Abstract

The paper examines the forces within an inner city community in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), Jamaica, which heighten the perception of fear among the police. It explains some of the reactions by the police in terms of a ‘fight or flight’ response that is triggered by fear. The research was conducted in a poor inner city community that has been the focus of much violent activity and employed a mixed methodology – a questionnaire survey among heads of households and focus group discussions with 8 to 11 and 15 to 35 male cohorts as well as police officers posted in the community.

The community is particularly fractured with a long history of interpersonal and intergroup conflict. Knowledge of property crimes committed within the community was low but of personal crimes and especially homicides, extremely high and the police saw the citizens as either playing a passive role in relation to policing or actively supporting criminal activity. The relationship between the two groups was highly contentious.

The paper examines the rationale for fear among young police officers, many of whom were in their first posting. They discussed threats that were both symbolic and actual. The paper also examines the reactions of the police as seen through the eyes of focus group participants. It argues that while there can be no excuses for police excesses, there has to be recognition of the enormous threats to their safety and attempts made to create the kind of environment that supports efforts at community policing. The Jamaica Constabulary Force must develop early warning systems to identify officers who are in need of psychological services and signal that it is not a sign of weakness to request access to these services.
Introduction

In 2004, 11 police officers were killed in Jamaica, some in the performance of their duties and others as targets of violent attacks. Many more have been wounded. Relations between the police and members of poor communities especially those in inner city areas are extremely poor and their actions have been the subject of well extensive criticism. There are some occasions in which lethal force is unavoidable; when the police must shoot in order to protect themselves or innocent civilians. What is of concern, however, is a seeming lack of restraint. Amnesty International (2004) claimed that Jamaica has the greatest number of lethal shootings by police per capita and that almost every police shooting results in a fatality. In 2003, 133 persons were killed by police officers many in disputed circumstances (Amnesty International, 2003). These practices have been condemned not only because of the human toll and suffering but also because they are seen as being counter productive. It leads to what Kinsey and Young (1986) refer to as the mobilisation of bystanders, alienating those who are not involved in criminal activity.

Policing is conducted in heavily armed communities where every young man is seen as a potential threat. It is the argument of this paper that the constant threat produces both chronic and acute stress and that many of the acts of brutality may be the outward manifestations of the psychological and physiological responses to fear.

This paper examines the forces within an inner city community in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), Jamaica which heighten the perception of fear among the police. It provides evidence of fear and explains reactions in terms of a ‘fight or flight’ response that is triggered by fear.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

According to Valent (1998), Charles Darwin argued that many gestures and emotions in the species were associated with early survival strategies. For example, males across the species expose their teeth in rage. An increased pulse rate and pupil dilation occur in situations provoking terror. Biopsychosocial characteristics, he argued, evolved because they enhanced survival and among these responses were fight or flight (Valent, 1998).

These ideas were developed and extended by Cannon (1963) and Seyle (1978). Cannon was the first to use the term stress to describe the reaction to a dangerous or life threatening situation. When an individual encounters a stressful situation alarm signals are sent by way of nerves and hormones preparing the body for fight or flight. Seyle (1978) identified three stages in the physiological response to stress – the alarm, the adaptive/resistance and the exhaustion stages. It was in the alarm stage that the option of fight or flight presented. This is the stage of fear, anxiety and panic (Bryce, 2001).

Williams (1999) felt that stress came about when an individual’s ability to cope with a given situation is exceeded by the combination of internal and external pressures. This stress may have developed from chronic (ongoing) or acute (sudden) pressures. Once this occurs, what follows is a series of dysfunctional physical and mental responses which may well impair decision making. From this point, the behaviour of the individual is determined by the fight or flight response. According to Williams, the aggression associated with this is latent in most people and is held back only as a result of social codes. Civilized societies have tried to suppress the fight response but in certain situations these social codes break down unleashing great brutality or are redefined to make violence a duty (Williams, 1999).

Bracha et al. (2004) propose a reordering of Cannon’s sequence in the light of recent work on the sequential responses to increasing threat. Work among non human primates has established that an initial freezing response is followed by attempts to flee and once this has been exhausted there is an attempt to
fight. Thus, he says, ‘flight or fight’ is the proper order of responses. Grossman (1999) does not simply reverse the order. He increases the available options. There is posturing, actions designed to convince the opponent that he/she is facing a formidable opponent, and only when this fails is there a resort to fight or flight. There is also the possibility of submission, he states.

