

SOCI 446

PENOLOGY

SESSION 5 – Crime Prevention – The Role of the Police and the Public

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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

College of Education

School of Continuing and Distance Education

2014/2015 – 2016/2017

Course Information

Course ID	SOCI 446
Course Name	PENOLOGY
Session # and Title	SESSION 5 – Crime Prevention – The Role of the Police and the Public
Semester/Year	SECOND SEMESTER /2018



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Session Overview

- Crime prevention constitutes a part of what Ross referred to as the central problem of society – namely social control. This is because; crime is the worst of all social deviations and every society works towards its reduction to the barest minimum if not entirely eliminated from society.
- Although criminologists believe that there are some indirectly functional aspects of criminality, the negative impacts of crime outweigh its assumed potential to compel positive social reforms!
- In the earlier session on the Police we emphasized that crime prevention involves a partnership of a number of agencies, including the police. We have already discussed who the police are and their functions and main challenges. In this session we will examine how the Ghana police measure up to their crime prevention functions compared to the police in the developed societies.
- Included also in the session is the partnership role of the public in crime prevention.



Session Overview cont.

- Although the policeman sees himself as a specialist in dealing with violence, he does not want to fight alone. He does not believe that his specialization relieves the general public of their citizen's duties.
- Mostly the general public is not aware that they have a critical role to play as perhaps the most effective partner in crime prevention. Given that the police are not present everywhere, members of the community who witness crimes have the obligation to report to the police and actively assist the police in the investigation of the crime and the apprehension of the culprits.
- In the absence of public education hitherto, the public rather prefers to see the policeman as an automaton, trained and paid to prevent crime. Once the humanity of the police is recognized, the citizen would feel the obligation to become implicated in his/her work which after all, is sometimes dirty and dangerous. What then, are the specific roles of these two partners?

. Session Outline

- The main topics to be covered in this session are as follows: -
- Topic One: The role of the police in crime prevention
- Topic Two: The role of the Community (public)
- Topic Three: The neighborhood watch scheme

Objectives/Expected Outcomes for the Session

- On the completion of this session, you should be able to –
- Describe the specific roles performed by the police towards ensuring public safety.
 - Discuss meaningfully, the important role of the public not only in cooperating with the police but acting as informants through the neighborhood watch schemes.
 - Explain the origins of the neighborhood watch schemes in Ghana, and how these schemes can be properly organized to play an effective role in crime prevention.

Topic One:

The role of the police in crime prevention

Why prevent crime?

- To begin our discussion let us review some of the reasons why crime prevention is of a major concern in all societies. The following are some of the arguments why:
- **Crimes – particularly the increase in and fear of crime - disorganize society, bringing about social injustice and disequilibrium.**
- **Crimes are very costly to control in terms of the amount of money spent on the salaries, training and equipping the various agencies involved in the fight against crime, including correctional facilities where prisoners are fed using the taxpayers money**
- **Crimes are costly in terms of the loss of life, limb and property;**
- **The psychological harm, the trauma, the revulsion, the bitterness and the disaffection produced by crime cannot be estimated in terms of monetary value!**

The Partners in crime prevention

- Further, crimes such as terrorism succeed in disrupting international relations;
- Invariably serious crimes evoke very negative sentiments – revulsion, hatred and vengeance in the victims.
- **Effective crime prevention, as has been emphasized, requires a partnership approach aimed at the removal or reduction of the risks of crime.**
- The partnership is constituted by **the police, local councils and organizations and the community (cooperating with the police and deploying various forms of law enforcement or security technology).** The justice system through its penal policy and the government through the implementation of positive socio-economic policies which constitute a social crime prevention measure.

The Role of the Police

The role of the police includes;

- **Publicity (public education)** on crime prevention programs, including the dissemination of crime statistics;
- **Providing advice to private and public formal organizations,**
- **Preventive patrol detection of crime and the apprehension of offenders;**
- **Organizations of neighborhood watch schemes and**
- **Working in partnership with local authorities to implement policies and in designing out crime**

Role performance by the Ghana Police

- The police in Ghana are involved, but not as effectively, in the roles described above compared to their counterparts in the developed societies.
- Some amount of **public education** is given by the Ghana police during occasional news conferences and annual police week celebrations, and occasionally during television programs on crime prevention measures. You may recall two recent programs which illustrate this, namely, “Crime Combat” and “You and the Police”.
- The Public education by the police in Ghana is perhaps not enough; certainly not at the level of frequency at which efforts are made in the developed societies.

Role Performance by Ghana Police

cont.

