

Review Article

An Overview of Community Policing: Elements, Goals and Benefits

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Abstract

This paper examines the evolution and significance of community policing, a paradigm shift from the traditional professional model of policing that emphasizes hierarchical structures and reactive crime response. The paper conceptualized community policing in terms of a collaborative partnership between the police departments and the communities they serve. The partnership is aimed at addressing the root causes of crime and disorder through constructive identifications of proactive problem solving police-community engagements. The paper further explores multifaceted nature of the concept of community policing, highlighting its socio-economic dimensions and the varying conceptions of both scholars and police agencies. Key elements of community policing including community partnership, organizational transformation and problem solving were analyzed within the contexts of crime reduction, community safety and building of community trust objectives of community policing. Benefits of community policing such as improved police community relationships, increased community capacity to address issues, enhanced perceptions of safety were also discussed. The paper also underscores the importance of community policing as a strategic framework for building safer, more resilient communities through collaborative efforts of the police and its host communities.

Keywords

Community, Policing, Partnership, Problem-solving, Community Trust, Collaborations

1. Introduction

The second half of 20th century saw the end of the “professional” model of policing in most jurisdictions. In the professional model, local police departments were organized strictly on hierarchical order, with standardized operational protocols, and emphasis on response to crimes when they occurred. During the second half of the 20th century, the police and other stakeholders in law enforcement began to re-examine the role of police departments in public safety management which resulted to the nursing of the idea of partnership with the host communities in fighting crimes and

disorder. The new partnership eventually gave birth to a new law enforcement philosophy known as “community policing.” The philosophy of community policing stressed the need for the uniformed police officers to engage local citizens in law enforcement activities, which shall be accomplished through flexible hierarchies and protocols, with a view to address the root causes of neighborhood crimes.

In view of the above, this paper explores the concept of community policing, examining its elements, goals, and benefits within the context of modern policing. The paper begins

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by analyzing the evolving understanding of "community," contrasting lay perceptions with sociological perspectives that emphasize social structure, shared values, and a sense of belonging. It further differentiates police agency definitions of community, highlighting the influence of jurisdictional boundaries, socio-economic factors, and crime rates. The historical evolution of policing in Nigeria was also examined, tracing its development from pre-colonial traditions to the contemporary era, emphasizing the shift from a professional model to a community-oriented approach. Community policing is presented as a paradigm shift, advocating for partnerships between law enforcement and the community to address the root causes of crime and disorder. Three core elements of community policing are identified: community partnership, organizational transformation, and problem-solving. Community partnership emphasizes collaboration with diverse stakeholders, while organizational transformation necessitates structural and administrative changes within police agencies to support proactive problem-solving. The paper reviews existing literature on the effectiveness of community policing strategies, citing studies that demonstrate positive impacts on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and police legitimacy, albeit with mixed results regarding crime reduction. The goals of community policing are outlined, focusing on proactive problem-solving, crime prevention, and improved police-community relations. Finally, the benefits of community policing are discussed, including enhanced police-community relationships, increased community capacity for problem-solving, positive changes in police attitudes and behaviors, improved perceptions of safety, and reductions in crime and disorder. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of a collaborative and proactive approach to policing, highlighting the potential of community policing to foster safer and more secure communities.

2. The Concept of Community

Understanding the concept of community policing requires an understanding of the term community. Lay people commonly think of community in terms of a neighbourhoods, village, or small geographical area that consists of familiar residents interacting with one another daily on face to face basis. For many, the community may describe a group of people living in an area under the same government, or a social group having common interest, or a society as a whole. It is also common for lay individuals to have a personal perception of the term community. As Fynn [9] argues that there is ethno-cultural coloration to the conceptualization of community as ethnic, cultural and racial groups often refer to themselves as communities, for example Chinese, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Indian, African, White or Black communities. Similarly, interest groups often consider their commonality a community, for example, the business, academic/intellectual, medical, locals or law enforcement communities [9]. In view of the above, it can be said that there is ambiguity in defining

community which makes its exact meaning debatable even among scholars and across fields.

