



In response to Dr. Laura Huey's commentary on "harm-focused policing"

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In Volume 1, Issue 3, Dr. Laura Huey provided an insightful commentary into "harm-focused policing". She defines harm-focused policing as "a method for identifying places that, and/or offenders who, produce the greatest 'harms' within a community and allocating police resources accordingly" (Huey, 2016, p.83). Dr. Huey goes on to explain that typical police performance measures involve examining crime rates in particular areas; if rates decrease, then the police are thought to be doing a good job. She rightly points out that this can be misleading as not all crimes are equal in measure or severity and further, not all crimes are reported to police. By treating reported crimes as equal measures, risk assessment and resource allocation can be skewed. Thus, she argues, we should be evaluating crime in terms of "harm" and weighting crime types via harm indices. This, she contends, should help agencies improve resource allocation and address negative public discourse regarding the need for larger police complete size despite "falling crime rates".

I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Huey's commentary on harm-focused policing and would like to extend and alter it in two ways. First, I want to explain why harm-focused policing is, in fact, not a completely new idea in Canadian policing. Second, I'd like to propose an alternate vision for policing research that goes beyond "harm-focused policing" towards a more "community safety" approach.

WHY HARM-FOCUSED POLICING IS NOT NEW TO CANADIAN POLICE AGENCIES

Dr. Huey asked the following question in her piece, "Will harm-focused policing catch on across Canada and change how policing is performed and evaluated here?" In response to that question, I believe harm-focused policing is already in use in police agencies across Canada—police executives and academics just don't know it. Though there is no standardization across police agencies, harm-focused analyses are not new to crime analysts. Crime analysts employ various analytical techniques every day to determine the most problematic (harmful) persons and places. They analyze patterns and trends of crime and disorder. They anticipate and predict the next 'harmful' occurrence based on complex numeric and qualitative measures, as well as historical data. They often weight hotspot analyses on crime type severity (harm index) and then augment these analyses with report

narratives, intelligence data, and risk terrain mapping techniques. Though the analytical process is extremely complex, at the end of the day, results must be displayed in the simplest format possible. Police members want to know when and where to go so that they can reduce crime and disorder in their city. They're not usually interested in a full rundown of the rigorous and complicated analytical techniques.

Unfortunately, crime analysts, who are at the (hidden) forefront of research and analysis for Canadian police agencies, seldom publish work or scholarship on what they do and how they do it. I am as much at fault for this as any other. To be fair though, crime analysts do not typically get paid or promoted for academic publication. On the contrary, they may be reprimanded for publishing articles not approved by their chain of command; their research may be embargoed by supervisors; or they may be asked to exclude inconvenient data or exaggerate results leading to the publication of deceptive information. I'm not saying that this will or has happened. I am saying that it can happen. The bottom line is that crime analysts do not hold the Intellectual Property Rights for their work and, therefore, do not have control over it. It is often easier to refrain from publishing than to face career-based and ethical dilemmas.

Thus, the bulk of scholarship on crime analysis, police performance measures, program evaluation, police reform, and evidence-based policing strategies must invariably be left to academics and sworn police executives. Yet these very same academics and executives may not be fully aware of what goes on behind the epistemological curtains of the crime analyst's world; they may not know about the novel research and analytical methodologies crime analysts employ daily. To advance Canadian police research, police strategies and organizational reform and to improve public safety, we should encourage more collaboration between academics and crime analysts. To do so, however, we need police executives to recognize the importance of such collaboration.

A DIFFERENT PARADIGM FOR POLICE RESEARCH

In the second part of my response to Dr. Huey's commentary, I want to delve into an alternate vision I have for policing research in Canada. While there are many benefits of using a harm-focused approach to research, this approach adheres to the traditional paradigmatic axiom that individuals

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are sometimes victims of criminal incidents, are harmed by these incidents and that therefore policing and police research ought to focus on crime, severity of harm, and risk of victimization. This axiom pervades our present thought on policing and police research in Canada. Yet is this the best framework for creating safe and secure communities?

Everywhere you look, police services are trying to make communities safer through the traditional crime-focused model. We analyze crime and crime hotspots, deploy resources accordingly, and arrest the criminals. The underlying idea is that, if you address the harms in the community, if you prevent crime; if you reduce the risk of victimization, then you will make the community safer. To illustrate how this idea permeates our collective thought, here are a few quotes from various Canadian Police Agency websites (emphasis added):

- “The City of Surrey Crime Reduction Strategy is an innovative problem solving approach to addressing the causes and effects of crime” (Mayor’s Task Force on Crime Reduction and Public Safety, 2007)
- “The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) is an integral part of the Government of Canada’s action plan to tackle crime in order to build stronger, healthier communities.” (Public Safety Canada, 2015)
- “We will continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with other service providers to address the root causes of crime” (Regina Police Service, n.d.)
- “The Divisional Policing Support Unit educates and assists community members to be more aware of their own safety, and to be proactive in the reduction of crime and eliminating the opportunity for crime” (Toronto Police Service, 2016)

SO WHAT?

By now you are probably wondering what is wrong with this. Nothing is wrong with it. But if you take the traditional crime-focused approach to community safety, then you are led down a particular path. You are led to concepts of crime

prevention, risk reduction, and harm avoidance. You are led to measures of the incidence and prevalence of crime, victimization rates, and crime severity indices. In practice, solutions will involve risk avoidance strategies, harm reduction approaches, and crime prevention/intervention activities. In other words, if all you can think about and analyze is crime, risk, and harm, then how can you imagine anyone ever being safe?

What if, however, we rephrase everything so that the question becomes: “How do we manage to keep people safe?” If we shift the research focus to maximizing safety rather than reducing crime, risk, and harm, then we are led down a completely different path—a path that may potentially be fruitful in terms of improving the safety and security of our communities (see Figure 1).

If police agencies follow a community safety-focused model, they may begin to prioritize collective impact approaches and develop diverse partnerships with community and government agencies. They might enhance self-safety capacity and protective behaviours of citizens by seeking ways to improve environmental conditions. Police agencies may also then mobilize community resources to increase well-being such as by helping establish safe injection sites or engaging with youth in sports—to name but a few.

One path leads to different concepts, measures, and methods (practices) of addressing community safety than the other. If researchers and police executives want to better understand how to ensure the safety and security of people and the community, then we must expand beyond the traditional axiom of crime, risk, and harm-focused research and practices. We need to review where the safest communities are and why they are so safe. We need to understand the impact of a crime-focused model versus a safety-focused model on the community and which has better short- and long-term outcomes. We need to move beyond one-dimensional views of the problem.

So here is the challenge for academics, crime analysts, criminologists, and police executives. Let’s develop indicators focusing on safety rather than indicators focusing on crime



FIGURE 1 The two models: concepts, indicators, and practices.

and risk. Let's use these indicators in research so that they may lead us to novel solutions to public safety concerns. In the modern era, police can no longer be viewed as just crime fighters. Police must now become the architects (in the words of former Winnipeg Police Chief Devon Clunis) "of a culture of safety for all".

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest. This article was prepared by Sheri Bell in her personal capacity. The opinions and thoughts expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the views of any police service with which she may have affiliation.

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