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# Community Safety Workers: An Exploratory Study of Some Emerging Crime Prevention Occupations

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fear of crime within communities, a perceived lack of social controls or community cohesion, and the limitations of reactive or repressive approaches to crime or of the capacity of the police alone to prevent it, have all contributed to the development of new forms of community safety practices. A number of new community safety 'professions' or positions have emerged in recent years. These often target neighbourhoods or housing areas seen as at-risk or disadvantaged, or are employed in selected public spaces.

The aim of this report is to provide a brief overview of the emergence of such community safety roles, based on examples drawn from selected countries: England and Wales, France, Belgium, Australia, and South Africa. Within each country, examples of community safety positions are examined in terms of their public policy context, job description and structure, roles and responsibilities, recruitment and training, and their monitoring and evaluation. Some of the practical and political considerations in their implementation are also touched on.

In **England and Wales**, Neighbourhood Wardens and Community Support Officers provide various forms of visible patrols, and serve to control low-level public disorder and disorganization. Evaluation of these programmes provide some evidence that their presence is linked to a decrease in crime, and clear indications that they can have a positive impact on residence satisfaction and quality of life, and reduce fear of crime through their presence. Their work is viewed by the police as contributing to the reporting of crime, intelligence gathering, improving the police image, and enabling the police to deal with more serious crime.

In **France**, Local Social Mediation Agents are recruited to ensure safety, security and assistance in public transport areas, to undertake night patrols, to enhance the perception of public order and strengthen social ties by their presence in public spaces, and in some cases to facilitate access to services and promote civil rights. Most evaluations of these services are process evaluations, and do not provide quantifiable outcomes. Managers have reported a relationship between the presence of social mediators and such positive indicators as a decrease in moving from particular dwellings or neighbourhoods, incivilities and complaints, and mediators are also seen to contribute to a more positive image of the area in which they work.

In **Belgium**, there are a number of Prevention and Security Agents that supply functional supervision either on public transport, apartment complexes, commercial or shopping centers, urban or industrial complexes, high-risk neighbourhoods, and recreation areas. What they have in common is that they provide an on-site presence to promote security, and a semi-formal form of social control. Evaluation of these services is mostly carried out by local councillors for internal purposes, and on the basis of on-site visits. On a local level, such internal evaluations determine trends in crime and incivilities within municipalities, in order to initiate adequate security and prevention programmes.

In **Australia**, Night Patrol services have been put in place at the request of Aboriginal community members and adapted to their needs. They provide foot or vehicle patrol services in a particular area, or throughout a community, which intervene using non-coercive approaches to prevent the occurrence or escalation of harm and antisocial behaviour. They target those at-risk groups such as youth, women, sex workers, the homeless and intoxicated. Few of these services have been formally evaluated, but many areas attribute a range of reductions to the presence and intervention of night patrol services. This includes levels of youth crime, complaints, truancy, reports of antisocial behaviour, calls to the police, family violence, excessive drinking, intoxicated individuals handled by the justice system, accidents related to substance abuse, hospital admissions, and the lessening of tension between Aboriginal people and communities and businesses.

In **South Africa**, the Community Peace Workers programme is a cooperative initiative between the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and the Department for Safety and Security. The programme's major goals are the prevention of crime and youth development in targeted low-income areas. The project aims to provide young people with the skills to mediate situations of conflict in their community, and provide them with life skills and job training. Monitoring and evaluation of the programme seems to suggest some success in meeting its objectives. There are reported reductions in insecurity, and Community Peace Worker graduates appear to behave in a more positive and responsible manner, with as many as 80% of them working or self-employed.

### **Overall conclusions**

Community safety professions appear to have been created primarily to address the consequences of a lack of social cohesion and control, and feelings of insecurity in crime-prone environments and communities, often associated with isolation, conflict and despair among residents. In some cases they are specifically intended as employment creation and job-training initiatives. The report presents a variety of positions which range from voluntary recruitment to those which are virtually police personnel. These jobs address a need to provide services not performed by public authorities or organizations.

Community safety workers often have few statutory powers to coerce, and rely primarily on persuasion and mediation. They often encounter difficulties such as a perceived lack of legitimacy by other crime prevention actors, mainly because their roles are largely ill-defined. Community safety professions are often seen as auxiliary or temporary functions by other actors, such as those who implement programmes, and even by the community safety workers themselves. It is optimal for these community safety services not to be thought of as marginal or auxiliary, but as complementary to other roles and as a way to bridge gaps in service through working in partnerships.

The notion of visibility is widely accepted as a key component for reducing fear of crime and reassuring residents. There are, however, paradoxes in the way these community safety positions are created which significantly impacts their performance. While they are created to reassure the public through providing a visible, familiar presence, in many cases there is high staff turn-over. The case studies suggest that the most significant challenge to the viability and longevity of such programmes is their position within national and local safety strategies, and responsibility for, or the ability to finance, the initiatives. Creative and dual-purpose initiatives such as job-creation approaches have been successful in getting programmes started, but sustainability has proved to be difficult.

Evaluation of these programmes or initiatives is often scarce or limited in scope. They are generally internal, based on observations by workers, and on the use of services, the number of interventions, and sometimes on local crime statistics. More systematic and better evaluation of these programmes is clearly needed.

This report suggests that culture, tradition, and assessments of changes in social controls and guardianship are significant factors determining how a position is conceptualized, and the kinds of emphasis placed on its role. They range from providing additional patrols, extra security in public spaces, to mediating conflict and improving social cohesion. The examples also suggest that local implementation is key to the success of an initiative, since adaptation to a community is crucial for the acceptance of community safety workers by residents of a neighbourhood.

These professions are relatively new initiatives created within the past 15 years, and they have shown some merit. Community safety workers interviewed during evaluations believe they can make a difference in the community they serve. While they face many challenges as their roles evolve, or alternative funding sources are sought, community safety professions should be considered as desirable policy directions for the time being. The challenges include coordination, job definition, legitimization and funding support, and are conditions that must be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of their roles. As these positions continue to grow and expand, more in-depth analysis is needed to assess their value and contribution to prevention strategies and their application within the context of different communities around the world.

**The complete document is available in English on ICPC website  
An executive summary is available in French**

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