

## POLICE PERFORMANCE AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Francesco Bruno<sup>1</sup>

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the organisers, for the invitation to attend this important Conference, and for identifying the issue on which I was invited to report.

I think that the role of the police in a modern and democratic society is changing and developing, especially at present, as the world is experiencing many critical changes that will influence the future of criminology and crime prevention. In fact, as I have already been able to see and confirm, the society in which we live appears increasingly more complex and interdependent. Societies are continuously evolving and becoming more and more interdependent.

Every societal complex is made up of simple systems that are interrelated and connected through dynamics representing diverse structural and functional components of the social composite. In this sort of society the criminal tends to organise himself systematically, and the police can also be represented as a system.

Although the characteristics of police may vary from country to country according to political institutions and legal cultures, it is possible to isolate some common elements in the general structure of the system of police. It can be said that the police represents a human system (composed of human beings), arranged in a complicated organisation that is imbued with authority (deriving from the law), and which possesses several instruments, including arms, at its disposal. This organisation acts within the society with the aim of preventing and counteracting criminality, and maintaining, safeguarding and strengthening the security of the citizens. The function of the police system is presented in Figure 1.

The dynamic relationship of the police system with society can be divided into three main phases.

The first, or input phase, is characterised by the composition of the police, how it selects its personnel, trains and assimilates them into the organisation, according to specific legal provisions.

The second phase is the organisation of the police and its true functioning and action. During this phase, the activities aimed at hitting institutional targets must be implemented with efficiency.

The third phase consists of the output component. During this phase, the police interacts with society in order to attain its objectives and also to establish relationships with other social entities.

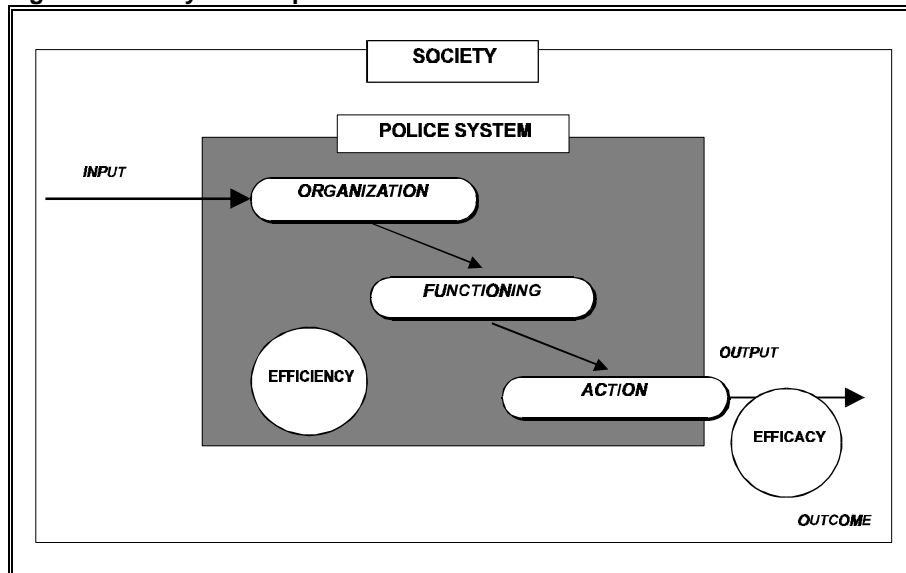
The ability of the police to achieve its objectives may be defined as efficacy. In other words, in the output phase, two different ways of achieving the objectives can be distinguished: the first is the effectiveness (i.e. the capability to produce affects "output" in the social dynamic); the second is the ability to achieve the outcome of their initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of Forensic Psychiatry, Università La Sapienza, Rome, Italy.

Considered as a system, the police can be identified, modified and directed by scientific instruments through heuristic or applied sciences. Various scientific disciplines, in particular those coming from applied human sciences and the natural sciences, deal with each phase and activity of the police system. The list of such disciplines is lengthy but we will limit ourselves to considering the contribution that can be made from criminology and specifically from the adoption of victimological instruments with the aim of assessing the performance and needs of the police.

