Chapter three.

policing.

This chapter offers an overview of some core issues concerning criminal psychology and policing. It will review the general features of the police role, how this has changed over time and how these changes are reflected in the police image. The chapter also considers how police officers cope with the demands placed on them and how personnel are selected, and discusses some of the Government’s aims to create a police service representative of the community it serves. Finally, this chapter will explore citizens’ perceptions of the police and other police and security agencies, track some of the key developments in the private security industry over the last decade and discuss some forms of voluntary policing, both within and outside the limits of the law.

It might be thought that the roles and responsibilities of the police are well known and agreed upon, but an independent committee of inquiry into the roles and responsibilities of the police in England and Wales (1996) found that no such consensus actually existed. They proposed the following: ‘the purpose of the police service is to uphold the law fairly and firmly; to prevent crime; to pursue and bring to justice those who break the law; to keep the Queen’s peace; to protect, help, and reassure the community; and to be seen to do this with integrity, common sense and sound judgement’.

Even this description is not without problems, for it is difficult for any definition to capture the vast array of duties performed by the police. Every day the police service is involved in a large range of activities, ranging from fairly trivial tasks such as giving directions to dealing with serious road accidents, reporting deaths to loved ones and investigating crime.

It could be argued that much of what the police do on a daily basis is in fact unrelated to crime.

Police officers not only perform a vast range of ‘social service’ duties, but work and interact with a variety of people within the criminal justice system, including offenders, informants, suspects, victims, witnesses, lawyers, solicitors, social workers, senior officers and staff at judicial proceedings when officers attend court to give evidence. This diversity of responsibilities is probably one of the main reasons why the media, especially television dramas, focus so much on policing.

In fact it may be questioned whether there are any clear limits to the responsibilities of the police. They perform many routine yet important duties within society, but to what extent is it reasonable to expect the police to work in extremely demanding conditions? Is there an expectation that police officers are ‘super- human’, unable to be harmed in the line of duty, akin to some type of superhero? There are numerous examples of very brave emergency service officers across the world who have carried out their duty with extraordinary professionalism and courage. One has only to consider the brave men and women who entered the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11.

When there is a natural disaster looming, is it realistic to expect officers to stay in the environment in order to ‘police’? When news of hurricane Katrina alerted the citizens of New Orleans in the US the whole city was ordered to evacuate, but police officers were expected to stay and wait for the hurricane: to remain at the site, live in terrible conditions and leave their families, in order to keep law and order. Is this a reasonable expectation?

In many countries what constitutes routine police activities has been transformed over the last thirty years, reflecting the changing character of the environment being policed.

Recent advances in technology have changed the way many crimes are investigated, and the type of evidence that can be produced to bring an offender to justice. The most notable example of this is DNA profiling. Currently the British national DNA data- bank matches over 1,000 DNA profiles every week. This helps the police to identify criminals, make arrests earlier and obtain more secure convictions. Not only can it be used in the investigation and as evidence in court for current crimes, but also for old unsolved cases. It has also had a significant effect on what are termed ‘miscarriages of justice’, whereby innocent people have been convicted for a crime they did not commit (see chapter 8). An example of this is the case known as the ‘Cardiff Three’.

The Cardiff Three were convicted in 1988 for the brutal murder of a prostitute in Cardiff. Twenty year-old Lynette White was stabbed more than fifty times in a flat above a betting shop and in 1990 three men were sentenced to life imprisonment for her murder. The convictions were overturned by the Court of Appeal in 1992, after new DNA evidence was uncovered under layers of paint on a skirting board in Miss White’s flat. This led to the capture of Jeffrey Gafoor, the real murderer, who was jailed for life in 2003. Serious problems regarding the initial police handling of the case were also voiced.

As crime evolves into new areas, for example into new forms of fraud or Internet crime, so police need to continuously respond to the changing needs and challenges. New methods of policing develop (e.g. via CCTV) and specialist units emerge. Even the image of the police has changed. The ‘golden era’ of policing of the 1950s was personified by the friendly, local bobby on the beat. This image has remained in the public consciousness despite drastic changes in the style of policing. The old image of the bobby walking down the street, knowing the names of citizens within the com- munity and being very much part of the community has changed considerably, although it is still felt that there is a strong association between a uniformed police presence and public confidence.

