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Measuring the Performance of the Police: The Perspective of the Public

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The results summarized herein reflect the analysis of the authors and the nature of the data used. The analysis does not necessarily reflect the position of the Department of Public Safety Canada or the cited references.

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- The purpose of this research is to:
 - Review and critically assess the current survey measures used to measure the performance of the police.
 - Provide some recommendations on best practices when it comes to survey questions.
 - Assert the need for consistent measures of police performance that are comparable across time and place.

Structure of Policing in Canada



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Federal – all places not covered by provincial or municipal



Provincial – small municipalities and rural areas



Municipal – large/medium Canadian municipalities



Dimensions of Police Work



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- Police undertake a broad array of work.
- Dimensions of police work are:
 - 1) Reduce crime and victimization
 - 2) Call offenders to account
 - 3) Reduce fear and enhance personal security
 - 4) Ensure civility in public spaces
 - 5) Use force and authority fairly, efficiently, and effectively
 - 6) Use financial resources fairly, efficiently, and effectively
 - 7) Quality services/customer satisfaction



Measures of Police Performance: Direct and Indirect



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- All existing measures of police performance can be divided into direct and indirect in terms of how they operate

Direct Measures

- Crime rates
- Number of arrests and fines issued
- Clearance rates
- Calls for service response times

Indirect Measures

- Satisfaction surveys
- Direct observations
- Situational studies
- Independent testing



Measures of Police Performance: Direct and Indirect (continued)



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- The measurement of police performance is a complicated task that has multiple dimensions.
- Both direct and indirect measures need to be used when attempting to measure police performance.
- There is no single measure that is able to measure the performance of everything the police do.



Preferring One Performance Measure Over Another



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- Police resources are allocated according to priorities and along the dimensions of police work
- What would happen if most of police resources are allocated to one or two of police work dimensions?
 - The crime rate might be reduced, but at what cost?
- Alternative approaches to policing around the world do not produce large crime reduction figures or large numbers of arrests



Crime Rate vs. Crime Severity Index



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- Crime Rate – still used in Canada because it is quick, simple, and allows for trend analysis.
- Crime Severity Index – an innovative metric developed in Canada, which complements Crime Rate.
 - It measures not only the number of police-reported incidents, but how serious or severe these incidents are.



Example: Flying and Airplane and Measuring Police Performance



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- What is more complex: airplane or police organization? (hint: it's police)
- An airplane has over 50 sensor and indicator dials that require monitoring
 - At least 10 require constant monitoring by the pilot
- Question: which dial is the key airplane performance indicator? Or is there one?
- No, none! All sensors and indicators are important to measure, and at least 10 of them are vital to a successful flight (and survival of passengers)



The Case for Measuring Citizens' Opinion of Their Police



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- Public's perceptions and opinions of their police is the only large scale indirect police performance measure.
- This kind of information can only be gathered through public opinion surveys (i.e. asking the public directly about how they feel).
- Public opinion surveys on police performance act as a supplement to direct performance measures.

Conceptual Framework of Public-Police Interaction



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Current Public Opinion Measures in Canada



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- Currently, only one national survey in Canada – General Social Survey (GSS), Victimization cycle – measures ‘how good of a job’ the police does every 5 years through 8 questions.
- This is the only source of comparable measures of police performance in Canada.
- Only two police services – Edmonton and Regina – out of all reviewed adopted the eight questions from the GSS.
- The rest of police services design their own questions on satisfaction with policing services.



Generalized and Specific Questions on Satisfaction with Police



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- There are two types of questions on satisfaction with police:
 - Generalized – the simplest and quickest way to measure the overall level of satisfaction of citizens with the police.
 - Specific – supposed to measure what it is that the citizens like or dislike about their police.
- It is important not only to know how the public feels about the police in general, but why it feels this way.



'Good Job,' Favorable Views, Satisfaction, Confidence, and Trust...



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- Most commonly used terms (from least to most powerful):
 - 'Good Job.'
 - Favorable views of police.
 - Satisfaction with police.
 - Confidence in police.
 - Trust in police.
- While similar and related, these are theoretically distinct terms that should not be used interchangeably (but often are).



'Good Job,' Favorable Views, Satisfaction, Confidence, and Trust... (continued)



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- **'Good Job'** is fairly straightforward, light approach that could lead the respondent to answer in a certain way.
- **Favorable views** is another light approach that, in some cases, could be leading too.
- **Satisfaction** comes from the field of Customer Satisfaction in customer-based businesses, which are very different from the policing "business."
- **Confidence** is a "passive regard of the police by the public" (Stanko et al, 2012: 321); it is something people *have*.
- **Trust** is an active, not passive, mechanism through which people regard their police. It is something people *do*.

- Using "good job" and "favorable views of police" in the question will produce the **most positive responses**, while using "trust in police" will produce the **least positive responses**.



Terms in Response Categories



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- The use of terms in response categories is also inconsistent:
 - Use of “Somewhat” is problematic.
 - A confusion about true mid-point.
 - Meaning of some terms is debatable.
- If the question is the same but the response categories are different, the results of the survey cannot be compared to each other (but sometimes are).



Other Correlates of Confidence and Trust in Police



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- Measuring confidence and trust in police is also important because it correlates with:
 - Maintaining public order.
 - Citizens' compliance and cooperation with police.
 - Reporting of crime to the police.
 - Police officer safety.
- Increased confidence and trust in police only helps the police in doing their job.
- For more information on research in the area of fairness of procedural justice and perceived police legitimacy: <http://www.proceduralfairness.org/>



The Need for Comparable and Consistent Measures



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- A large number of both generalized and specific police performance questions are already being asked in numerous public opinion surveys.
- However, the validity and reliability of these questions, for the most part, have not been tested and are of questionable value.
- Questions that are currently asked are not standardized, making them impossible to compare across time and place.
- In other words, it is impossible to compare police performance between different police services or to the national average, unless standardized questions are developed and asked on surveys.



Where Do We Go from Here...



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- Three notable approaches to developing and testing consistent measures:
 - From theoretical constructs: Maguire and Johnson (2010) in the U.S. derived questions from theoretical constructs and tested them against Mastrofski's six dimensions of policing as a service industry.
 - Through engagement with policing stakeholders: Coleman (2012) in Canada consulted policing stakeholders in order to derive and test the factors that may constitute police performance.
 - Through engagement of multidisciplinary panel of experts: Jackson and colleagues (2011) in the U.K. and Europe derived, tested and implemented European indicators of trust in judicial systems.



Current Project in Canada



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- Panel of Experts:
 - 4 academic experts
 - 5 policing community experts
- 16 questions and 37 indicators were identified by expert panel.
- Questions will be tested for validity through pilot test.



Conclusion



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- In Canada, only one national survey administered by Statistics Canada asks eight questions on police performance only once every 5 years.
- The majority of Canadian municipal police services commission their own annual or bi-annual public opinion community surveys that include general and specific police performance questions.
- Current project will identify and validate 10 to 15 ‘core’ questions that measure police performance from the perspective of the public.
- The ‘core’ questions will be recommended for use in police community surveys in Canada.





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