**Figure 1: The system of police**



During the last few days the usefulness of victimisation surveys has been debated in great depth, with reference to the results of the International Survey as well as the problems of methodology and political-judicial policies. Therefore, I will not go into these issues again here, but will attempt to concentrate solely on those aspects that are directly related to the theme of this report. In particular, with regard to this theme, victimisation surveys can be considered as a fundamental tool of advancement in understanding the phenomenon of crime and its effects on society. Moreover, the carrying out of victimisation surveys on a systematic basis and at various levels can produce several advantages: firstly, by increasing our quantitative knowledge of the number of crimes that make up the "dark" figure of crime; secondly, by sharpening our qualitative knowledge of the other face of the criminal act, i.e. of those aspects that characterise the actual criminal act, but also the effects of the act on those persons, places and family relationships involved with the offence or offender.

The phenomenon of crime can be described as a complex social problem that occurs at a given moment, but which is preceded by a long preparatory phase and by several diverse and lengthy phases that deal with different entities. At present only one recognised aspect of this complex phenomenon has been understood. In the seventies, we began to recognise the other side of the coin; thanks to the progress in victimology, we can now understand the other component of the criminal act.

For many years, in fact, the attention of criminologists was directed solely towards the criminal, and towards the most suitable type of punishment or incarceration. No attention was given to evaluating the behaviour of real or potential victims. In other words, for a long time, and to a large extent even today, it is commonly held that the "clients" of the justice system are real or potential criminals and not the real or potential victims. In particular, it is believed that the "citizen" only becomes involved with law enforcement in the role of a criminal or victim, or in other roles that are related in one way or another to the legal process.

Nowadays, on the contrary, it has been recognised that the phenomenon of crime produces a profound and widespread effect on society. As a result, each citizen is either directly or indirectly affected by this phenomenon and reacts to it in many different ways.

For this reason it is necessary to consider each citizen as playing different roles to that of a client of the criminal justice system. For the same reason, in order to function efficiently, the criminal justice system must establish a close relationship with citizens and obtain their full support. In fact, victims can make several contributions to the criminal justice system: first, they can contribute to the credibility of truth and to the arrest of the perpetrator of the criminal act, although their contribution must be strategically directed and evaluated by the police. Secondly, the victims can react and demand that their needs be satisfied. As a result, if strategically monitored, citizens can guarantee a more effective and widespread social control and develop a legal culture that represents a strong societal legal defence mechanism. Finally, the citizens can monitor the work of the police force, by identifying any of its defects.

All this, however, does not come about spontaneously, but must be stimulated by the correct and adequate state action, as well as by the proper operational know-how. The crucial element of this mechanism is represented by the feeling of security experienced by the citizens. In fact, in order to accept the authority of the state, the citizen must feel protected by the state; he/she must feel supported by the state in order to support, in turn, the state institutions.

The question that this report poses, therefore, is if and how victimisation surveys can be useful in assessing the performance and needs of the police.

According to Joanna Shapland, it can be claimed that nowadays victimisation surveys are far more varied in both scope and purpose, (their uses and the policies for which they have been adopted, have multiplied). In particular, whereas previously surveys were used to count crime, nowadays they are used to measure victim needs and guide victim services. This statement holds true especially in the case of local surveys that can provide information about the extent of the problem in general, and information with which to assist the setting up of services. I agree with this opinion on the use of victimisation surveys although I am also aware of the numerous biases presented by victimisation surveys from the methodological

perspective. In particular, I share the remarks of James Lynch who highlights the major sources of error that affect these kinds of services:

- 1) sampling error;
- 2) non-response rate;
- 3) failures of re-contact and altered recollections as time passes;
- 4) telescoping effects;
- 5) mode effects (differences between the interviewing methods);
- 6) computer-assisted telephone interviewing.

For these reasons, I believe that the real and most significant output of victimisation surveys is not to be found at the level of quantitative analysis, but of qualitative study. Professor Lynch indicates as a priority, the analysis of the data that are not greatly affected by the error structure of the survey: "analysis of public attitudes towards crime and crime control policy, the characterisation of crime control policy in terms of the mix of public and private activity involved, and responses to crime (with special emphasis on calling the police)."

