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# Vulnerable People Policing: inclusion or exclusion of target groups?

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# Overview

- Background and origins of research
- Community Policing Backdrop
- Methodology
- Observations of emerging patterns
- Analysis of what is being done and how
- Analysis of levels of community involvement
- Analysis of contents of 'message' delivered by police

# Background & origins of this work

- New Zealand Police Research Symposium 2008
- Australian Institute of Criminology & forthcoming Report on Public Policy
- Opportunity to look further into new community policing practices

# Community Policing Backdrop

- Community Policing always comes back to the fore in policing
- Acknowledgment of its importance/necessity as a police practice and paradigm
  - Where are we now? Has our approach to Community Policing changed?

*CAVEAT*

*Analysis of initiatives that indeed ARE of community policing*

# Methodology

- Overview of current literature
- Fieldwork
- Analysis of Police 'requests' to academia and evaluation bodies: what did/do Police want to know about community policing today?
- Ethnographic stance on the issue (work, research, teach police → complex perspective on culture)

# Several patterns

- Different move and different types of requests
  - Major pattern is a distancing from geographical policing: move from physical space to 'social' space
- it is not about geography only, anymore, it's about identities and what these identities entail

# Evidence from the field

- Almost all community policing evaluations and action research projects commissioned by police have been targeting 'special needs' populations
- 🔔 If related to geography, the better, but not necessary



# Police Requests

- Special initiatives, policies & research projects have been directed at:
  - Youth
  - ATSI
  - NESB / refugees
  - Homeless
  - Mentally ill and otherwise disabled
  - Sexual minorities
  - Victims of crime
  - Elderly
  - ...and others

# How did it happen?

- Variety of factors acting in synergy
- Egg / Hen
- Slow movement guided by necessity and promoted by social commentators, defended by lobbies and special interest groups
- Questions of legitimacy, accountability, focus on evidence-based practices, interest in ensuring that evidence is admissible at Law
- Changes in the Law, introduction of legislative definition

Police particularly sensitive to 'sections of society that it sees as vulnerable' (Winning the race – revisited)

Ongoing necessity to link / build relationships with communities to run efficient police practices

**DISADVANTAGED  
SOCIAL GROUPS**  
→  
**'VULNERABLE  
PEOPLE'**

Community principles of crime prevention, working with communities, exchange of information

LAW: make interesting points re. How to define/categorise some sections of the population that deserve 'special attention'

Efforts to identify NEEDS v. systematic problem with identification of communities

# What the Law says (semantics)

- Clears up the terminology (so far very broad)
- Goes beyond 'multi-cultural policing', etc.
- Certain specific groups possess certain vulnerability traits that make them worthy of attention & additional precaution because:

*They are defenceless, and are more prone to becoming victims or offenders*

- Ex:
  - NSW Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act, Reg 2005 + reprised in other legislation nationwide
  - Anti Discrimination Acts
  - UK Human Rights Act 1998, etc.

# From a critical standpoint

- If we assume that this is, indeed, a new pattern/form of community policing
  - What are we doing, exactly?
  - In what way? What is the contents of the message?
  - Is this really community policing or a new form of (imposed) social control?

# What is being done

- Recruitment, diversification (representativity)

'Incentives' difficulty, eligibility sometimes problematic, question of 'preservation of identity', retention pbs

- Awareness building and training

Strong presence of these communities in providing awareness and knowlegde to police about culture, age 'priorities', concerns

# What is being done (cont'd)

## ■ Liaison schemes

Usually limited numbers of specialised police, focused on crime prevention or communication (or investigation, but CP?), occasional interaction with target populations (contents of the message)

## ■ Partnerships

Scattered world-wide, difficult to sustain, often geographically based and issue focused, lack of commitment after consultation (?), different levels of engagement

# What is being done (cont'd)

## ■ Self-determination

Very rare, practiced more extensively in areas of Canada (particularly in Quebec, Nunavut – special constabulary), some success in Australia (Youth Show the Way), with some resistance to be observed



# The contents of the message?

- Critical stance on the actual involvement and nature of participation of vulnerable people
- Contents of message is, often, directed AT communities (eg.: crime prevention workshops in schools, role of ACLOs, role of ELOs, role of GLLOs)
- Two-way communication?
- Consultation, but where is the follow up?
- Peel's seventh principle

# Communication v. Dialogue

- Study of communication courses for police recruits ( $\neq$  for some specialist police)
- Contents relates to:
  - Body language
  - Respectful formulations
  - How to properly gather intel (name, address)
  - How to make sure the person understands the information that is provided
- Scarce contents as to how to engage with community members at a dialogue level

# What is being done (cont'd)



- Recruitment
- Awareness building and training
- Liaison Schemes
- Partnerships
- Self-determination

# Vulnerable People Policing

- Exists in the field, as a new, complementary view on community policing
- Is a multi-agency practice (Councils, govt & non-gvt agencies)
- Our responsibility to establish as a pattern, so it can be improved upon
- Remains a way to reach out to communities, 'in spirit of further inclusion
- Very sophisticated in theory, but still lacks finesse, in practice (co-production?)
- Tainted by 'legal protocol frenzy'

# Conclusion

- Vulnerable People Policing utilises 'new' traits of population to establish them as 'priority categories' in community policing
  - New (better?), easier way to target special groups
  - Attention be given to not marginalising them (!)
  - Paternalistic in practice, inclusive in theory (policing 'of' v. policing 'with')
- ... What if a person does not want to be considered vulnerable? And refuses to be included in a vulnerable category?