As far as the military is concerned, ordinary citizens have these options when faced with stressful events. However, policeman and women have no such option. They have to fight. Military Policy, writes Grossman (1999) has raised this to the level of a law of nature. When expectations limit the options available to individuals in handling fearful situations, the experience of fear is magnified to such an extent that it can lead to negative interactions as the police develop occupational attributes to tame the hostile environment. Authoritarianism, aggression, brutality may all be expressions of fear and anxiety.

In the United States of America, police shootings of civilians are considered to be low frequency events (Stock, et al., 1998; Klinger, 2005) and this has been attributed to a number of circumstances including the rules governing the use of firearms by the police, their training, fear of liability and the fact that they rarely encounter citizens in circumstances in which they have cause to use firearms. According to Stock, et al., (1998) the police in the state of New Jersey responded to 8.5 million calls in 1990 and fired their weapons on 167 occasions and in the view of these authors it could be argued that their failure to use justifiable force on occasions could endanger their lives and those of innocent civilians.

Shooting events may be rare but they are not randomly distributed. The association between the police use of deadly force in the USA and Jamaica and community level characteristics is well established in the literature (Harriott 2000; 2003; MacDonald, 2001; White, 2003; ). Frazier (www.riskinstitute.org,) sees the environment and the police officer’s perception of it as one of the primary factors affecting the use of force. Most police shootings in Jamaica occur in poor neighbourhoods. In the USA, they are most frequent in Black neighbourhoods and charges of racism have frequently been levied at the police. However, these are usually poor, depressed, Black neighbourhoods, occupied, according to Charles Murray (1984) by a class characterized by destructive pathologies and aberrant behaviour that were threats to society seeing that its members were responsible for the high crime rate in the country. Wilson (1987) saw this ‘underclass’ as the product of historic discrimination and structural changes. In such communities, the ills of segregated poverty, including crime had reached qualitatively different proportions (Wacquant and Wilson, 1989).

In these high crime neighbourhoods, the police are at risk. Of the 1,030 persons who were responsible for the death of policemen in the USA between 1981 and 1990, 42 percent were Blacks, a percentage that is far higher that their share of the population (12.7 percent). In police districts that have a reputation for being dangerous, officers are more prone to use force and once the culture designates the community as violent, the image is almost impossible to change. Stock, et al., (1998) describe the five stages in the ‘dynamics of fear’ as proposed by Solomon. The first stage is the identification of potential trouble and this is followed by the awareness of personal vulnerability, the recognition of the need for an action plan, survival mode and survival strategy adoption. However, these, they said were fluid stages and it was possible for officers to jump from the first to the last.

The officer in fear will be drawn more quickly to firing a weapon and this reaction is more likely among officers who have little training. Moreover, new recruits especially those living in poor neighbourhoods, often bring high lifetime experiences of traumatic events (Davidson et al., 1991; Follette et al., 1996) which make them more vulnerable to succumbing to the stresses associated with police work. Many display the problems associated with the early career stage (Stock, et al., 1998). They revel in the newly found power and authority but have limited life experiences in modulating their actions.
But the ‘dynamics of fear’ model also works in the minds of the perpetrators for fear is contagious. If the officer is afraid, the perpetrator is likely to be afraid and the tension created by such high stress situations interferes with judgement and can lead to a variety of negative interactions which can have deadly consequences both to the officer and perpetrator (Horvath and Donahue, 1982; Stock et al., 1998). The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the police are supposed to suppress their fears. They are repeatedly exposed to traumatic, life threatening situations but must project an image of ‘toughness’ and avoid any show of ‘weakness’. In battling with the horrors of their job, ‘tough cops’ cry (Stone, 1999) but to request help is to risk career setbacks. They continue to perform under stress which increases the level of fear and interferes with their judgment and performance (Nideffer, 1985). In such a state, it is very easy for the police to jump from Stage 1 to Stage 5 of Solomon’s ‘dynamics of fear model.’

