



Policy Brief

The Case for Community Policing

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Executive Summary

This policy brief is designed to highlight **recommendations for police departments to improve health outcomes** for those who become justice involved with police.

The policy recommendation will focus on developing a **comprehensive community policing model** managed by a governing body that represents the whole community. This model will **provide structured community engagement**, increase **accountability** for both citizens and police departments and **support police officers' individual mental health**.

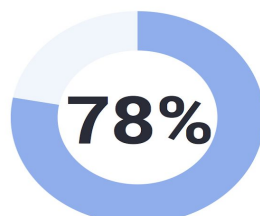
Introduction

Police officers are on the front lines more than ever; they deal with individuals actively using substances or are in a mental health crises. With this heightened role comes a heightened responsibility. As a result, there is a renewed call for police departments to review established practices and to develop new approaches to policing. As noted in a 2015 review by Major Cities Chiefs Association, Major County Sheriffs Association and Federal Bureau of Investigation National Executive Institute, a different type of policing is needed. More specifically there is a call for community engagement policing and helping to change police from “mentality of warriors to one of guardians”¹.

Understanding how the police are seen by the community is important in helping to create this change. Research indicates there remains a divide on the perceptions of police across racial lines. As explained below, studies have indicated that people in minority communities hold more negative views of police than Caucasians^{2,3} and this has led members of minority groups to be less likely to reach out to police during times of crisis and to feel more unsafe during periods of direct interactions with police^{1,3}. This perception creates a health inequity as members of a minority community will be less likely to engage police during crisis situations and therefore will not have access to treatment or other supportive services that could be facilitated by police⁴.

How Willing Are Americans to Report a Crime?

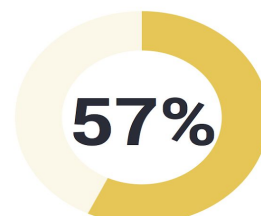
% Who Would Definitely Report a Crime



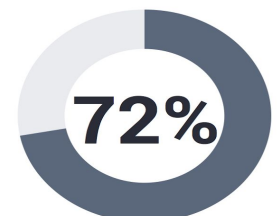
White American



African American



Hispanic American



All Americans

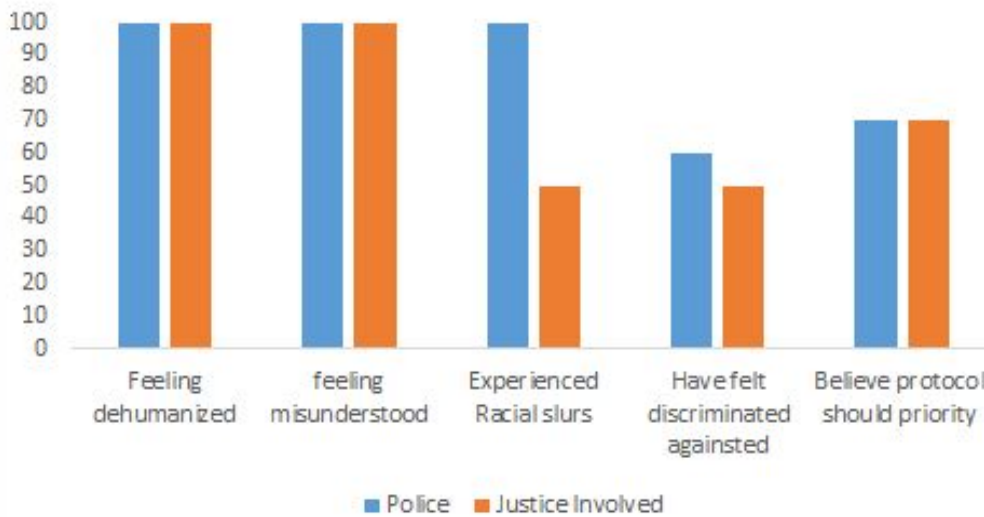
Community, Nation & Police Impact

Negative perceptions of police by minority groups can impact the health of these groups by making them less likely to seek out the help of police during periods of crisis and to feel increased stress during these interactions. According to YouGov November 2018 article reviewing a recent YouGov Omnibus datapool, African-Americans were less likely to call the police than Caucasians and nearly half (46%) of African-Americans felt unsafe when dealing with police compared to only 26% of Caucasians.

Another study conducted in New York City found that young men of color experience interactions with police as traumatic, and over the course of time they develop high levels of perpetual stress and symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder⁵. Studies have also shown that police carry stress from one encounter to another, raising their overall stress threshold. Research shows that whatever skills they might have had diminishes over the course of time due to this stress. As police become increasingly stressed they are less likely to follow protocol which directly contributes to civilian encounters becoming tense and traumatic, thus reinforcing their stress⁶. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle, stressed police officers behave less strategically, thus creating trauma within the community. The traumatized community then reacts badly toward police officers, breeding even more stress.

Figure 1

Common Experiences in Police Interactions



At a Glance:

56% of African americans and 33% of Hispanics believe that police are too harsh. Only 26% of Caucasian agree.

Minority communities (Hispanic and African Americans) had less confidence that police were able to be impartial and fair and were less likely to see police as competent and having integrity.

