

Replace Rhetoric on Police with Problem-Solving

By

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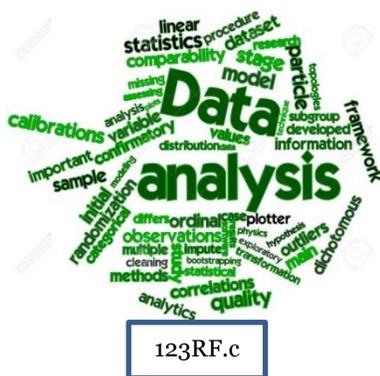
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In Response to Use of Force Article
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National Data on Police's Use of Force Proves Almost Useless

When the Justice Department surveyed police departments nationwide in 2013, officials included for the first time a series of questions about how often officers used force. In the year since protesters in Ferguson, Mo., set off a national discussion about policing, President Obama and his top law enforcement officials have bemoaned the lack of clear answers to such questions. Without them, the racially and politically charged debate quickly descends into the unknowable.

The Justice Department survey had the potential to reveal whether officers were more likely to use force in diverse or homogeneous cities; in depressed areas or wealthy suburbs; and in city or rural towns. Did the racial makeup of the police department matter? Did crime rates? However, when the data was issued last month, without a public announcement, the figures turned out to be almost useless. Nearly all departments said they kept track of their shootings, but in accounting for all uses of force, the numbers varied widely. Some cities included episodes in which officers punched suspects or threw them to the ground. Others did not. Some counted the use of less lethal weapons, such as beanbag guns. Others did not.

Moreover, many departments, including large ones such as those in New York, Houston, Baltimore and Detroit, either said they did not know how many times their officers had used force or just refused to answer. That made any meaningful analysis of the data impossible. The report's flaws highlight a challenge for the Obama administration, which has called for better data but has no authority to demand that a police department keeps track of it. Those that do keep track are under no obligation to release it.



When the Justice Department's civil rights investigators have scrutinized police departments and reviewed records that would not otherwise have been made public, they have found evidence of abuse.

References: <http://www.governing.com/topics/public-justice-safety/National-Data-on-Polices-Use-of-Force-Proves-Almost-Useless.html>

Full Article: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/12/us/data-on-use-of-force-by-police-across-us-proves-almost-useless.html?ref=us&_r=3

My Response

Personally, I am a data guy for most things, but with the emotions on police use of force and citizen behaviors that are less than stellar erupt, there are way too many variables involved to make heads or tails of quantitative data.

First, we have missed the 360-degree issue due to media hype and alleged focus by special interests that shut out the big picture. To cast blame on police without examination of all matters, their connectedness, the lack of social responsibility, sociological needs, the selfishness and ambitions of others, and additional descriptors that are part of the problem, is in itself slipshod.

The leap to lofty and often ill-conceived political rhetoric, to toss money or other fixes without thought is of little value, but carries significant taxpayer cost). The rush to a solution versus common sense and thoroughness seems foolish as well. Moreover, importantly, we are talking about behavior and actions by all parties to the issues and problems, not analogous to skin color, gender, age, occupation, residence and other demographic information. It is negligent to not fully understanding the cause contributors.

Looking below the surface of a situation, we need to drill deeper to motivations, behaviors, attitudes and individual responsibility in a civilized society. Those things of the mind, not the visual grasp for straws or media hype that are prevalent. Federal intervention, rhetoric and tossing money around, is not very useful in these cases. So, STOP, get out of the way, quit threatening, chastising, blaming, and posturing – as it does not seem to be working and most of us resent the projected falsehood.

The National Institute of Justice hosted a seminar on “Strengthening Law Enforcement – Community Relations.” Positive in approach, but here again, it was a discussion within the police, about themselves, and with solutions that were police focused. I would ask what good is it if the outcomes, minus citizen engagement, are not included.

This seminar was a community-wide problem focus and requires a broad-based approach to sustainable solutions. Yes, change is necessary for policing, and some of the discussion will be very positive. However, it takes two to make the dance satisfying. An attempt at a quick fix, while of high intention, is not the answer. Police officers are retrenching and how can we blame them. The community/citizens continue on their path and in the middle, more hot air than what a boiler emanates in a Maine winter.

What Herman Goldstein proposed in his Community Problem Oriented Policing model (CPOP) was that citizens, other stakeholders, and police with the support of elected officials and expertise where needed that contributes value, can make a positive and sustainable change in communities.