- In Britain and America for example, news programs are presented almost on a daily basis to dramatize on television, issues related to crime, and to reconstruct certain crime events (including the graphic profiling of suspects based on rudimentary evidence obtained from witnesses) aimed at refreshing public memory and to solicit information.
- The disparity in the levels and frequency of public education in Ghana and Britain or the US could be attributed to the differential rates of criminality and of technology in a “developed” and “developing” society.
- Given that their larger populations, urbanization and levels of techno-bureaucratization, the frequency of criminality in America and Britain are much higher, and the relevant news dissemination technology is readily available.

Preventive patrols

- However, given the value of publicity in educating citizens on what safety measures to take, the more often relevant police information is published the greater would be the impact on changing the behavior of citizens.
- **Preventive patrols** form a part of the routine of police crime prevention duties in Ghana. Although foot, bicycle and horseback patrols are perhaps more useful based on the fact that they focus effectively on smaller catchment areas, the Ghana police have often complained about the inadequacy of vehicles for patrol and communication equipment such as walkie-talkies.

Preventive Patrols cont.

- The disadvantage of vehicular patrols is that if they are not watching over compact segments of the community, they may have to drive over long distances and take longer durations to cover the spaces between one point and the other.
- For example if the community being patrolled by one vehicle is large, it might take let's say about 45 minutes for the vehicle to drive between residential buildings A and K which are far flung.
- In other words, if you live in building No. 1, which has just been reached by the patrol vehicle, it would take 45 minutes for it to get back there.

Preventive patrols cont.

- Given this time span, robbers or other criminals (who normally take time to watch and plan their activities) might be able to accurately time the vehicle and be able to carry out their operations within the span of 45 minutes that it is absent from the area.
- A Policeman on foot patrol has a smaller area under his charge, and if he is diligent, he should be able to quickly call for reinforcements as and when required.
- Police involvement in other aspects of their defined functions are examined subsequently as they relate to the public, local authorities and neighborhood watch schemes.

Topic Two

The Role of the Community

- Community action in crime prevention is largely structured around the participation of community members in target hardening practices as well as their involvement in neighborhood watch schemes.
- Individual residents in communities are expected and encouraged to take defensive, target hardening action by installing their own security devices such as alarms, closed circuit television monitoring systems, electrical fencing, security guards , special locking systems, reinforced doors burglar proofing , watch dogs, etc . **The public are expected to involve the police in their target hardening practices by seeking their advice**
- Further still, given that statistically about half of all reported crimes are committed by the youth under 21, an important principle concerning community participation in crime prevention is to encourage the youth to take an interest in the community of which they are a part.

Youth involvement

- Part of the explanation for youth involvement in crime has to do with the unavailability of facilities, services and job opportunities in which they can be involved, for leisure or economic gains. The first step towards getting the youth involved in the community is through consulting them.
- Any consultation program should involve young people and their parents and relevant organizations. As far as possible, the community's children and their parents and organizations should be involved in the management of these youth facilities together with paid and youth workers.
- The location of these facilities is very important. In general, youth centers and clubs should not be located far away from the estates; otherwise they may not be well patronized.

Youth involvement cont.

- The emergence in Ghana of the neighborhood watch scheme as an important concept in community participation in crime prevention was mentioned earlier.
- The youth are especially suited to these watch schemes – particularly if they are conscientized enough to believe in community safety, they become emboldened and invigorated crime-haters taking a keen interest in the safety of their communities. They ensure that their watch schemes are well organized, self censored and insulated against infiltration by actual or potential criminals
- Target hardening practices which individuals can adopt by installing security hardware (such as alarms and close circuit televisions,) is similarly catching on in the country. These are however restricted as of now, to the affluent, who can afford the costs involved.

Challenges to public partnership

- While individuals may enthusiastically install security devices, they may have some challenges with the way the devices function. As an illustration, when the alarm system in a particular residence gets accidentally triggered off over a number of times, neighbours who know about this may be unwilling to come to the aid of the occupants of the house when the alarm goes off in response to some real danger.
- CCTV and other intruder detector systems may relay pictures of intruders but cannot do anything to physically stop them. The relevant physical deterrent activity lies in the doing of the occupants who may have to take protective/defensive action by themselves or call in the police.

Challenges cont.

- Even as some effective/ efficient security technology may be expensive to acquire, the same can be said with reference to the hiring of private security personnel, thus cutting out the accessibility to these options from working and middle class residents.
- The acquisition, training and maintenance of guard dogs, such as Alsatians could be similarly expensive. Besides, dogs could be vulnerable to poisoned meats which could be hurled at them over the fence wall. Poorly trained dogs will go such meat and would then be rendered out of action!



Challenges to public partnership cont.