Historically a strong association has developed between the police uniform and the maintenance of personal and public standards. These concerns have remained important since Peel-style policing began in England in 1829. In the United States, it was well- expressed in the following address to the NYPD by the General Superintendent, Amos Pilsbury, in 1859, which is displayed at the New York Police History Museum, Manhattan, New York:

The uniform you wear should be a perpetual ‘coat of mail’ to guard you against every temptation to which you may be exposed, by reminding you that no act of misconduct, or breach of discipline, can escape public observation and censure. By exemplary conduct and manly deportment, you will command the respect and cordial support of all good citizens. For the faithful performance of the important trusts committed to your care, you will be noticed approvingly, and your services will be appreciated by the community.

In England and Wales, the ‘bobby’ remains a powerful symbol. Few other police forms can project such a compelling image that is easily recognized beyond their own jurisdiction. An exploration of the history of the British police shows that same key concerns have recurred throughout its existence, such as that of ensuring the recognition and distinctiveness of police officers – called ‘visibility’ – and maintaining a strong supportive relationship with members of the community – known as ‘reassurance’. Other concerns have related to the style of policing, the manner in which the police engage with the public and seek their assistance and co-operation in carrying out the law, known as ‘engagement’. The occasional public outcries for a return to a significant visible policing presence on the street put the police service under pressure to continually monitor and modify their evolving style of policing, and to ensure that they remain readily identifiable, distinctive and accessible to the public.

The uniforms of the modern police service include anything from full body armour for public order incidents, to specialist firearms equipment and clothing, to variations to the traditional uniform, with perhaps the addition of a bulletproof vest and Doctor Marten style boots! Increasingly attention is being paid to the ways in which the public make sense of the messages sent out by policing activity. Her Majesty’s Inspectors of Police commented in 2001 that ‘A police officer in uniform on an unhurried foot patrol suggests that “all is well with the world”. However a marked police vehicle with blue light and sirens activated sends out a different message. This is currently visible policing but we would suggest it is far from reassuring.’

Stress.

It is not surprising that the stress experienced by police officers has become the subject of research, for the policing role requires that they deal with difficult situations and investigations, sometimes in highly dangerous and unpredictable circumstances. This is a worldwide problem. The effect of routine stressors over long periods of time can have many detrimental effects, such as medical problems, absenteeism, high staff turnover, alcohol problems, marital problems and family breakdowns.

There is, however, some disagreement on how ‘stress’ can be defined or measured. Little is known about the causal route from experiencing stress to becoming ill. Different groups may be more susceptible to stress than others. As noted by Brown and Campbell (1994), it is important to establish two major issues: first, whether police work is inherently stressful; and second, whether police officers are adversely affected by exposure to work related stressors.

It may be that police work is inherently stressful, but that does not necessarily mean that officers will always suffer because of it. The dominant policing ideology emphasizes that officers should be capable and emotionally strong individuals, who are able to deal with situations that ‘civilians’ would find stressful. If the work itself is inherently stressful then what could be done to reduce or remove its causes and effects?

Is police work more stressful than the work of other professions? Violence and aggression are usually assumed to play a significant contribution to stress in the workplace, but other occupations experience similar stressors, notably other emergency services, for example ambulance crews and accident and emergency (casualty) departments. Direct comparisons are difficult largely because of the wide and increasing diversity of policing duties.

Police may witness death and mutilation, and may have to report to family members about the death of a loved one, or deal with violent offenders, and have to respond immediately to dangerous or potentially life-threatening situations. While such traumatic experiences are infrequent, the high levels of uncertainty may in themselves be stressful.

It has been found that not all officers experience the same type or the same level of stress. Different ranks of officers have different causes of stress. Senior ranking officers experience greater organizational pressures relating to administration and paperwork, such as staff shortages, high staff turnover, a lack of resources, high workload and keeping up to date with new developments and techniques. Lower ranks are more susceptible to stress from active police work, such as attending serious traffic accidents and dealing with violent confrontations.

Police are required to maintain a public and private image. Their own police subculture, also known as ‘canteen culture’, stems largely from a police force historically drawn from white working class males. This canteen culture has certain pronounced features which serve to protect them and provide a sense of mutual support, but emphasizes a macho image and excludes admitting failures, fears and discussing problems, or admitting to experiencing stress. Over time this culture has been passed down, and despite many changes in the service over the last twenty years, many researchers note that canteen culture still exists and may prevent officers from seeking help.

Minority groups within the police service, such as women, or members of ethnic minority groups, may experience the extra stressors of discrimination from members of the public and/or within the organization.