Sociologists largely sees community in terms of a group following a particular social structure within society who work together to organize social life within a particular place or being bound by a sustained sense of belonging across time and space [26] Ferdinand Tonnies [25] distinguished between two types of communities *Gemeinschaft* – a community based on a feeling of togetherness and *Gesellschaft* a community that is sustained by an instrumental goal. The former was analogous to the characteristics of mechanical communities as envisioned by another erudite scholar, David Emile Durkheim, who described it as small, undifferentiated with common values and beliefs that binds people together, while the latter fits the characteristics of organic communities which were described as groups differentiated and complex with apparent absence of commonality [6, 8, 25]. It was noted that sociologists view of community is largely socio-structurally weighted where the commonest emphasis have been common culture, values, beliefs and shared interests [25]. A community may also involve a feeling of belonging, a sense of integration, a sense of shared values, a sense of togetherness and a sense of we-ness [14]. It can be said that community represents the general feelings of people in terms of their spirit, cohesion, trust, safety, interactivity, interdependence, and sense of belonging [14]. These feelings of strong attachment are the primary sources of peace and security. They are also the reason for the participation of the community members in all aspects of its associational life – voluntary, religious, political, socio-cultural, economic and so on. An all-encompassing definition of community was given by MacQueen, McLellan, Metzger, et al. [15] who defined it as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. In view of this, it can be said that elements such as a sense of locale or geographical boundaries, sharing of common interests and perspectives (sense of commonalities), and joint actions or social ties such as families, friendship and even diversities that brings people together, are important in understanding what the concept of community entails.

On their part, Police agencies often define communities in terms of jurisdictional, district or precinct lenses, or within the confines of public or private housing areas as Flynn [9] put it that a typical police definition of community emphasizes jurisdictional, district or precinct boundaries which are usually derived from a combination of socio-economic, geographic and historical factors that collectively contributes to some level of community composition. Be it as it may, the police definition of community involves all industrial and institutional components and various community groups that they have to account for as community groups. Flynn [9] outlined some of the factors that guide the police definition of a community. These are:

- a. Police organizational designations (beats, sectors, areas,

precincts or districts);

- b. Socio-economically defined neighborhoods (housing developments, or racially or culturally homogeneous neighborhoods);
- c. Geographically defined areas bounded by natural or man-made barriers;
- d. Geographically defined areas that are distinctive by their crime rates or numbers of calls for police service;
- e. Areas represented by self-appointed grassroots organizations and;
- f. Areas containing particularly vocal or politically active inhabitants.

In view of the above, a community can be seen as a specific area served by a police department or law enforcement agency and the individuals, organizations and agencies within the area. This means that every police personnel ought to belong to such geographically defined community to effectively discharge his/her duties [18].

3. The Concept of Policing

It has been established that the concept of policing in Nigeria is not something new; in fact, different forms of law enforcement which reflect the nature of policing existed in the various empires, states and principalities that constitute the present Nigeria, even before the colonial conquest [19]. Hence, understanding policing in Nigerian context will require the peeping of law enforcement patterns in the three important historical epochs: the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial Nigeria [13]. In the pre-colonial era, there were absence codified laws and formal state structure, thus law enforcement were the exclusive domain of traditional institutions which were carried out by palace guards, secret cults, age groups and so on, based customs, traditions and value systems of the various communities where they operated [16]. During the colonial era, policing was carried out strictly based on the operational guidelines of the British laws designed to protect the British commercial and imperial interests [16]. The post-colonial phase is more of what Inyang and Abraham [13] referred to as cultural transfer, where the policing activities give priority to the defense and protection of the political elites who replaced the former colonial masters.

In view of the above, it can be said that defining the term policing might involve some ambiguity because scholars interested in it might have been influenced by the historical events surrounding its evolution. Thus, different scholars emphasize specific aspects and activities involved in policing. For example, some scholars see policing in terms of coercive ideological regimentation of social life through the activities of formal police [1], some view it from the standpoint of activities aimed at conflict resolutions, especially those originating from the institutionalized social inequalities [20], some gave weight to activities of crime prevention [13], and some emphasizes the service role of the police [23]. Yet, there

are still those writers who consider protection of life and property as hallmark of policing [2], while some other writers gave policing a broader view by defining it in terms of any activity aimed at making societies safe [4]. In view of the above different areas of emphasis by scholars, it can be said that policing broadly involves activities that are carried out either by formal authorities, hired individuals and groups or community volunteers that are targeted towards law enforcement, maintenance of order and protection of life and property of the citizens with a view to improve the general wellbeing of people by making societies safer. It is therefore safe to say that policing is aimed at positively contributing to peoples' full enjoyment of their rights, detection, prevention and control of crimes, ensuring that people can safely demonstrate for their rights, facilitation of smooth political transitions, and provision of support services of political and legal reforms [22].

