

GOVERNMENT-CITIZENS PARTNERSHIP AND COMMUNITY SAFETY: A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A. Background and Rationale

A1. Background. This proposal arises indirectly out of recent research that we have conducted in two high-crime areas of Sheffield (Bottoms and Wilson 2004 – copy attached to this proposal). That research was focussed on a topic that is not central to the Home Office civil research renewal programme, i.e. public attitudes to the punishment of offenders. However, in order to interpret adequately the results of the community survey that we carried out, we found it necessary to consider the broad issue of social control in high crime communities, and in particular the question of ‘control signals’ (see further below). That topic clearly does have links to the civil renewal research programme, and the research proposed here aims to explore these issues further.

A2. Rationales We plan, in this proposed research, to address the third strand of the Government’s civil renewal agenda, i.e. government-citizens partnership. As sociologically-oriented criminologists, we are particularly interested in the potential contribution of government-citizens partnerships to the development of safe neighbourhoods, and that is our core rationale for undertaking this proposed research. (We note that such an approach is highly congruent with some of the Home Secretary’s emphases in his Edith Kahn Lecture: Blunkett 2003). Within this framework, we propose to focus especially on two key concepts, namely:

(a) ‘Control Signals’ We are intrigued by the evidence (originally deriving from Taub et al 1984 in Chicago) that some high-crime neighbourhoods can seem non-threatening to residents and potential residents, to the extent that they may have not only positive ‘satisfaction with safety’ scores, but also rapidly appreciating property values. (There is a tendency in some of the literature to treat ‘high crime’ and ‘perceived lack of safety’ as synonymous, but that is clearly false). We are further intrigued by the evidence that certain actions by key institutions/groups in a local community can help to generate feelings of safety in local populations – see for example Taub et al on the Hyde Park/Kenwood area in Chicago (summarised in Bottoms and Wilson 2004, n. 42); also the evidence on crime rates declining by day in areas with improved street lighting (Bottoms and Wilson n. 44), presumably because of enhanced public confidence in the better-lit area leading to greater use of the area by day, hence enhanced natural surveillance. All these results can reasonably be conceptualised within the framework of Innes and Fielding’s (2002) ‘control signals’ terminology (also discussed in Bottoms and Wilson). As the street lighting example shows, there is no necessary element of citizen consultation and conscious participation in achieving a successful ‘control signal’. However, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that if residents are actively and continuously consulted about the adequacy of social control in their areas, better control signals can usually be put in place. Moreover, such consultation may help to generate confidence in residents that collective action can be taken to improve the neighbourhood, making it less likely that residents will act purely on the basis of their own individual interests, to the collective detriment (e.g. by moving out of the area, or by withdrawing into a private ‘shell’: see Taub et al 1984 on this individual/collective distinction and its implications). All of

this, incidentally, is very congruent with the philosophy of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP), also discussed briefly in Bottoms and Wilson (2004), and now being taken forward rapidly in many police forces. Tony Bottoms is closely linked to these developments as Chair of the Independent Academic Advisory Group for the NRPP.

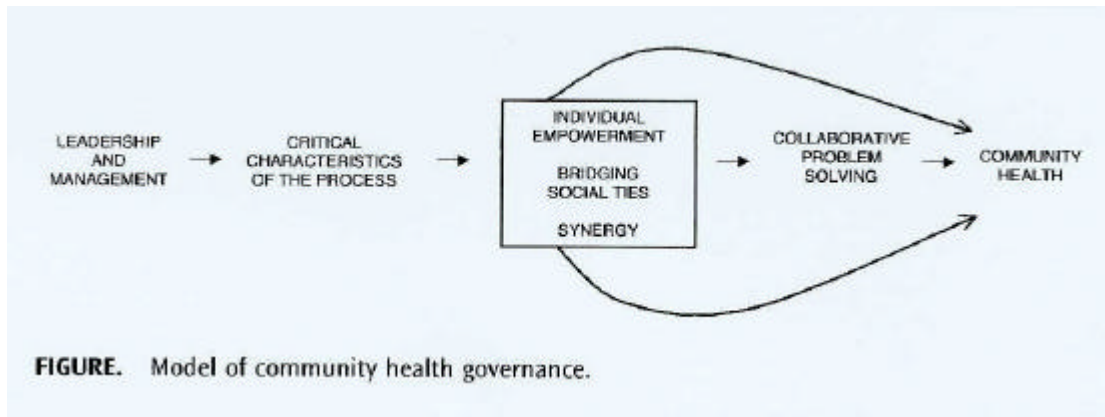
(b) The ‘Community Health Governance’ model In considering our main topic, i.e. the potential contribution of government-citizens partnerships to the development of safe neighbourhoods, we have become extremely interested in the ‘Community Health Governance’ (CHG) model recently proposed by Lasker and Weiss (2003). That model was developed by public health researchers who were persuaded by the evidence that enhanced community problem solving can lead to improvements in community health, yet also noted that ‘many communities are having substantial difficulty achieving their collaborative objective’. Very similar implementation difficulties also exist in the crime field; for example Hazel Blears (2003), a Home Office minister, recently said that ‘many communities, especially those in deprived high crime areas, lack the capability or the will to express their needs and to participate. This may be due to lack of leadership, organisation, knowledge, skills and confidence.’

