BOOK REVIEWS

Shona Morrison and Ian O'Donnell - Armed Robbery: A Study in London. Oxford Centre for Criminological Research. £12.50. ISBN 0 947811 05 2.

Despite consistent media interest and the fact that a significant number of people in prison have been convicted of armed robbery there is very little academic research on this subject. Therefore, this study which looks at armed robbery mainly in the Metropolitan area is to be welcomed. It provides some valuable insights into the ways in which armed robbers select their targets and their weapons. It is the use of firearms in particular which this study sheds most light on.

Against a background in which the number of recorded armed robberies has quadrupled between 1982 and 1992 and in which the arming of the police has become a critical issue this study is very timely.

From a rational choice perspective the authors analyse 1134 incidents of robbery in which a firearm was used and carried out 88 interviews with convicted armed robbers. What emerged from this research was that firearms are rarely discharged in the course of armed robberies and that fatalities are rare. Paradoxically, it transpires that it is in cases in which robbers are 'under-armed' that staff and bystanders are tempted to intervene and that people are injured.

The interviews which were carried out with the armed robbers did little to confirm the media stereotype of the armed robber as a professional, organised, trigger happy villain. The picture which emerged of the typical armed robber was of a poorly educated, unemployed, predominantly white male in their late twenties. In many cases these villains had long criminal careers and a quarter were homeless at the time the robbery was carried out.

Most significantly the interviews with the robbers revealed that in only 30% of cases did offenders carry a firearm which was capable of discharging a lethal shot. In almost 40% of cases offenders carried some form of replica handgun, while in a remarkable 23% of cases offenders produced no weapon at the time of the robbery and merely intimated that they possessed a gun. In these cases robbers kept their hand in their pocket as if they were holding a weapon but in fact were holding such objects as 'a courgette, a tube of toothpaste and a candle'.

These findings question the validity of the official statistics which maintain that loaded weapons are used in a much higher percentage of cases. If the findings of these Oxford researchers is, however, more realistic it throws into some relief the issue about the increased use of firearms in armed robberies and raises questions about current sentencing policy which makes little differentiation between those robbers who carry lethal weapons and those who are armed only with courgettes.

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Rosenbaum, D.P. (Ed.) (1994) The Challenge of Community Policing: Testing the Promises (Sage Publications)

Over the past decade, community policing has taken its place in the vocabulary and practice of all those involved in crime prevention and law enforcement. There are numerous examples of chief police officers talking of the benefit of community initiatives as being more effective than traditional law enforcement approaches (random squad car patrolling and reactive radio responses) and as impacting more significantly upon the communities they serve.

Yet despite an apparent support for community policing, do we really know that much about it? What actually is it, and why and how is it different in approach from traditional policing methods? Moreover, is the rhetoric associated with it transferable to working programmes, policies and practices? And perhaps most importantly of all, is community policing the panacea that we have all been led to believe?

Dennis Rosenbaum has gathered together the expertise of widely recognised academics, researchers and practitioners in an attempt to find answers to many of these questions and to further an understanding of the philosophy and practice of community policing. The various contributors carefully document and evaluate the planning, implementation and operational impact of community policing initiatives, mainly in the US, but also further afield, in an attempt to 'help the field move beyond "smoke and mirrors", rhetoric, and politics to begin testing the promises associated with genuine police

reform efforts'.

Eck and Rosenbaum begin the collection with a vigorous attempt to establish a theoretical framework for evaluation, and conceptualise what community policing is (and is not) in contemporary discourse and practice. They characterise it within a discussion of efficiency, equity and effectiveness and highlight how it rearranges priorities, changes methods of measurement and redirects resources comparative to traditional policing approaches. For example, Eck and Rosenbaum suggest that whereas traditional policing approaches measured equity through due process and numerical parity, community policing places as much, if not more, emphasis on the public in measuring and evaluating equity.

Having conceptualised and characterised the nature of community policing, the book looks to questions of impact, both within the community, and within organisations themselves. Sadd and Grinc, in an evaluation of community policing programmes in eight cities of the US, suggest that impact was minimal and transient within neighbourhoods, while others highlight unintended consequences and detail difficulties in achieving desirable outcomes.

Given impact evaluation, another area of focus is process evaluation, with numerous authors focusing on the internal workings of organisational reforms and the organisational impact of the community policing philosophy. Lurigio and Rosenbaum highlight a favourable impact on officer motivation and job satisfaction as well as regarding the police role, although others point to the organisational, structural and operational constraints.

The main achievement of the book is to raise awareness of the fact that community policing is neither homogenous, nor often transferable across regions, countries, or organisations and cultures, and that some approaches and initiatives are more feasible and productive than others. As the book goes on to suggest, problems internal to organisations can impact detrimentally on the efficiency of community policing, as can difficulties associated with partnership initiatives unless the community plays a critical role as an active and informed partner rather than observer.

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