4. Conceptualizing Community Policing

The conceptualization of community policing must involve an understanding of the essence for the conceptual intermarriage of the duo of community and policing. Okeshola and Mudiare [21] argued that Community policing is anchored on a systematic relationship between the police and the entire citizenry, which allows for law enforcement and tackling a huge range of community problems. The authors further described it as a paradigm shift that refocuses efforts on constructive engagement of the police with people who are the end users of the police service for the re – negotiation of the contract with the police. This has the potential making the community co – producers of justice and quality police service [21]. It is a policing philosophy that tasks the police to consult and collaborate with the public on policing matters [4]. The philosophy of community policing advocates for partnership and collaborations in between the police and host communities as guidelines for a successful police operations. The aim of Community Policing is to provide an enabling environment where the police and law-abiding citizens can work together in partnership to solve problems, share resources, prevent crime, promote interagency collaboration, promote peace, and improve the overall quality of community life [12]. In view of the above, it is safe to say that community policing heavily relies on the ability of the police organizations to create enabling environment through building of relationships with the various interest groups living in areas of their operation who in turn support the police in their work.

A study by Gill et al [10] suggest that community- policing strategies have positive effects on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and police legitimacy, but limited effects on crime and fear of crime. Specifically the study found out that:

1. Community-oriented policing strategies were 5% to 10% more likely to reduce crimes.
2. Community-oriented policing was associated with a 24%

increase in the citizens' perception of improvements in disorderly conducts.

3. 23 comparisons measured citizen satisfaction with police, and found that community-oriented programs were effective almost 80% of the cases, and citizens were almost 40% more likely to be satisfied with the work of the police.

It is therefore clear from the above findings that community policing is a bridge that facilitates communications, collaborative engagements and understandings between the law enforcement agencies and the various communities where they work with a view to build safer and crime free communities where citizens will go about their businesses of life without being intimidated, threatened or fear of being victimized [11]. Community policing involves rethinking and redesign of the police role by giving more weight to preventive orientation rather than relying on aggressive law enforcement. So, community policing is all about an understanding on the part of law enforcement that good policing could not be provided by the formal police agency alone and that partnership with the members of the public is the way out. It is a policing philosophy that is built on the understanding that police and community can work together to solve the underlying problems of crime and disorder with a view to improve quality of life and strengthen police legitimacy. As Silverman [24] rightly argued, 'the closer a police officer's relationship is with people on his beat, the more people he knows and the more those people trust him, the greater his chances of reducing crime.' It is therefore safe to view community policing in terms of philosophy of policing which made the public co-producers, with the police, of safety and order [24].

5. Elements of Community Policing

Being a philosophy of policing that seek to promote organizational strategies that support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues (such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime), police agencies whose commitment to community policing goes beyond parroting tends to emphasize the following three elements:

- a. Community partnership
- b. Organizational transformation and
- c. Problem solving

a. Community Partnership

Central to community policing is the collaborative partnership between law enforcement agencies and the various communities they serve with a view to develop solutions to problems and increase trust in the police. The police have for long recognized that the duo problems of crimes and disorder could not be resolved by working alone. Hence, interactive partnership with community stakeholders is imperative. The police must be able to make the public (including institutions within the community) see reason in trusting and agreeing to

work with the police as collaborative partners. To achieve this, the U.S Department of Justice [26] recommended police partnership with number of individuals and institutions, including:

1. public agencies such as legislative bodies, public works department, healthcare providers, child support services, schools, judiciary and so on;
2. community members including community residents, tourists, political leaders, traditional leaders, visitors, youth, women, etc.;
3. non-governmental organizations and other non-profit organizations;
4. private sector such as chambers of comers, private investors, companies and so on and;
5. media which shall include both print and electronic media. The central goal is to have constructive engagements, enhance advocacy, attract additional resources for responses, increase publicity on community policing and rebuild public positive image of the police.

b. Organizational Transformation

This involves structural and administrative panel beating of the police agency to align with community partnership and proactive problem solving requirements of community policing. There is a need for change in the organizational structure, management style, orientation of the personnel and even the channels of communication in a way that support successful implementation of community policing. For effective implementation of community policing, the following changes were highlighted [26] on the:

1. Organizational management involving critical and constructive changes in climate and culture, leadership style, formal labor relations, decentralized decision making, accountability, strategic planning, procedures, organizational evaluations, and increased emphasis on transparency and accountability;
2. Command structure that give local patrol officers a decision-making authority and holding them accountable for their actions. This can be achieved through long-term assignments, de-specialization of work, devotion of necessary human and financial resources to support problem-solving efforts and sustain partnerships;
3. Personnel system of the police, involving recruitment, hiring, selection, and retention of staff (and volunteers), personnel evaluations, supervision, and training must also be changed to reflect commitment to community policing ideals and;
4. Police agency must upgrade its information technology to accommodate the demands of the community policing approach by ensuring that the police obtain accurate and timely information about crime and community conditions.

