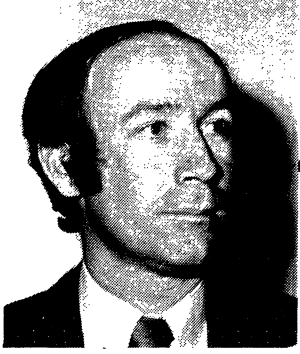


CRIME PREVENTION IN VICTORIA



*(Gavin Brown)

Introduction

Crime prevention is the recognition, anticipation and appraisal of a crime risk and the initiation of some action to remove or reduce the risk. It is the very reason for being of modern police forces. The time honoured maxim of Sir Richard Mayne that "The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime; the next that of detection of offenders if crime is committed . . ." prefaces the instructions of forces throughout the world.

In the State of Victoria, Australia, the community certainly agrees with Sir Richard. A random sample was asked to rank six police activities in the order in which the Police Commissioner should try to devote most effort and activity. Crime prevention was ranked first, ahead of 'detection of robberies, murders', "eliminating road accidents", "providing higher training standards", "improving relations", and (ranked last of all) "controlling demonstrations".

Crime in Victoria

Victoria has an area of 228,000 Km² about the size of Great Britain, and a population of about 3,825,000, making it the most densely populated State of Australia. Melbourne is a city of 2,717,600 people. The State's major crime rate during the period 1976 - 1978 showed an annual increase of about 10%. A bureau of Statistics victimisation survey during 1975 indicated a considerable level of non reporting in a number of offence categories. The Victoria Police Force, in August 1979, had a strength of 7,500 sworn personnel of whom 489 (6.6%) were female.

Crime Prevention Strategies

Crime prevention by the police involves three basis strategies. The most demonstrably effective is to identify and take proceedings against the criminal. This action acts as a general deterrent by warning citizens of the likely consequences of similar behaviour. It provides specific deterrence to the offender, hopefully to dissuade him from re-offending. Crime prevention therefore, occurs after the police have reacted to an offence. If the offender is a career criminal and he is imprisoned, the prevention is likely to be significant.

Crime prevention by enforcement is the easiest and most common police technique. Its limitation are obvious. Not all crimes come to police notice, and of those that do, only a small proportion actually result in arrest. In a democracy, the State and the Courts significantly influence that probability. Deterrence varies from crime to crime, especially since many people may be unaware that an arrest has been made. Community perception of arrest probability is crucial if general deterrence is to be maximised. The media influence may be considerable, particularly where the offence is sen-

sationalised whilst the successful investigation receives little publicity. The strategy presumes that criminals are rational adults, free to choose between a life of crime or a law-abiding life.

The second crime prevention technique is to identify the social causes of crime and modify either their impact, so that criminals are no longer created, or to improve the individual's capacity to withstand crime inducing pressures. This strategy suffers from the lack of any general theory of crime causation, the complex interaction of individual and environment, and the difficulty of eliminating deleterious conditions structured into the social system. Combatting inflation by maintaining a pool of unemployed is probably a good example of this last. The police role in this broad based crime prevention strategy is mainly to work closely with community groups to the most appropriate assistance. The extent of prevention attainable cannot be measured; but may well be considerable.

The last crime prevention technique is to reduce the opportunity and desire for crime by raising public awareness of certain types of crime, particularly through crime analysis; by encouraging the community to take more than a passing interest in activities in their neighbourhood; and by encouraging security measures. Information is the lifeblood of the police service, therefore this system holds considerable prevention potential. The major difficulties are obtaining public participation and problems of evaluation. The advantage of this, and the previous social factors approach, is that they are purely preventive, being able to swing into action without the necessity for an offence to have been committed.

Some Crime Prevention Efforts

In Victoria, the Crime Prevention Bureau, staffed by eight officers, provides security advice to commercial and government organisations, conducts courses in crime prevention for police and produces literature on security measures. The Bureau recently advised on a \$A40,000 public awareness film funded by the Lions International.

The Force's Public Relations Division is heavily committed to lecture circuits and the production of high standard police displays, particularly at the Royal Melbourne Show, a 14 day annual event attracting over half a million visitors. Police exhibitions blend crime prevention advice with information about a variety of police duties. The Division also produces a weekly five minute segment on State-wide television which often features the State "top-ten" wanted criminals. A "Kanga Kop" promotion is aimed at emphasising the approachability of police officers, whilst 'Blue Light Discos' are intended to provide a supervised activity for teenagers away from hotels.