- Household, life, fire and other property insurance schemes are often recommended by local authorities to both local organisations and individuals to cushion the policy holders off, when they are victimised. While insurances may be regarded as having only an “after victimisation effect” they could be prohibitive as well if the premiums payable are rather high.
- **Perhaps of greater concern to the public is the absence of police visibility in certain communities**, and the lack of access roads which could hamper police ability to respond expeditiously to distress calls. This concern is explained also by the fact that the numerical strength of the police may be highly inadequate to ensure high visibility and prompt response.

Challenges – Lack of Awareness

- Further, the police-public cooperation required for effective crime prevention may be subject to certain conditions : These conditions according to Hurwitz and Christianson, include the fact that;
- **Someone must be aware that an offence has taken place.** The fact remains that not all offences are observed or recognized as offences. This is especially true in the field of special legislation, where knowledge of acts and regulations, administrative provisions, circulars, etc., is limited. In such a situation, an actual offence may not be seen as such either by those implicated or by bystanders.
- **This applies also to some offences against the criminal code. For example, a fraudulent transaction can occasionally be considered a legal business disposition because of the mistaken understanding of the law.**

Lack of awareness cont.

- A misunderstanding of facts can also give rise to a non-appreciation of the criminal nature of an act; for example, sexual relations with an under-age, but a physically well developed girl; or negligent homicide committed by members of the medical profession in which not even the guilty party is aware that a technical error which is punishable has taken place.
- The implication is that because these crimes are either not observed by a third party or recognized as a crime by the offenders, they do not come to the notice of the authorities



Offences committed by/against close relations

- **Reporting to the police is often omitted when it is inconvenient to the notifier or the offender is regarded as minor, or when there is special relationship between the offender and the victim or because of fear of retaliation for reporting to the police or when the victim or the witnesses himself involved in a crime.**
- **Reporting may thus be omitted with blackmail or in sexual crime against a child where the parents are afraid that the child may be harmed by the police hearing or press publicity.**
- Theft from or defrauding relative, violence towards husband or wife -these and others as a rule, are first reported only when the possibility of a private settlement with the offenders is ruled out.

Fear of punishment and Emotionally flavoured crimes

- The fear of punishment and stigmatization deters offenders and witnesses from giving information.
- This is particularly true of homosexual offences, abortion and all other offences with a highly emotional flavor (such as, for example, rape, incest, domestic violence, etc.) or offences in which the police have to rely more than elsewhere on information from the public.
- Thus human emotions connected with the fact of penalization easily falsify statistical information as well as case study material.
- **There is also the problem of changes in police techniques and public attitude.** As the policy of the police or the attitude of the public changes, so does the proportion of the total crime which finds its way in the criminal statistics.

Topic Three:

The Neighborhood Watch Scheme

- The **neighborhood watch scheme** took off in Ghana in 1984.. It was easily the only concept in crime prevention which attracted a greater publicity in the printed media and also in the broadcast media through the dramatization on both television and radio of it's utility in combating crime.
- As a consequence, watch groups sprung up quite rapidly in the country. There was however a decline in the activities of these watch schemes, as the crime situation temporarily improved.
- A reactivation of the schemes however took place in response to the increasing rate of crimes of violence – armed robberies and mystery killings – in the country, beginning in the late nineties to the early twenty-first century

Watch schemes cont.

- One of the roles of the police in crime prevention is to take an active part in the formation of these schemes, by vetting the suitability of potential members and to provide support. The practice in Ghana, however is that these watch schemes are formed without police notification or involvement.
- This creates the opportunity for these schemes to be filled with people of criminal persuasion who utilize the opportunity to plan their strategies given the exposure they have (as neighborhood watchers) to the residences of unsuspecting innocent citizens.
- The absence of collaboration between the watch schemes and the police— perhaps because of ignorance on the part of either the police or the public - has led to some clashes between the two groups in some suburban areas in the national capital.

Evaluation of the Watch schemes

- The question often raised about neighborhood watch schemes is about their efficacy in their role as an intelligence gathering arm of the police. What are the facts?

The Watch scheme – a failure?

- The prevailing opinion is that the watch scheme has failed as a concept in crime prevention.
- Rosenbaum reported to the 1986 UK Home Office conference on Communities and Crime reduction, **that crime levels and the fear of crime could even increase in areas where the scheme has been introduced**, and Trevor Bennett declared at the same conference that if watch schemes are having any effect, it is on residents and not on criminals.

Potential for dramatic crime reduction

- The police as the organizers of the neighborhood watch schemes are perhaps best in the position to say whether these schemes are useful or not.
- Contrary to the views expressed above, a significant 73.3% of the police respondents whom I interviewed in Britain (1992) indicated that the watch schemes were effective; 20% only disagreed. T
- The respondents who considered the watch scheme effective emphasized however that it was only those schemes which had 'proper **advice** at the start', constant **support** throughout' and with several **keen** members' that performed with excellence

Potential for crime reduction cont.