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methodology was employed comprising a questionnaire survey among a 1 percent sample comprising 159 heads of households randomly selected and focus group discussions conducted with two age cohorts in the community. The 15 to 35 male cohort represented that segment of the population that is responsible for most of the violent crime and constitutes most of the victims of violent crime (Bailey, 2004). In addition, an 8 to 11 male cohort was selected from the primary school in Lowinc in the hope that they could give some insights into the manner in which the forces at work in these communities impact on the young and the process of value formation. Focus group discussions were also held with members of the police – young men and women who were posted in the community, as well as a Superintendent attached to the Divisional Headquarters. This was one of the few external groups that had any contact with Lowinc. Except for the police group which comprised six individuals the focus groups comprised between 7 and 10 persons.

THE PEOPLE

This paper is part of a larger study of social exclusion and crime in Jamaica (Bailey, 2004). Research was conducted in several communities in the KMA with a view to isolating factors and forces which exclude, and the relationship between the degree of exclusion and different types of crime. The paper focuses on the style of policing as an exclusionary force and is based on the experiences of one of the low income communities. It is an inner city community (to which the name Lowinc will be given) in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA), that has been the focus of much violent activity.

The Community

Lowinc is a fairly large community comprising roughly 16,000 households with 42 percent headed by women. The level of unemployment in the community was almost 20 percent and among males reached a high of 23 percent in the 25 to 34 age group. The percentage of unemployed female household heads in that age cohort was just under 40. Most of those who were employed were among the working poor, that is, those who were employed but whose income was below the poverty line (McDonald, 2002; Henry-Lee, 2002). Seventy-nine percent of household heads earned incomes below the J$13,923 deemed necessary for the subsistence of a family of five. Young men in the community are typically labourers, gardeners, factory workers, bus drivers, conductors and security guards while the women often work as vendors or domestic helpers.

The Participants

Of the seven men recruited for the focus group discussions, one had tertiary level education and held a job in a public sector organization, one was self employed as a taxi driver and two as vendors.
Two of the participants were students and one was unemployed. Much of the discussions revolved around the manner in which their lack of skills and the reputation of the community made it difficult for them both to find and keep jobs.

**RATIONALE FOR FEAR**

*a) An Aversive Environment*

There are two types of housing units in Lowinc. The northern section comprises a housing scheme developed by the state for low income families. In addition to these structures, there are many squatter shacks, and these are especially numerous in the southern sector, towards the sea. In this section, which forms the seaward boundary of the community, desperately poor environmental, social and economic conditions prevail.

The community developed adjacent to one of the largest gullies draining the KMA. The gully is very poorly maintained and in the vicinity of the community is overgrown with trees and shrubs and strewn with garbage and debris. The gullies are used as dumps, not only by the poor living on their banks but also by middle-class households farther upstream as a means of meeting the problems posed by an irregular public garbage disposal service. The vegetation and the garbage obstruct the flow of water and contribute to the flooding during the rainy season. The community has the additional disadvantage of being situated close to the main garbage disposal site for the KMA. Frequent fires which burn for many days in the dump create smoke hazards, causing discomfort in Lowinc and surrounding communities.

An industrial plant marks the northeastern boundary of the community. This is just one of the large number of industrial complexes which line the northern border of the community, all which get rid of their chemical and other liquid waste products by means of open drains which flow through Lowinc on their way to the sea. The drains are not well graded and the blackish water either flows sluggishly or forms stagnant pools. Moreover, Lowinc, to the north of the railway line, has a sewage disposal problem. Initially, the problem was attributed to faulty installations, which were corrected. Today’s problems are apparently caused by misuse of toilet facilities and the manholes over which some of the housing units were built. As a result, raw sewage sometimes overflows onto the streets and, according to some of the residents, into houses. In addition, the squatters to the south have unacceptable means of waste disposal, and the stench created by the disposal of industrial and human waste and by the sluggish gully is almost overpowering. Much of this part of the shoreline has become a dump for garbage, old tires and discarded metal parts which, in places, block the effluent from the industrial plants. Pigs and goats can be seen scavenging in the garbage found not only on the shore but throughout the community.