CATO Institute/YouGov 2016

The problem within our Community

To understand a more local perspective, the authors of this brief conducted interviews with more than ten justice-involved men and two local police officers. These interviews confirmed some of the current research around perceptions of mistrust and feelings of dehumanization of the individuals during interactions with police. As in the literature, the experiences of those individuals here in Massachusetts felt that the way police conducted themselves impacted them negatively. Police officers reported mistrust, disrespect and bias toward them from members of the community. Many of the justice-involved individuals interviewed also acknowledged the long-standing impacts of negative interactions with police and this has caused distrust, fear and symptoms of possible mental health issues in the individual. These officers felt that their community has negative views of them while, from the interviews of inmates, 60% of those believe that the police discriminate (Interviews conducted 3/20 and 4/29/2019). See Figure 1

“I try to keep my cool and cooperate as much as I can. A cop can mistake something for something else. I just stay calm, I’ve done that before but sometimes they go above and beyond. I have to be hyper aware.” ~ William, age 27

(Interview conducted, 3/20/2019)

“The uniform changes how people perceive you. You can be the coolest, nicest cop, but as soon as you put on that uniform, none of that matters.”
~ Officer One

The Case for Community Policing

Connections may heal tensions:

When asked for suggestions, the inmates and police interviewed agreed on how to fix tensions between minority neighborhoods and police. **70% of inmates felt that community members would benefit from police interacting with community members outside of arrests or other crisis events.** Police agree, proposing that civilians be given more opportunity to do ride-alongs with officers in order to see things from their perspective. This would demonstrate more respect for how dangerous and challenging the work may be in just basic interactions with civilians. Training was also mentioned by both groups. 40% of inmates felt that police needed to focus more energy on de-escalation and anger management and 40% believed that hosting more events for children and families within the community would help. Most powerfully, **70% believed that talking with and listening to the community would have the most significant impact on the community-police relationship.**

Community policing requires a philosophy shift “helping police to change from a mentality of warriors to one of guardians”⁷.

Policy Recommendation: Community Justice Committees

Nationally, there is a recognition of the need to improve the criminal justice system. In 2015 the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the County Sheriffs Association and the FBI delivered a report on Engagement Based Policing that highlighted the need to address some of the issues discussed. Similarly, Massachusetts passed the Criminal Justice Reform Bill in 2018. This legislation touches on many areas of the criminal justice system but does not address community engagement. The vision for community engagement is a multifaceted approach focusing on two-way listening, conversations, programming and ultimately to lead to community ownership of community justice.

We recommend the following addition to the MA Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Policies: All police departments in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts establish Community Justice Committees. Community Justice Committees will include key stakeholders of the community including **1 elected official** (mayor, representative etc.), **1 chief of police**, **2 community leaders from community organizations**, **2 representatives who claim a minority identity**, and at least **2 representatives from the community who have had previous involvement with the justice system.**

The Committee must address several components as outlined by the National Joint Report (2015).



Community Justice Committees: Scope and Responsibilities

1) BUILDING TRAININGS FOR HEALTHIER SKILLS

Community Justice Committees will be responsible for implementing the recommended “Tactical Human Dynamics™” (THD) to all current and incoming officers. THD is an interactive training using a range of hands-on techniques and exercises designed to teach social interaction in all of its dimensions: physical, mental, and emotional. There is also an online version called APACTS which can also be used if more cost effective. This training can be implemented online and can be run on “any computer, tablet or mobile device... does not require any additional hardware of any kind, nor does it require a live human trainer. THD or APACTS improves perception and decision-making skills at the same time.”(pp. 22) and is fully customizable to the police department’s needs.

Implementing this training would address:

- Communication between police and civilians
- Minimize feelings of disrespect
- Increase de-escalation tactics

2) BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY POLICE RELATIONSHIP THROUGH STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

Community Justice Committees will facilitate a plan to engage all department police officers in Community Engagement. The Major Chiefs report highlights the success of the Philadelphia Police Department in their Community Engagement Strategies. Community Justice Committees will implement similar strategies here in the Commonwealth.

The Strategic Plan for Community Engagement would be expected to outline the community engagement committee’s goals and outline a plan to to accomplish these goals. The committee should focus on identifying groups within the community that are not currently engaged with the department and various methods to engage such groups positively to police. The committee may also focus the goals on groups already engaged with police through traditional means (arrests, 911 calls) and identify alternative positive techniques to engage groups that will lead to improved relationships. Interventions established should be reviewed by the committee at least annually to identify if the target goals were met⁸.

3) BUILDING HEALTHIER POLICE OFFICERS

Community Justice Committees will assess, address and monitor police officer work-related stress and improve well-being. Under this category of responsibilities, Community Justice Committees will:

- Implement yearly mental health check-ups for all police officers. This can be implemented by contracting with mental health staff from their employee assistance program (EAP) to be on site during officers annual in-service training days to provide screening of the officers throughout the inservice training. In addition to the interview the clinician may use tools such as the BDI or BAI or other tools identified by the EAP team. Recommended follow up with the EAP members for those that score at above baseline.
- Facilitate the creation of SHEILD Teams for every police department: “The SHIELD program is a peer-led, scripted, team-based health promotion program delivered once per week for 30 minutes for 12 weeks.”¹⁰ According to a study done by the CDC and SHEILD Teams reduce stress and sleep related disorders, improve healthy eating habits, promote healthier work relationships and promote moderation of tobacco and alcohol. Although this study did not conduct ongoing programing, the Community Justice Committee will institute opportunities to participate in SHEILD programs as many as 3 times a year.

Conclusion

Our communities have acknowledged challenges in the relationships between the police and the community, especially members of the minority community. While we acknowledge that there are many communities already practicing community policing models, our recommendation is to bring this to all communities in a way that is sustainable and community-driven. The recommendations above have been submitted in order to build trust and improve the health outcomes of interactions between police officers and civilians. These recommendations have been backed by extensive research data, including the real-life testimonials of individuals on both sides within the MetroWest region. It will take a collaborative effort from all parties to make these policy recommendations as effective as possible. This policy urges the community to be a part of the change. Law enforcement alone cannot be expected to remedy decades of trauma between police and community in a silo. True community development and growth rises from collaborative evidence-based practices.



“I wish the generations ahead of us don’t have to go through the same things we have gone through” ~ Peter age 28

Citations

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