Report on Global City Policing Conference 16th May 2023

Context:

As part of a joint commitment from academics and police forces to 'praxis', the sharing and interaction of practical and academic knowledge, the themes of this conference emerged from a survey of serving police officers. Academics at the Department for Security and Crime Science (led by Professor Ben Bradford, Director of the Centre for Global City Policing, and Dr Chris Dyke, Research Fellow) honed these themes into three key sessions for the conference, held at UCL.

The ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre were instrumental in funding the event, providing two of the speakers and helping with organisation. The Centre's Co-Director, Adam Crawford, expertly wove the sessions together in his role compering the event.

The conference was timely, coming just weeks after the release of Baroness Casey's review into the Metropolitan Police attracted worldwide attention and led to even greater introspection as police forces across the country considered how to improve organisational culture to tackle crime in a modern society.

Survey respondents highlighted the need to prioritise crimes against women and girls; the impact on police of non-crime callouts; and prevention and diversion from crime.

Sessions

The first session was titled ***Police and Public Relations: Lessons from Operation Soteria Bluestone***, brought to us by Professor Betsy Stanko and Professor Katrin Hohl, academic leads and authors of the most recent report from Operation Soteria Bluestone, a project spearheading efforts to improve both procedural and outcome justice in response to rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO).

The session included a review of Op Soteria Bluestone's work, conclusions, and requirements (not 'recommendations') for the police. Before laying out their empirical findings they laid out their theoretical framework – the 'six pillars' of:

- Suspect-focussed investigations (not focussing on the credibility of the victim)
- Identifying repeat suspects
- A Procedural Justice approach to victim engagement, preserving the victim's dignity and confidence in the system, free from myths and stereotypes about rape
- Learning, development, and officer well-being (officers burn out at higher rates than frontline medical professionals did during the covid pandemic), including professionalising the RASSO role
- Using Data and Performance measures appropriately
- Applying Digital Forensics

They went on to identify the concrete achievements of the project: increased rates of bringing charges and achieving positive outcomes, and increasing the provision of early advice.

Discussions led naturally onto major questions such as how to improve strategic planning and frontline practice, and change what Stanko and Hohl described as the 'banana skin' of modern policing – the organisational culture around violence against women and girls, including sexual violence. The role of training was discussed at length among our attendees, though a key theme was

the importance of not relying on standalone discrete training days – a cultural change around thinking about victims requires something more fundamental.

The second session looked at **'Demand Management'** and how alternative ways to tackle vulnerabilities in society could both better address those vulnerabilities and reduce non-crime demands on police time. Again, this proved a timely session, as just days afterwards the Metropolitan Police announced that, from 31st August 2023, they will no longer respond to mental health calls where this is no imminent risk to life. The conference was treated to two fascinating presentations by members of the ESRC Vulnerability & Policing Futures Research Centre Professor Martin Webber and Dr Dan Birks.

Professor Webber drew on a career in social work to consider the different approaches to addressing mental illness. He recognised the empirical ambiguity about how much police time is taken up by mental health non-crime calls – the varying definitions used, the different figures in different forces (ranging from 1-10%, though some leaders have estimated anywhere from 20-80%). What was not in doubt, though, was that mental health calls to police are increasing, that they take up a significant (though contested) portion of police time, that the police are not the most suitable agency for these calls, that the trend is driven by cuts to mental health services and mental health beds, and that improved multidisciplinary triage and diversion services has been shown to significantly reduce the number of mental health calls to police. Professor Webber went on to demonstrate the potential impact of mental health training for police officers when it comes to recording and identifying mental health issues.

Dr Birks went on to present a thought-provoking example of how data can work to assist police, not just take up their time recording it. His innovative graphical demonstration of mapping police call-outs showed an application of how different types of deprivation and vulnerability can be visualised graphically and highlight target areas for crime prevention.

The discussion entered the field of AI – can artificial intelligence write a statistical report? Can it search through vast swathes of police data as accurately as a human (it could certainly do it quicker) to identify trends and frequencies? And what are the ethical and practical barriers to doing so? How can data analysis help process body worn video (BWV) footage to similarly identify themes and areas for development? The conference also discussed the role of the police in mental health calls – whether it was possible to quantify harm reduction achieved by police visits, and whether police presence indirectly worsened the overall situation by allowing other services to make further cutbacks.

The third session, **Creating a Diversion**, provided three distinct perspectives on how to steer young people away from crime.

Dr Paolo Campana (University of Cambridge) and Superintendent Lewis Prescott-Mayling (Thames Valley Police) explored the captivating field of relational and public health models of crime prevention, drawing on Gary Slutkin's famous 'Cure Violence' initiative. Dr Campana developed the concept of relational information and the use of social network analysis to help us understand the mechanisms underpinning crimes and the 'transmission' of crimes, particularly between gang members. He showed us how violence ends up being reciprocated, escalated, and how once-cooperative criminal enterprises can turn sour and result in further internal violence.

Superintendent Lewis Prescott-Mayling from Thames Valley Police moved the discussion onto how this transmission resembles contagion, and how public health models can help tackle crime, through cascade effects and significant underlying risk factors, incorporating the interaction between

personal and environmental effects. He gave examples of how the contact tracing system we all got used to during the pandemic might be applied to reduce the reciprocal and escalating violence Dr Campana had highlighted.

The conference was then rounded-off by a show-stealing presentation from three young people, Jonas Phillips, Leonita Metaj, and Bipin Khanal, who work on a youth engagement panel with the Violence Reduction Unit. The trio delighted the conference with an engaging discussion on how peer relationships, engagement by professionals with young people on the cusp of criminal activity, and dialogue between police and their communities can bring a positive and effective change in outcomes for everyone. They brought in messages from behavioural science and social psychology, urging police forces not to use images of knives in their campaigns (thus normalising the prevalence of deadly weapons) but again draw on public health lessons and demonstrate positive role modelling and normalise prosocial behaviour.

Next Steps:

The key questions emerging from this conference are:

- How do we apply Operation Soteria Bluestone and apply it to other areas of policing?
- How do we move beyond compartmentalised 'training' and towards culture-based change: how does a police force improve its underlying culture and practice (in all areas of policing)?
- How can the use of data and 'predictive policing' avoid the pitfalls of stigmatising already marginalised communities while still targeting at-risk areas effectively?
- What role can AI play in handling data for time-pressed police, and what safeguards will need to be applied?
- What will be the impact, on the police, health services and the community as a whole, of the Met's subsequent decision to step back from mental health call-outs? What messages will this have for other areas where the police find themselves filling the gaps left by social care and community services?