There are other incivilities such as abandoned buildings and the persistent loitering of young men on the corners of the streets and lanes. These are the environmental incivilities that have long been associated with the phenomenon of fear of crime. There are few roads in Lowinc, but narrow unlighted lanes which often terminate in a dead end. A number of researchers have argued that people’s anxieties, related to the quality of their immediate environment are often translated into fear (Hale *et al.*, 1994; Hunter and Baumer, 1982; Smith, 1985, 1986). They are confronted with symbolic or actual threats and their perceptions of what is a dangerous situation are shaped not only by past experiences, but also by certain cues that the environment is threatening. Lowinc presents a prime example of inner-city communities in Jamaica which are beset by a range of environmental problems. These problems are very important in determining the level of comfort not only of members of the community but also members of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) as they enter and attempt to work in Lowinc.
b) Pervasive Violence

Lowinc has a long history of violence – interpersonal, inter group as well as conflict with neighbouring communities. The police spoke in seeming awe of the reputation of the community and felt that its stigmatization was partly the result of exploits of two former residents who were among the island’s most feared, most notorious criminals. One they say, was reputed to have ‘killed seven men in one night.’

However, the dubious reputation of Lowinc is not based simply on the activities of former gunmen. It is still the scene of much internal conflict. Like most inner city communities in Jamaica Lowinc is extremely fractured internally with the ‘tribal’ divisions of the community clearly rigidly defined. Each of these spatial tracts is controlled by a specific gang comprising young men who are held together by strong bonds of friendship. Conflict within and among these groups is the source of most of the violence within Lowinc. Residents of the community have strong commitment to identify with specific groupings and this results in the existence of an extremely segmented and polarized community. Internal rivalry and discord, the rituals associated with ‘rights of passage’ and inter group conflict find violent expression.

Respondents in the questionnaire survey were asked a number of questions designed to assess their experience of personal victimization and their knowledge of crimes committed within the community in the previous six months. Their knowledge of property crime was relatively low with less than 6 percent being able to recall an incident in the area within the period. Knowledge of personal crime was higher and especially of homicides. Thirty five percent of the respondents knew of a homicide and 32 percent maintained that they could recall at least 10 victims. Twelve percent of the respondents had been victims of personal attacks, mainly assault, wounding and shooting.

In the focus group discussions respondents tried to explain the reason for the level of interpersonal violence and frequently made reference to the history of violent confrontation among groups in a geographically fragmented community. The impression given was that there was a tradition that had to be respected and that the length of the conflict added depth and intensity:

“Lowinc has a history of violence. You might come from a certain subdivision that was in conflict and the history of violence carries it on. Long history.”

Harriott (2003) explained this type of reasoning in terms of focalization, in which small incidents were taken out of context and aggregated. New incidents were interpreted in the light of the prior history of conflicts, and therefore they generated a greater emotional intensity than if they had been treated on their own merit. The other reason Harriott gave for the intensification of conflicts was transvaluation, in which personal issues were masked and redefined in terms of broader community or political party interests. If a member of a gang lost face, he translated the problem into a broader community issue, necessitating some form of group retaliation, some display of what Gray (2003, p. 21) described as ‘badness-honour’:

“social behaviour that can result from deficits of power … and material well-being … aggressive public displays of personal violence and defensive postures to secure an imperiled self…a repertoire of subaltern power …”

The result is a high degree of gun violence, poor on poor, marginalized on marginalized, and sadly it seemed that they had seen so much wanton loss of life that they placed little value on human life. The young men in the focus group sessions explained:
“Nuff time a new man might come into the gang. Him hafi kill two man to get a ratings. People more tend to shoot people from other corners …”

“Sometimes innocent people get killed too. Sometimes, a man might say it’s a long time since him make a duppy (ghost) and so they make duppy …”

“… you become so depraved … no have no money. You find you have one bag of time. You start getting haunted. You kill a one man to get a ratings …”

Violence was used to get “fame…stripes in the bad man world.”