When Herman Goldstein and Ronald Clarke came to the City of Charlotte, to work with Chief Dennis Nowicki and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department to convert an entire police jurisdiction AND the community/citizens to CPOP, the results were phenomenal. It worked and aptly reduced tensions and improved the quality of life across all demographic segments of the jurisdiction. A resounding success embraced by citizens, police, elected officials and many others who know the details and results.

The base inquiry, what is the problem? When people in a neighborhood come together with those mentioned above to address the problem/s, to drill down into available information allowing a proper analysis, to work collaboratively to identify sustainable solutions and then implement them with ongoing evaluation, now you have something. It is tangible, measurable and offers proof that effective and lasting change is possible. Laws, ill-advised political action, posturing and other invective's, are moderately useless as history aptly demonstrates.

The current global focus is way, way too broad as no two places are replicas of the other! We need to narrow down to the city by city, neighborhood by neighborhood and include all stakeholders. Problem-solving, identifying serious issues rank ordering them as a community group and working to fix the top issue first and move to number two, is a process that works. When the rhetoric (and lack of it to not appear biased) is the rule, the conditions continue as before. Only when we change the approach to sustainable solutions will we see valued outcomes.

Based on the Charlotte experience, I would be shocked if the positive change did not take place if CPOP were the order of the day. People must communicate, to work together to solve issues and problems, if the modification is to happen. Those who refuse to come to the table due to personal bias, selfishness or hidden motives, then work harder to get them there.

Political and self-posturing rhetoric is a total waste of good air. There are way too many seeking selfish outcomes and who are blind to anything but themselves, living by bias, reputation enhancement, false statements and all manner of subterfuge. STOP – we see through it and chastise you for not doing what is pure and right!

With the Passage of Time.

In a post comment reflection, it appears clear that the current dilemma is spin, prejudice, personal agenda and some other variables that often confuse the situation, and not provide solutions. Partisanship is not the way to run a country; it is destructive in this instance and leads to more, not less, turmoil.

Intelligent solutions emerge from a proven problem-solving engagement, a thorough examination, a collection of information, analysis and focused effort to attain sustainable solutions. When this is not the case, we remain in a constant loop, movement without conclusion and that is neither wise, cost effective nor in the resolution of long-standing problems.

Like many of the past era change trends, there were short-lived as a movement to new ideas emerged. Longevity is lost and without a depth of evaluation, while demonstrated effectiveness is left to conjecture. Problem-solving, when done right, leads to successful change outcomes. One of the more prominent is Herman Goldstein's approach used as the core of the Community Problem Oriented Policing (CPOP) model. CPOP utilized a scan, analysis, response, and assessment (S.A.R.A.) model that emphasizes the following components (Center for Problem Oriented Policing¹). The key is its thoroughness, of gathering information, conducting a careful analysis, working with others to seek sustainable solutions through program development, and evaluating the process and outcomes to make adjustments and fine tune where needed. A depth of information is available at this website including examples of successful CPOP programs including the processes used.

Scanning:

- Identifying recurring problems of concern to the public and the police.
- Determine the consequences of the problem for the community and the police.
- Prioritizing those problems.
- Developing broad goals.
- Confirming that the problems exist.
- Determining how frequently the problem occurs and how long it has been taking place.
- Selecting problems for closer examination.

Analysis:

- Identifying and understanding the events and conditions that precede and accompany the problem.
- Identifying relevant data to be collected.
- Researching information about the problem type.
- Taking inventory of how the problem is addressed and the strengths and limitations of the current response.
- Narrow the scope of the problem as precisely as possible.
- Identifying a variety of resources that may be of assistance in developing a deeper understanding of the problem.
- Developing a working hypothesis about why the problem is occurring.

¹ . <http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara>

Response:

- Brainstorm for new interventions.
- Searching for what other communities with similar problems has done.
- Choose among the alternative interventions.
- Outlining a response plan and identifying responsible parties.
- State the specific objectives of the response plan.
- Carry out the planned activities.

Assessment:

- Determining if the program was implemented (a process evaluation).
- Collecting pre- and post-response qualitative and quantitative data.
- Determining if the broad goals and specific objectives were achieved.
- Identifying any new strategies needed to augment the original plan.
- Conduct an ongoing assessment to ensure continued effectiveness.

For persistent or newly emerging serious problems in a community, dependence on violation and arrest may not be sufficient as an end to and cessation of future crime. We urge intelligent and proven models such as CPOP, to provide the police agency with a smart approach to crime control and prevention. Serious consideration of changing business, as usual, is essential if we are to be effective and efficient to the communities we provide police and law enforcement services.