Lasker and Weiss attempted a systematic review of the literature in the field of community health, and set out to provide ‘a multidisciplinary model that lays out the pathways by which broadly participatory processes lead to more effective community problem solving and to improvements in community health’. The systematisation provided by the model, the authors hoped, would act as a guide to more informed and effective local practice.

As may be seen in the accompanying Figure, the CHG model focuses on three key concepts (‘individual empowerment’, ‘bridging social ties’ and ‘synergy’).¹ Together, these are seen as (i) arising as intermediate outcomes from prior aspects of leadership and social process in the community; (ii) having a direct effect on improved community health (see the upper and lower arrows), and (iii) having a further effect on improved community health that is mediated through ‘collaborative problem solving’. The three key concepts are all seen as necessarily present if community health outcomes are to be optimised.

In recent years, a number of scholars have suggested significant parallels between the fields of criminology and public health, and the CHG approach would seem to be a good example of a well-developed community health model that should be actively explored for its potential criminological relevance. It also has some obvious links to the Civil Renewal agenda.

¹ For full discussion see Lasker and Weiss (2003, pp. 21-26). Basically individual empowerment is when people feel they have control in addressing the problems that affect their lives; bridging social ties are ties and networks providing various kinds of social support, and acting also as bases of trust; and synergy is a group process where a group of persons and/or organisations combine their resources to develop effective action.



B. Aims and Objectives

The proposed research will focus upon a number of key dependent variables, in particular:

- Levels and types of recorded crime
- Victimization rates as reported in a victim survey
- Fear of crime scale
- Perception of neighbourhood safety scale

A clear focus on crime, order and safety as dependent variables is deliberate, and picks up the Home Secretary’s comment, in his Edith Kahn lecture, that ‘we rely on the local community for precisely those things I have argued the progressive tradition has struggled with – basic social order; decent behaviour; the socialisation of the young into community norms’ (Blunkett 2003, p. 14). However, as previously noted, it is important to include a number of dependent variables on crime, order and safety, because they do not always move in the same direction.

The research will then try to explore, as fully as possible, how both the ‘control signals’ concept and the ‘CHG model’ (as described in Section A) might contribute to the dependent variables. As previously explained, this is relevant to the Civil Renewal agenda because both the control signals concept and the CHG model incorporate important elements of community participation, though neither is limited to such elements.

It is proposed to return to the same areas of Sheffield that were used for the recent study of attitudes to punishment, although concentrating on only the main four sub-areas considered in that research (i.e. Areas A1, A2, B1 and B2).²

This approach has two main advantages. First, we have already become acquainted with many aspects of life in the areas, and their recent history, and can therefore cut to the main issues in the proposed research more rapidly. Secondly, because we carried out a survey in these areas in December 2003/January 2004, we will be able to ask some of the same questions in 2005 as were asked in the first survey (e.g. victimization rates, fear of crime scale, area coherence scale, collective

² Sub-area A3 consists of two enclaves so is not a natural geographical area. Sub-area B3 has a large refugee population and high population turnover, so is not very suitable for the present research.

efficacy scale). Thus, we can capitalise on the existence of this earlier survey by building in, in effect, an element of longitudinal design within the research, as well as a retrospective dimension. Since additional control initiatives have taken place since January 2004 in both Area A and Area B (see Section D below), this longitudinal dimension of the research acquires an added significance.

C. Contribution to Civil Renewal Research Programme

The focus on crime and order variables as important dependent variables for the Civil Renewal programme has been defended in Section B.