There were open displays of violence and young children taking part in the focus group discussions gave graphic and chilling accounts of incidents they had witnessed. They said that the men in the community shoot each other in quarrels over drugs, money and guns. They also felt that the young men killed “because they just want fi kill.” Young children were being socialized in an atmosphere of crime and violence and they had an intimate association with serious injuries and death. They vividly described the injuries sustained by people in the community – the man who was shot in the leg; the man who was chopped in the neck; the boy who got shot while selling chicken and chips; the girl whose belly was cut and “her tripe drop out.” They knew both those who were injured and killed as well as those who injured and killed because “some of them are my father’s friends”. The irrational and spontaneous nature of violence within Lowinc inspires extreme fear among those entering the community.

c) Alienation

This is the context in which the police work. The Headquarters of the Police Division in which the community falls is quite near. Notwithstanding, the violent nature of the community justifies the presence of a police post within the community. The policemen and women who were posted in the community were all young and this was the first community to which they had been posted. The relationship between the police and members of the community was contentious, imbued with issues of power and small, marginal communities such as Lowinc are at the losing end of these power relations. Harriott (2000) has written at great length of the organization of the JCF and its relationship with inner-city communities. He noted that despite the changes in the organization of crime, the role and strategies of the JCF have remained largely unchanged. The organization adopts a paramilitary style to achieve its objective. The assumption is that people must be coerced if crime is to be brought under control. Lea and Young (1984) saw this military style as indicative of an absence of ‘consensus’ policing, a situation which developed when there is a lack of trust between the police and the community and when the flow of information that was necessary for the solution of crime dries up.

The police saw citizens of Lowinc as either playing a passive role in relation to policing or actively supporting criminal activity. Cooperation, they said, was almost non existent. This theme was developed repeatedly in the focus group sessions with the police. They saw the lack of cooperation as one of the biggest problems they faced in policing the community:

“One of the problems we have is that if you ask ‘does Tom Stroke live here?’ you will hear ‘I don’t know you know officer’. They don’t know if it is even something to help. They just won’t tell. The other day I was looking for a man in (Blank). I ask a man who I know for a fact has lived there for about four years and him tell me ‘No officer. You mad, officer? Cyaa tell you dat, officer.’
“Sometimes we collect information from the victim or witness and it goes to court three or four times without them even showing up.”

The unwillingness to assist the police is only partly the result of the type of relationship that exists between the two groups. To community members this is a form of self preservation. Spatial disorder provides protection for those involved in criminal activity and there are risks involved in revealing the addresses of those wanted by the police. Too many persons have died merely because of a suspicion that they may have been informers. The act of informing is invariably followed by retaliation and reprisal and withholding information becomes a part of what Wallace et al (1996) referred to as a highly efficient ‘behavioural code’. To the young policemen however, the community was not sufficiently a bulwark between them and the criminals and therefore, to them, it was not only that the environment was aversive. They also saw the community as, at best ‘unappreciative’ or ascribed dangerous attitudes to all. This level of alienation from the community heightens feelings of fear.

Above all, there was the knowledge that the young men in the community were well armed. They were not specifically armed against the police but because of the violent nature of the conflict within the community, rival gangs felt the need to maintain an advantage in fire power. As a result, they were in possession of very sophisticated weapons. One of the young men in the focus group discussions said:

“I remember when older youths from S…..n could come and do anything to S…t. The only answer was to get our own guns and be independent. If S…..n have automatic…we have Tek Nine and AK. Sometimes, when we get the guns, it is not because we want to be violent but for protection. If we did not get the guns, the guys from S…..n would still be doing what they were doing. Beat us up or kill we.”

Given these circumstances it was not surprising that a few young policemen in a poorly designed police post would feel exposed and vulnerable to attack.

EVIDENCE OF FEAR

The suggestion to the police officers in the focus group discussions that they might be afraid to police the area was quickly, too quickly, rejected. They might have been more ready to admit to being afraid were it not for the presence of the Superintendent who’s presence was the one condition stipulated for participation in the group discussion. However when the question placed the emphasis on feelings of safety when working in the community, it gradually emerged that the young officers were totally intimidated by the conditions outlined earlier.

The police were fearful because they worked with symbolic as well as actual threats. A stated earlier, in some of the most dangerous sections of the community there were no roads but narrow unlighted lanes that twisted between zinc fences and sometimes terminated in dead ends. The roads and pathways were unnamed (‘even the residents don’t know the name of the roads’) and so searching for an address in response to a legitimate call could be a dangerous task especially when the fences provided shelter for those bent on attack. There were parts of the community where entry was possible only on foot and even when driving a vehicle they felt unsafe.

