



A RESOURCE FOR THE SERVICE

Police research in the Home Office

In 1992, the Home Office established the Police Research Group, (PRG) within the Police Department, to provide a central social science and management research facility to meet the needs of the Service. Prior to this, Home Office funded policing research had been conducted with the Home Office policy divisions as the main customer, albeit with police support.

This was more than just a tweak on the bureaucratic tiller; it involved the establishment of a new, and fairly substantial, research group. PRG has a staff of 15 full time researchers plus an external research budget of almost £1 million per year. In addition, the police section within PRG, headed by a Superintendent, is responsible for the dissemination of good policing practice and for the co-ordination of police initiated research in forces, including the Police Research Award Scheme. This scheme enables serving officers and police civilian staff to contribute to the research agenda.

When PRG was established, it inherited a small research programme from the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit, plus responsibility for maintaining the Crime Prevention Unit Series of research papers. PRG now runs two research series and produces a magazine, *Focus*, of more general police/research interest. All of these are available free of charge to the police and members of other relevant agencies.

The programme

How do we decide what to do? In relation to research, our role is to:-

'sponsor and undertake research and development to improve and strengthen the police service taking account of Police Department strategy.'

All of this is in the social science field; we are not concerned with IT developments or technical support for the police. It is nevertheless a broad agenda and one which, despite what might seem like a significant set of resources at our disposal, we could not hope to cover comprehensively. We therefore decided to concentrate on how the police deal with crime, in particular how they can improve their performance in relation to police operations against crime. The first phase of this programme was launched in 1993 and about £1 million was spent on it in 1993/94, covering 19 studies. The products from phase 1 are now emerging and reports will be produced over the coming months. Research and development

projects within phase 1 included work on how the police might improve their strategic response to crime; how they could free up resources in order to do so and what skills need to be developed in order to maximise police effectiveness in this area.

Plans are now underway in relation to phase 2 of this programme which will cover the policing of drug related crime, the contribution of forensic science to crime management, the development of crime analysis techniques and further work on repeat victimisation.

Repeat victimisation and policing

One of the many aspirations of PRG is to increase the relevance of social science research to everyday policing. Research and development has a great deal to offer any organisation, whether in the private or public sector. Research cannot be useful however, if it is seen as remote, irrelevant or untimely. The possibility of these outcomes can be minimised if research programmes are developed and maintained in collaboration with the customers they are intended to support.

The work on repeat victimisation, supported by PRG (and before it by the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit) and carried out both in-house and under contract to the University of Manchester provides an example.

In 1988 a Crime Prevention Unit paper was published (Forrester et al 1988) which showed that domestic burglary has been reduced on the Kirkholt Estate in Rochdale following the introduction of a range of measures to prevent repeat burglary. The work was carried out by an inter-agency group with the police and University in the lead. A second report on the Kirkholt project, in which the probation service took a higher profile, showed that burglary had been reduced by over 70% over a three year period (Forrester et al 1990). Although many police are aware that a disproportionate amount of crime is perpetrated against a relatively small number of people and places, most had not appreciated the extent of this, particularly for domestic burglary, and none had appreciated the effect on crime rates of targeting preventative effort upon them.

The Kirkholt project was followed up by a programme of work to explore and refine the concept of repeat victimisation, and to investigate the practical problems associated with the implementation of crime prevention measures based upon it. Crime prevention projects were set up in Liverpool to reduce repeat domestic attacks, in London to reduce racial violence

and in schools in both areas to reduce bullying.

The racial attacks study analysed the problem within an East London estate and found that over two-thirds of victims were victimised again within a six month period. A package was prepared to prevent repeat victimisation and has subsequently been adopted. A report of the initial research findings (Sampson and Phillips 1992) provides a brief survey of racial attack prevention schemes which assisted police officers and other practitioners to think about how this serious problem may be tackled.

The domestic violence project in Liverpool led to the development of a rapid response system by the police. The initiative incorporated a computerised briefing facility for officers as they were dispatched in response to calls. The reports of the work outline the scale and severity of this type of offence, and provide an indication of the success of preventative initiatives targeted at repeated domestic violence. (Morley and Mullender 1994; Lloyd et al 1994)

'Partnership' is in danger of becoming an overworked cliché, but we are aiming in PRG to facilitate a partnership between research and practice; we think that this approach is beginning to bear fruit.

Gloria Laycock is head of the Home office Police Research Group.

References

- Forrester D. et al (1988) *The Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project - Rochdale*. Paper 13. Crime Prevention Unit Series. Police Research Group. Home Office London.
- Forrester D. et al (1990) *The Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project: Phase II* Paper 23 Crime Prevention Unit Series. Police Research Group Home Office. London.
- Lloyd S. et al (1994) *Preventing Repeated Domestic Violence. A Demonstration Project*. Paper 49. Crime Prevention Unit Series Police Research Group. Home Office London.
- Morley R and Mullender A. (1994) *Preventing Domestic Violence to Women*. Paper 48. Crime Prevention Unit Series. Police Research Group. Home Office London
- Sampson A. and Phillips C. (1992) *Multiple Victimisation: Racial Attacks on an East London Estate*. Paper 36. Crime Prevention Unit Series. Police Research Group. Home Office London.