Crime prevention will be assisted by technological developments, such as helicopter patrols and computerisation of police records and crime data. Police also advise urban planners, particularly at Albury-Wodonga, a growth city on the Victoria-New South Wales border. There the "defensible space" theory of crime prevention formed the basis of police recommendations. In Geelong and other country centres, police are working with community groups developing "bike plans" in anticipation of the increasing use of that mode of transport.

Effective crime prevention in an area the size of Victoria requires the support of officers throughout the State. Local police best know problems peculiar to their District. Projects

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include speaking engagements, school liaison, police exhibitions, crime seminars, youth activities and property identification programmes. Operation "Speak Up" encourages the public to contact the police anonymously. Close co-operation usually exists between commercial security organisations and the police.

Police Ambivalence

The police role has usefully been described as "peace keeper", "Law enforcer" or "service" dependent upon the emphasis officers place on various duties. In Victoria, the majority of officers are more comfortable in the more traditional law enforcement mode. Some are sceptical of the value of preventive strategies, an inevitable result of the inability to identify and measure tangible benefits.

This attitude is reinforced when community involvement programmes stir difficulty. The Police Associated Citizen's Emergency Radio Group (PACER) was a much publicised scheme utilising Citizen's Band Radio enthusiasts to augment police patrols. Civilian participants received no police powers but were provided with identification. The groups relationship with many police, other than project co-ordinators, was quite strained, particularly after a number of complaints of PACER members exceeding their authority and even impersonating police. The scheme, which involved about 200 citizens over a 12 month period, was cancelled because of the demands it made on police manpower.

Ambivalence about police crime prevention efforts sometimes exists outside the Force. The word "police" was deleted from a "Police and Citizen's Youth Club" for fear of dissuading those who most needed to use its facilities. Welfare personnel quite often are reluctant to acknowledge police expertise and authority. Other groups fear being considered police apologists and avoid excessive police involvement.

Police Patrol

The results of the Kansas City Patrol Experiment, which conflicted with fundamental presumptions about the deterrent effect of preventive patrol have forced police throughout the world to examine their patrol procedures. Increasing fuel costs and restricted police budgets have added urgency to the need to demonstrate a degree of cost-effectiveness in police operations.

Prahran, an inner suburb of Melbourne, has a population of 60,000 people. Over the 12 months, April 1978—March 1979, uniform police patrols in the city were increased and portable radios issued to car crews and foot police. Analysis of the results is incomplete; but when compared with control areas, the increased patrol activity in Prahran was matched by a considerable reduction in the robbery and armed robbery rate and a temporary reduction in the burglary rate. Surveys of businessmen in the community, before and after the experiment, indicated increased feelings in safety and a greater awareness of police patrol, especially foot patrol.

Road Toll

The considerable preventive impact of sound legislation, police commitment and community support is well illustrated by the Victorian road toll. In 1970, pioneering compulsory seat belt legislation was associated with a 15% decrease in road fatalities. Random breath testing commenced a two year trail in July 1976 accompanied by a considerable and continuous publicity campaign. Previously, police could require a breath test only after an accident occurred or when driving was impaired. Random testing legislation, now permanent, empowers authorised police in uniform to require any driver to take a preliminary breath test. Although the detection rate of drivers exceeding the blood alcohol limit (0.05%) is low, the number of drivers killed decreased by 9% in 1978. During the first 34 months of random testing, 103 694 prelim-

inary breath tests were carried out. Of these 2,350 were positive and resulted in 1,592 people charged with the offence, which provides for mandatory licence cancellation for up to 4 years scaled to the blood alcohol reading. Police initiatives led to a tightening of legislation which permitted good behaviour bonds for exceeding .05% offences.

Women Police

The impact of Government policy on crime prevention is exemplified by the role of women police in the Force. Prior to implementation of the Equal Opportunity Act in 1977, the majority of women police performed duty in all women Divisions attached to each of the 23 Districts in the State. Separate seniority lists assured women police of short-term promotional advantages. Their duties involved some law enforcement, but also involved a caring, social service role, in particular, referring children and families at risk to appropriate helping agencies. The 24 hour service compared favourably with the "office hours" of many welfare groups. Male police also referred cases to women police.

The Force has obtained a 2 year exemption from the Equal Opportunity Act as it relates to women police Divisions. If the exemption is not continued, intergration will be forced and the present very valuable preventive work will probably be diminished. Experience in other Forces indicates that a considerable body of expertise may be replaced by a disinterested and ad hoc approach.