These conditions create not only individual but also collective fear. There is strong opposition to community policing within the Police Federation. Officers in this organisation have called for an end to policing in what the President referred to as ‘zinc fence communities’ as well as informal settlements and gully banks (Daily Gleaner, February 3, 2004). These places they said were far too dangerous. The police, the Federation said, were trained as peacemakers and policing these zones was too stressful.
Observers are generally pessimistic about the chances of success of community policing because of the lack of commitment and resistance within the force and because of the resentment on both sides – police and community – over the lives that have been lost in the violent confrontations (Deosaran, 2004).

The officers also highlighted the intimidation that they felt as a result of the constant loitering of men, many of whom were suspected of being involved in criminal activity.

“What I don’t like is coming to work. The road to the station passes where a lot of the guys hang out. It is not safe to me. The same guys you arrest will be there lining the road same time you pass. Guys hang out, watching … watching you, sometimes you see them gesturing so you feel unsafe. It is safer to walk through the open lot.”

The lone police officer is intimidated to the extent that he is prepared to take a circuitous route to the police post in order to avoid close contact with groups whom he believes are capable of harming him.

A first-hand knowledge of what the criminals in Lowinc were capable of appeared to have the officers in a mode where there was a continuous expectation of violence. A number of officers had been attacked in the past:

“The crime here is too high. You know there are a lot of weapons here so you feel more threatened. You are not comfortable. You can’t help but be more comfortable elsewhere. Your body get tense just driving through. Body get stiff. In 1999 I was on foot patrol and some men just opened fire on us.”

Feelings of fear are heightened by the fact that the police officers serving Lowinc do not feel comfortable even when behind what ought to be the safe walls of the police post. The post in Lowinc was not purpose-built but was formerly a community centre. There are open decorative blocks for ventilation, but these make them vulnerable to attack, ‘sitting ducks’:

“The working conditions are very poor. I mean look at the station. There is no security fence … no wall. It is just open. Sometimes they even throw tear gas.”

“You have to remember we are an out-station so we are few in numbers so we often feel unsafe inside.”

“It affects the mind. I remind officers all the time to be alert cause the station has been attacked in the past. You have to be alert especially when someone has been arrested. Sometimes we get calls that men are coming to shoot up the station … or burn it down. During the last gas riots they shot up the station.”

This scenario is repeated in inner city communities across the KMA. There are real threats to the lives of policemen working in the inner city and in violent communities. Young men in particular are seen by the police as enemies. Because of the fear and psychological stress that the officers have to contend with on a daily basis, all the officers in the focus group wanted to be posted elsewhere. Research by the Police Federation support the claim of high levels of stress within the police force. Among older rank and file members, such complaints as hypertension, diabetes and heart disease, the Federation said, were affecting performance. Younger members of the force complained of sleep deprivation and fatigue (Daily Gleaner, February 3, 2004). Their distress came not only from the dangers they faced but also from working “in faeces, among rats and other insects” (Daily Gleaner, February 3, 2004). In other words, they were becoming ill because they work in conditions under which inner city residents spend all their lives. The officers in the focus group sessions felt that policing would be easier in a ‘nice
community.’ Their job, they felt, was more difficult than that of police officers working in more affluent residential areas, and all aspired to being posted in one of those communities someday – flight with honour.

RESPONSES TO FEAR

Institutionalized anxieties find expression in a specific style designed to subdue the enemy. It takes the form of special operations under which special legal instruments are invoked to support the targeting of whole small urban communities. The need to confront and overcome their obvious fear propels the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) to portray itself as a powerful ‘force’ a fact that has been reflected in the names given to these operations. Operation Quick Draw in 1967, for example, was designed to subdue Western Kingston. Acid was another name given to instil fear. A number of these operations were deployed in the 1990s.

- Operation Ardent (1992): Combined police/military strike action force designed to deal with crime and violence.

Harriott (2000).

Strategies employed included curfews, raiding of entertainment activities, cordons, stopping-and-searching, and detaining large numbers of inner-city youths for processing and other overt expressions of social control. The actions of the JCF though rooted in fear and a compulsion to stay and ‘fight’ lead to feelings of resentment among inner city residents and give rise to an ‘us against them’ mentality. It fosters burning resentment against the police, an attitude that appears at an early age (Daily Gleaner, January 18, 2001), as young children cope with the disruption to their daily lives and witness the mauling of friends and relatives.