- These variables would thus seem to be the key factors which, when present, could make the watch schemes reduce crime **dramatically** to quote one of the respondents, who also declared, 'we have the statistics to prove this'!
- It does seem however that the 'giving of proper advice and constant support emphasized by the respondents are likely to place some pressure on the resources of the police.
- According to Osborn and Bright, the police themselves have expressed **concern about the resource demands of the neighborhood watch schemes. One police review claimed that the increasing number of neighborhood watch scheme, will undoubtedly place extreme pressure on the force in the future.** They could slow down the introduction of other schemes and create a reduced service'.

Effective watch schemes – a wise investment

- But it does seem plausible to suggest that if the neighborhood watch scheme has the capacity to dramatically reduce the level of criminality when properly organized and supported, **then the resources needed to provide the organizational and support prerequisites are perhaps well worth providing, if the fight against crime is to be advanced.**
- For, ultimately, if the neighborhood watch scheme proved as successful as it's potential is held out to be, **they would become effectively deterrent and would thus relieve the pressure on the resources of the police.**
- This way, organizing effective watch scheme could be a wise investment to make.

Reactivating watch schemes

- **The inactivity of the less productive watch groups can be attributed to the apathy which they experience after the initial impetus which led to their formation has dissipated.** As one of the British police respondents pointed out, 'neighborhood watch groups are usually established in response to perceived local crime problems.
- **When the problem is curbed, the impetus of the group also disappears'.**
- Osborn and Bright similarly noted that in most neighborhood watch areas, crimes do not occur very frequently, and people may soon be weary of watching out for burglars.

Resolving the problems of apathy and relocation of crime

- Thus the solution to apathy appears to be, according to them, that in order to survive, neighborhood watch schemes may need to address themselves to other community concerns as well as crime prevention.
- **The argument that watch schemes tend to cause the relocation or displacement of crime remains tenable only in as far as some neighborhoods remain uncovered by the scheme.**
- Hypothetically, if every community A – Z had an effective watch scheme, no neighborhood could then be considered as a safe haven by the potential criminal for their activities.

Police participation in the formation of watch schemes

- Thus, if all the existing or yet –to –be formed watch schemes in Ghana would invite the police to educate them on their activities or to participate in their initial formation, they would benefit from the vetting of their members and the required advice and support.
- Such properly organized schemes and can be expected to greatly impact the reduction of crime.

Summary

- The specific functions of the police in crime prevention include public education on crime prevention, preventive patrols and the apprehension of offenders organization of neighborhood watch schemes. provision of advice to private and public formal organizations, and working in partnership with local authorities to implement policies.
- Most of the challenges for the Police can be explained by the fact that there are not sufficiently resourced to be able to perform all the tasks that the law assigns them.

Summary cont.

- Although the policeman sees himself as a specialist in dealing with violence, he does not want to fight alone. He does not believe that his specialization relieves the general public of their citizen's duties.
- The public on the other hand prefers to see the policeman as an automaton, because once his/her humanity is recognized, the citizen would feel the obligation to become implicated in his/her work which after all, is sometimes dirty and dangerous.
- The police in Ghana are involved but not effectively in their crime prevention roles compared to their counterparts in the developed societies.

Summary cont.

- Members of the public who know about crimes do not report them, and this happens on a large scale. Reporting to the police is often omitted when it is inconvenient to the notifier. Further,
- It is a known practice that the family setting in which it occurs often prevents serious offences like incest, rape, abortion, domestic violence or homosexual offences, from reaching the ears of the police.
- These are often regarded as emotionally flavored crimes and are often hushed up..

Summary Cont.

- Community action in crime prevention is structured around the participation of community members in neighborhood watch schemes. Further, individual residents have the responsibility to take defensive action by installing their own security devices.
- Further still, given that statistically about half of all reported crimes are committed by the youth under 21, an important principle concerning community participation in crime prevention is to encourage the youth to take an interest in the community of which they are a part

Summary Cont.

- The prevailing opinion is that the watch scheme has failed as a concept in crime prevention, because crime levels and the fear of crime have the potential of increasing in areas where the scheme has been introduced,
- It was only those schemes which had ‘proper **advice** at the start’, ‘constant **support** throughout’ and with several **keen** members’ that performed with excellence.
- These variables would thus seem to be the key factors which, when present, could make the watch schemes reduce crime **dramatically**

Assignment

Which of the two – the police or the public - in your view , has not lived up to expectation as a partner in crime prevention in Ghana? What can be done to improve performance?



Reading List

REQUIRED TEXT

Chris Abotchie (2011)

Distance

Abotchie, C., (2018)

Crime Prevention

Publishing

Penology, Accra,

Institute of Continuing and
Education

Treatment of Criminals and

Accra, Olive Tree Printing and

Chapter One pp 1-12