Problem Solving Rather than responding to recurrent crime incidents, community policing gives more weight to proactive problem solving. It advocates for proactive development of solution to underlying conditions that contributes to crime and

disorder in the community. Together with community residents, business owners, public officials, community leaders and all other stakeholders, the police are tasked to initiate and coordinate constructive collaborative engagements with a view to identify local problems, propose proactive solutions and spearhead their implementations. Unlike what happened with the outdated professional model of policing where the twin problems of crime and disorder are considered as exclusive domains of police officers, community policing considers community stakeholders including police personnel, other law enforcement agencies, community resident and leaders, city agencies, community board members, precinct council members, local business owners, public and private organizations and any other person affected or connected to the problem. Cordner [5] was of the view that problem solving within a model of community policing has the following important features:

1. Operates as a standard method of policing, not an occasional special project;
2. Practiced by all staff throughout the ranks;
3. Decisions should be made on the basis of information that is gathered systematically;
4. Involves, whenever possible, collaboration between police and other agencies and institutions and;
5. Incorporates, whenever possible, community input and participation, so that the community's problems are addressed (not just the police department's) and so that the community shares in the responsibility.

Cordner [5] further identified steps for problem solving in the context of community policing. These are:

1. Identification of the problem;
2. Analysis of the problem;
3. A search for alternative solutions to the problem and;
4. Implementation and assessment of a response to the problem.

It is important to note that within the context of community policing, police officers are to serve as problem solving coordinators within their assigned areas and they are to work with the spirits of determination and are expected to apply their knowledge and experience, be persistent, committed and make a prudent use of available resources to achieve the goals of community policing.

6. Goals of Community Policing

The general goal of community policing is to reduce crime and disorder through careful examination of the underlying problems in neighborhoods from which such problems originated with a view to provide problem-based remedies. However, the specific goals of community policing are to:

- i. develop proactive solutions to underlying conditions that gives room to the problems of crime and disorder;
- ii. prevent crime and reduce its fear through creation of safe environment [4];
- iii. provide enabling environment for police agencies'

constructive engagement with people who are the end users of the police service [7];

- iv. develop the capacity of the police to look for resources within or outside the police department in solving problems of crime and disorder [3];
- v. change police attitudes and behaviour to align with community and democratic values involving inclusiveness, responsiveness and accountability [2].

7. Benefits of Community Policing

Mayhill [17] identified some of the common benefits associated with the practice of community policing. These include:

- i. *Improving police-community relationships and community perceptions of police*

The fact that community policing gives emphasis to collaborative team work with the members of the public, an opportunity has been created for non-coercive interactions with potentials for increase understanding of what police do, how and why. This has change the perception of community members about the police and vice versa.

- ii. *Increasing community capacity to deal with issues*

Community policing also encourage the police and community members to work together to achieve shared goals. Being part of the police team, the community has been empowered to respond to community concerns. Thus, members of the community have been encouraged to develop positive attitude and the capacity to identify and resolve problems, especially those related to crime and disorder.

- iii. *Changing police officers' attitudes and behaviours*

Community policing is about changing attitude of the police to embrace the culture of partnership, problem solving rather than responding to incidences and accountability. These are linked to winning the trust and confidence of the people through development of positive relationships and increased job satisfaction.

- iv. *Increasing perceptions of safety*

The involvement of the community members in the decision making process on how they should be policed has the potentials for increased perceptions of safety and decreased fear for criminal victimizations.

- v. *Reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour*

Community policing has the potentials to reduce crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour. This is because most of the underlying conditions and problems that produce such behaviours have been addressed by the community policing team even before they occurred.

8. Conclusion

The paper concludes that community policing is an emergent paradigm in the world of law enforcement which emphasizes partnership, proactive problem solving, and organi-

zational transformation. By collaborating with diverse stakeholders and implementing structural changes, community policing intends to address the root causes of crime and disorder within communities. The paper posits that community policing impacts positively on citizen satisfaction and promotes police legitimacy, but its effectiveness in crime reduction remains mixed. Goals centers on proactive problem-solving, crime prevention, and improved police-community relations for enhanced safety and security. Community policing offers potential for safer communities through collaborative and proactive policing.

Author Contributions

Kawu Adamu Sule is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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