All participants in focus groups held both with the children and young men in the community held negative views of the police. The utterances of the children, in particular had a great impact. While in some instances they were simply repeating what they had heard from adults, in other cases, they described incidents of brutality and injustice to which they were witnesses. By their account, the police were brutal, reckless and inspired fear. The stories of the children were significant because at times they were not intended to be direct criticisms of the police but simple statements of fact made in the course of wide ranging discussions. This, they were saying, is something that happens in their community. In their community, “... every time somebody get a gun you want to kill.” This included the policemen who, while on duty were “drinking and feel good and fire a shot.” One of the reasons they disliked policemen, they said, was that “dem fire shot”. They had also witnessed police brutality:

“A man did stand up at the corner and some police run up and tell the man to hold up him hand and dem beat dem with dem baton.”

They had also obviously heard stories of police corruption:

“... the police put a gun in my father’s friend house and they say they find it.”

“They get money so they put gun in people shoes.”
The gun-toting, gun-waving policeman was not the symbol of law and order to the children but an object of fear:

“… sometime I run go lock up in my room and go under my bed. When they wave them guns, sir, it make me scared.”

But it is the young men in the community who feel the full force of the style of policing. From their comments it appeared that they saw the police as a necessary evil. They lived in a community in which domestic disputes rivaled criminal activity. In the absence of social support services, and given the fragility of family structures, they looked to the police to respond to incidents involving human and family crises. The police responded, but not soon enough for the participants, given the proximity of the police post and station. The participants were divided over the reasons for the slow response to their calls. Some felt that it was a resource problem, but others sensed the police fear of entering the community, a fear that was particularly noticeable when reports involving the use of weapons were made. One participant pointed out that the response to domestic conflict was more prompt than to incidents of shooting. When violence flares up the police arrive ‘after everything has finished’:

“Police don’t want to come. Because they know that man in here have heavy ammunition.”

They were highly critical of the nature of their interaction with the police. In one sense, they saw the police behaviour in terms of a type of machismo in that some of the officers from Divisional Headquarters who answered the call from the police post had formerly been posted in the community where they had tried to project the image of being bad. They had to live up to this image. So initially there is a lot of posturing. In the words of one of the participants, the police “start gwaan (go on) with dem antics.” There is a display of bravado - one of options identified by Grossman (1999) - to convince the men that they were confronted by formidable adversaries. However:

“… if you even look pon them too hard them box you down, or butt you up with them gun …”

The policemen are armed in what they consider to be hostile territory and confronted with an action interpreted as aggressive or in certain situations, non compliant, they could succumb to stress and precipitate a violent police-civilian incident.

“…it seems like sometimes they see young men as birds to be slaughtered.”

CONCLUSION

It needs more than the efforts of the police to overcome the problem of social exclusion – economic, social and geographical – and the environmental problems that make living in and policing communities such as Lowinc such a challenge. The consequence of unemployment is very obvious in the form of the large numbers of young men who spend most of the day loitering at the corners of streets and lanes. Physical conditions are inimical to the development of civic pride, can shape how residents behave, influence the cognition and behaviour of potential offenders and the attitude of the police to working in the area. Substantial efforts at social inclusion, a sensitivity to the needs of low income communities and the effects of their exclusion on the police and the rest of the country are of critical importance.

A great deal has been written about the merits of community policing and the important role the approach can play in engaging and empowering communities. Very little has been written on the dangers of policing heavily armed and violent communities and how these influence attitudes and activities.
Sometimes, the use of force – deadly force is unavoidable and police officers will be forced to take lives in order to save lives.

However, the police ought to be reminded that democratic policing requires restraint and forbearance on the part of those who carry a badge and a gun. Kilnger (2005) argues that a large body of empirical research and practical experience has established that in these difficult situations, the police will need to use lethal force less often if they are trained to adhere to simple tactical principles which could limit the threat they face and allow them to take more time when deciding how to respond.

Equally important is the need to give attention to the mental and psychological factors involved in working under stressful conditions. Officers may receive training in the skills of defensive tactics but, if they freeze or overload under pressure, they will not respond appropriately (Stock et al, 1998). Stress (tension) has physical and psychological effects which can impair judgement and performance. The JCF must develop early warning systems to identify officers who are in need of psychological services and signal that it is not a sign of weakness to request access to these services.

REFERENCES


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