Police and Juveniles

The police cautioning programme primarily aims to reduce crime committed by children under 17 years by diverting them from the Children's Court, thereby expediting the disposition and avoiding stigma and other negative features of the formal Court hearing. The scheme, which commenced in 1946, initially applied to first offenders. The caution forms part of a discussion between an Inspector, the child and at least one parent and occurs at the family's local police station. The proportion of offenders cautioned increased steadily to 32% in 1975. A review of the scheme at that time indicated that 75% of cautioned children were not charged with a further offence within 5 years of the caution. Higher rates existed for females and children living outside Melbourne. The results encouraged the Force to simplify the scheme and extend it to repeat offenders under certain guidelines. An additional emphasis requires Officers considering prosecuting a child first offender to indicate why a caution is not appropriate. Previously, the reverse was the case. In the following years the proportion of offending children cautioned increased to 42% (1976) 50% (1977) and, in 1978, 59% of 15,082 child offenders were cautioned. This represented 85% of female offenders and 55% of male offenders. Cautioning Officers are expected to be familiar with, and use community support where this is appropriate. This programme also reduces the time officers spend attending Courts. A 1974 survey of officers at Melbourne Children's Court indicated that they spent an average of 76 minutes travelling, 106 minutes waiting and 14 minutes at the actual hearing.

Measuring Crime Prevention

A simple, yet accurate, measure of police effectiveness in preventing crime does not exist. Crime rates are influenced by complex social factors relating to the individual and his environment. Crime in one country may be respected, even honoured, behaviour in another. A community contains many types of crime and varied reactions to them. Seldom will even the most outrageous conduct receive no support. Studies of people who have not been arrested for crimes, yet report having committed them, do not disclose unique factors which might account for their avoidance of prosecution other than a certain lack of persistence. Over-generalisation is a distinct

danger in any discussion of crime. The prevention of aircraft hijackings, for example, appears to have been remarkably successful. On the other hand success in burglary prevention is extremely poor throughout the world.

Crime prevention based solely on arresting offenders creates serious organisational stresses in police departments. These include a high degree of frustration which may encourage crime figure manipulations. The approach fails to acknowledge either limits on police jurisdiction, or the social origin of crime.

Factors affecting jurisdiction include democratic values, the reluctance of Governments to give police the legal authority necessary to perform their task effectively and restrictions on police activity imposed by Courts. The social origin of crime is particularly impervious to control because police most often are acting against symptoms rather than the causes of the unwanted behaviour. Crime prevention strategy based on law enforcement is most effective when it results in the imprisonment of a career criminal.

Conclusion

Crime prevention will be facilitated when it involves both law enforcement strategies and a high level of co-operation between police and law abiding community. In this way, police action does not depend upon the commission of an offence. Families and people at risk can be identified and preventive action taken either by the police themselves, or by referral to a more appropriate agency. Citizens can become more responsible for the security of their living areas. Communication barriers between the police and the public can be broken down, capitalising on information sources that the "crime control" approach tends to stifle. The actual extent of prevention will depend on the type of offence and other

factors. This essay examines these issues and indicates the preventive activities of the Victoria Police Force.

Sir Richard Mayne's injunction to his "bobbies" to prevent crime was accompanied by a warning that their industry and integrity would be judged on the result. The approach is as simplistic today as it undoubtedly was then. Police have only a limited ability to prevent crime and that ability is increased in proportion to the extent in which they receive the support and co-operation of the public. This is more than "pie in the sky" rhetoric. The social and economic cost of perpetually reacting to crime is very considerable. Lives may be shattered and, in strictly economic terms, the expense of investigations and compensation is staggering. The end result, in many cases is an unsatisfying court hearing. Australian expenditure on crime presently is approaching \$A1,200 million.

Crime prevention which involves community participation is more difficult, but the potential for gain is commensurably higher. Traditional police methods have not reduced total crime. Limits on resources justify focus on the most "dangerous" crimes. The social dislocation and suspicion which accompanies widespread fear of crime, or a particular crime, made every practicable preventive effort worthwhile.

A danger exists that over-emphasis on crime prevention might engender the very fear it is intended to overcome. Citizens might needlessly change their lifestyles, resort to draconian security measures and seriously curtail their movements. The undoubted joy of living in a free and tolerant community may be considerably lessened. It is a police responsibility to ensure by sound and balance schemes and sensitive public advice that this does not occur. The challenge is not beyond our capacity.

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