Both the ‘control signals’ concept and the ‘CHG model’ are (see Section A) closely linked to aspects of the Civil Renewal agenda through issues of community consultation and participation. However, to the best of our knowledge neither the ‘control signals’ concept nor the CHG model has been explored in depth in relation to the civil renewal research programme.³ This proposed research allows for the possibility of such an in-depth examination. This will be partly conceptual (see Section D below) and partly an empirical analysis which will build fruitfully on our existing research.

D. Methods and Timescale

D1. Overview Three principal methods are envisaged: (i) conceptual analysis; (ii) a random survey of the population and a follow-up panel survey; and (iii) focus groups, discussions with officials, and collection of appropriate documents.

D2. Conceptual Analysis The early months of the research will focus on refining the concepts to be used in the study (especially those relating to the control signals and CHG approaches), and developing ways in which these concepts can be utilised in the interview schedule (including appropriate pilot work). Space precludes detailed discussion of these issues here, but from a preliminary assessment we are confident that, in principle, all the key concepts are operationalisable in a survey context. Nevertheless, it will inevitably take time to refine the conceptualisation and to develop appropriate questions.

D3. Surveys We propose two surveys. The principal one would be a random survey of the adult population in each of the four sub-areas A1, A2, B1 and B2, with approximately 160 residents approached in each sub-area. As noted in Bottoms and Wilson (2004) these sub-areas are high-crime high-deprivation areas (A1 slightly less so than the rest), but with a significantly different ethnic mix (Area A multicultural, Area B predominantly white), and different recent histories of social control. Some key characteristics of the areas, relating to both crime characteristics and area characteristics, are shown in Table 1; as will be seen, there are some very interesting cross-area differences, not always operating in a uniform way across sub-areas. The areas also have significantly different recent histories of social control. Area A has seen some improvements as a result of police action and designation as a New Deal

³ For example, neither is discussed in the recent review of the literature by Burton et al (2004).

for Communities area, with substantial resource injections (Bottoms and Wilson 2004, p. 391-2). Residents of Area B, at the time of our earlier survey, mostly felt themselves to be neglected by relevant authorities, though there was some evidence of a difference between B1 and B2 in this respect (Bottoms and Wilson 2004, n. 45). Since January 2004, there has been a high profile Dispersal Order used in sub-area B2 (with spillover consequences for B1), and the appointment of a dedicated antisocial behaviour team and community wardens in Area A. By comparing the results of the two surveys, and asking specific questions about these initiatives, we should gain a very good understanding of their public impact. We will also ask other questions relating to earlier control initiatives, as well as topics directly related to citizen participation and our key research concepts.

We plan to supplement the main random survey with a smaller Panel survey of some of those who responded to our earlier survey. The main purpose of this is to gain direct and detailed insight into understandings of recent change and participation in the areas.

D4. Focus Groups, etc Finally, we will complete the data collection with a limited number of focus groups, and extensive consultation with local officials, etc. This latter element will complement work already undertaken, but this time with a more specific focus on issues of citizen participation.

D5. Timescale We propose the following timescale

Feb 1	Project officially begins. Conceptual and pilot work undertaken.
April 1	Andrew Wilson becomes available as full-time worker on the project (he will have participated in conceptual and pilot work in February and March).
April-May	Survey fieldwork.
June-July	Analysis of survey, plus other fieldwork (focus groups, interviews, etc).
Aug-Sept	Final analysis and write-up.

E. Outputs

We envisage a research report to the Home Office, and a subsequent article in a refereed journal.

F. Project staff

As in our previous project, the two main workers would be Professor Anthony Bottoms and Dr. Andrew Wilson.

Table 1**Key Features of Four Areas**

Crime Issues	A1	A2	B1	B2
Recorded Crime per 1000 pop. (2002-3)	153	285	249	193
Victimization Score (excludes drugs)	69	89	88	100
Fear of Crime Score	14.9	17.2	19.7	17.8
% of respondents who:				
believe drug users resp. for local crime	37%	39%	9%	18%
believe more police needed	31%	46%	42%	70%
know someone who has been to prison	48%	64%	79%	59%
Area Issues				
Collective Efficacy Score	14.8	12.6	13.7	12.0
Area Coherence Score	18.0	16.8	15.1	16.6
Family ties in local area score	1.2	1.4	2.1	2.1
% of respondents who:				
feel at home in area	95%	79%	95%	75%
believe area has improved (last 3 years)	39%	38%	13%	8%
believe street lighting is problem	31%	21%	42%	49%
believe 'problem families' are problem	0%	7%	25%	32%

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