public perceptions of the police.

Police forces in many countries enjoy a positive relationship with the public. Despite periods of unrest, allegations of racism, sexism and awkward interactions with youths, citizens in such countries generally have trust and respect for the police. Both police and citizens support the concept that effective policing requires public support, therefore to provide a professional police service the police must work with the community. Many writers believe that it is the notion of ‘policing by consent’ that is the hallmark of British policing. The British police are proud to remain routinely unarmed, retain the principal of minimum force and carry a minimal amount of equipment for their own protection. Throughout its history the British police has worked on the principle of being unarmed, uniformed citizens.

Perhaps the ever-increasing demands for more police on the street is a reflection of the positive relationship the public have with the police. In Britain there are often calls for more uniformed police on the street, which research suggests offers citizens reassurance, lowers fear of crime and maintains law and order.

However, years of intelligence-led policing, large amounts of paperwork, the introduction of cars and the increasing amount of specialist functions (such as fraud, Internet crime etc.) have taken the police off the street and out of the sight of the public. This has resulted in a greater demand for a uniformed presence on the streets which has been recognized by recent Government policy documents.

Together with the perception that the police are being removed from public view, other changes have occurred in society that have resulted in a greater need for security. Over the last fifty years or so there has been a massive increase in the amount of land, property and possessions that citizens own (and many of these possessions such as DVD players, laptops, mobile phones and televisions are also very easily transportable), making it easier for thieves to steal, transport and then sell on. All sorts of security products are avail- able to help citizens to protect their homes and possessions (e.g. burglar alarms, bolts and locks), and this industry has become big business. Presumably the more fearful people are the more security they will need.

Security has also been developed in terms of manned guards. In recent years commercialism has grown, and so has the need for shop owners to protect the premises against shoplifters and trouble makers. This has resulted in uniformed private security guards interacting with the public on a day to day basis. In fact in many countries the private security industry has developed its services at a staggering rate and conducts a diverse range of activities. There has been some concern about the increasing role these security agencies play in relation to the public, especially as until recently there was no legislation in England and Wales in place to regulate or control the private security industry. This has resulted in some very interesting research uncovering the darker side of the industry, such as bouncers dealing drugs, the ‘night-time economy’, and many cases of criminals running security companies in order to exploit their perceived authority. To prevent further abuse and risk to the public, the Private Security Industry Act was established in 2001. The industry is now regulated and only accredited officers are allowed to perform security duties.

Other changes that made a significant difference to citizens’ lifestyles and policing activity is the merging of public and private space. Over the last twenty years there has been a vast increase in public access to privately owned premises such as shopping malls and leisure centres. As more activities take place on private property, more private security is required to protect it. The roles of the police and private security organizations increasingly overlap, and the boundaries of ‘private’ and ‘public’ have become less clear.

Despite an increase over the last twenty years in the types and number of uniformed officers the public are now likely to see on the streets, citizens still want more police on the street. In order to fulfil this need in England and Wales the government has introduced a number of schemes to provide this uniformed presence, but these are not necessarily police as we have known them in the past. Many schemes have been set up over the last decade, such as Neighbourhood Warden Schemes, and more recently Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). PCSOs do not have the same powers as police or the same extensive training, but they do wear a uniform that is remarkably similar to that of a police officer and do work with the police. So far the government have been so pleased with the work of PCSOs that it plans to increase the numbers from 6,214 currently to at least 25,000 by 2008.

Throughout England and Wales in 2003 there were 141,230 police officers and 12,077 special constables (part-time, volunteer officers). In comparison, according to the Security Industry Authority in 2003, there were approximately half a million security officers working in the private security industry, with an annual revenue of 3–4 billion pounds. Clearly, policing and security are in great demand.

This chapter has dealt mainly with issues regarding public police and private security. However, there is a vast array of policing activities conducted by many other agencies that fall outside these two categories and it is increasingly difficult to group or categorize these agencies. They all have different roles and responsibilities and work within different boundaries of the law. For example, private investigators are not bound by the same stringent rules as police officers, and they have many methods of investigation open to them. Many of the large investigation firms have the most advanced technology available, can access sophisticated databases, and use perhaps what could be described as ‘less ethical’ methods of investigation (such as delving through someone’s rubbish bins and tapping phone lines) in order to gather information for their client.

Voluntary policing is also an area of great interest, but has received little attention from academics. British criminologist Professor Les Johnston is one of the few who have conducted research in this area. He divides voluntary policing into two categories, which he terms ‘responsible citizenship’ and ‘autonomous citizenship’. Responsible citizenship includes citizens working within the guidelines of the law, such as those volunteering as special constables or becoming involved in local neighbourhood watch. Within this category Johnston (1996) also discusses ‘spontaneous citizen involvement’, whereby a citizen may witness a crime taking place and intervene or report it. However, clearly there is scope here for citizens to become too involved and become a ‘have-a-go-hero’ (Johnston 1996). The mass media may also play a role in investigation under the umbrella of ‘responsible citizenship’ (Johnston 1996). The media can gather information from the public to help the police solve crime. The media can also pursue their own investigations, and reporters often go under cover, gathering information and footage to publicize.

The second category suggested by Johnston is ‘autonomous citizenship’. This involves citizens setting up their own patrols. There are some well-known examples of this, for example the Guardian Angels in New York. Research suggests that during the 1980s New Yorkers felt safer due to the Guardian Angels’ presence, more so than when the police (NYPD) patrolled. Another aspect to autonomous citizenship is ‘vigilantism’, which involves citizens taking the law into their own hands. This will be discussed in chapter 8 on punishment.

Conclusion.

It is clear that the police deal with a diverse range of duties, and are ‘an all-purpose social service’ (Morgan and Newburn 1998, p. 75). These duties have developed over the years, new specialist units have emerged, and new tools of investigation and technology help the police solve crime (e.g. CCTV and DNA). Society and policing have changed, and the image of policing image reflects this.

There appears to be no limit to the public expectation of police responsibilities, and it is not surprising that police stress has been researched by psychologists. Research suggests that police do experience stress, and the most common coping strategy reported appears to be talking to colleagues.

It has been suggested that only certain types of people are attracted to working in the police service, and this raises the question whether there is a ‘police personality’. Research supports this view, as there do appear to be common traits amongst police officers, such as authoritarianism. Research is still examining whether this is as a result of police training or because some personality types are simply drawn to policing.

This chapter also considered the Government’s aims to provide a police service representative of the community it serves drawing on examples of minority groups including women, ethnic minorities and sexual orientation. While there is a clear message that these citizens would be greatly encouraged, it is difficult to envisage how the Government could really meet its targets, firstly in terms of attracting enough recruits, and secondly in retaining them.

Finally, the chapter considered developments in public policing arrangements (e.g. the introduction of PCSOs), the huge growth of the private security industry in Britain and various forms of voluntary policing. Clearly the public police do not have a monopoly on policing and security, and the future of policing will involve many different agencies, transforming the way citizens are policed, crime is investigated and evidence is provided to bring offenders to justice.