I believe that Irving Waller is right when he says that: "an essential objective of criminal policy is to increase the safety and security of persons and property. National and comparative victimisation surveys provide a major indicator of the extent to which policies are achieving this objective. Moreover they provide a largely untapped source of information on the explanations of crime that must become a key strategic tool in reversing the global trend from deteriorating safety and security".

Mr. van der Vijver dealt in depth with the subject of this report, by studying in detail policy development in the police organisation and the role of citizen surveys. First of all, he states that he prefers the term "citizen surveys" because it entails not only victims but all citizens. He believes that the research should be policy oriented in order to improve the effectiveness and quality of policing and, although he is aware that changing policy is very difficult, he hopes that it will be possible to modify the behaviour of the police - a much more compelling need. He suggests that the police themselves could carry out these surveys.

Mr. van der Vijver underlines that the problem of public safety will increase in the future and that there is a strong tendency in police management to improve the quality of policing by turning its attention to the needs of the community. Figure 2 presents a list of the items that, according to Mr. van der Vijver, could be included in these citizen surveys.

### **Figure 2: Elements in citizen survey**

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|------------------------------------|--|
| - Actual level of victimisation    | - Problems in neighbourhood            |
| - Fear of being victimised         | - Priorities required from the police  |
| - Risk perception of victimisation | - Attitudes towards the police         |
| - Reporting behaviour              | - Contacts between citizens and police |
| - Concern about crime              | - Judgment of policework               |

One role that these surveys could play might consist of an identification of the problems in certain areas in order to formulate the goals of the organisation, and thereby improve the evaluation and quality of police performance. The systematic use of these surveys could also allow for an assessment of the developments of: fear of victimisation; victimisation rates; and the citizen's opinion of the police.

Different people experience problems in very different ways and their accounts can vary according to the phrases and questions used during interviews. What is important with respect to people's opinion of the police, is the nature of the contacts established and maintained between the public and the authorities. The quality of such contacts is strongly influenced by the management and the organisation of the police. Mr. van der Vijver is convinced that victimisation surveys are factors that can cause the police to modify their reaction. There is a relatively wide gap between a decision to bring about organisational changes and the actual changes that occur. For this reason he suggests that citizen surveys should be associated with internal evaluation studies of the police personnel, and interviews with key figures in the local community.

Mr. van der Vijver also makes many other interesting points in his report, on which I agree in general. In particular, he stresses the differences between decisions related to the police system and their outcome. In Figure 3, I have tried to represent the components and the dynamic relationships of the different phases of the function of police in society.

As can be seen, outcomes are defined by decreased crime rates, and victimisation indicators are defined by crime prevention, perceived safety, security and public order, adjustment in the social context, confidence in the police, the perception of the role of the police, the supervision, evaluation and monitoring of the activities and, finally, by the planning of future activities. The level of achievement of these outcomes can be modified by a feedback mechanism, the phase of input and functioning and the dynamic development from the output to the outcome.

In other words, in order to assess the performance and needs of the police, it is necessary to evaluate the qualitative aspects of the outcomes, taking into account that such outcomes depend not only on the police activities, but also on various other factors. These factors include the role of public opinion through the mass media, the role of expectations of the people, social and cultural characteristics, and last but not least, the role of the operational model within the framework.

I agree with Mr. van der Vijver when he says that: "the goals of the police in social terms, its effects, the relations between costs and results were not considered

important by management. Output criteria and formal aspects, like the quality of the reports in legal terms were considered to be more important."

In developed societies, moreover, the prevailing model of functioning is the business model, based on the balance between costs and benefits, with the people judging the police according to this model.

In conclusion, I believe that the systematic use of instruments at various levels, such as the victimisation survey, focused on the people's perception of what they expect from the police and how they feel with respect to personal security and fear of crime, as well as how they can describe their experiences of victimisation, can be of invaluable use in the monitoring and assessment of the activities of the police.

I would like to conclude this report by thanking once again the Department of Public Security of the Italian Ministry of the Interior for its vital support in this initiative, and I would also like to believe that in the near future the Department will allow such an initiative to be put into practice.

**Figure 3: Elements of police system**

