

Why Should Indian Police Join Hands With Criminologists? This Article on Public Safety Might Just Have an Answer

Indian Police must recognize the need to add a skill set which is not held other police staff, and take a bold step of inviting outsiders into their department.

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Criminologists function as an important part of the police organization in western countries. These professionals enhance the capacity of police departments to understand crime problems, and develop proactive ways to prevent those problems from recurring. Despite such complementary roles, the Indian Police continue to exhibit a conscious disregard for criminologists, including their knowledge of research and data analytics. How long will Indian Police show this indifference, and glorify their ineffective practices (e.g., strategies, tactics, and programs), when there's a need for a radically different approach to safeguard citizens against crime and victimization? This article argues that integrating criminologists into the routine operations of police will allow for better use of limited resources, increased public safety, and lesser physical and economical costs to tax payers.

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The tunnel -thinking approach continues

Crime wasn't a hot topic during post-independence period of India – after all, cycle theft made up a large portion of total crimes, and police did not require modern techniques to deal with criminals. Fast-forward to 2018, and India's crime profile looks very different. The rate of criminal victimization has grown dramatically. The expression of criminal behavior has turned violent. The street gangs have evolved into organized crime-groups. And the borderless realm of cyberspace has created new criminal opportunities.

Yet, despite these vast changes in crime trends, the Indian Police rely predominantly on reactive methods of policing – a policy where police involve in responding to a complaint after the crime has been committed. Indeed, there have been few attempts to address crime and public safety concerns through proactive enforcement. But the number of IPS (Indian Police Service) officers espousing this philosophy – the philosophy of crime prevention and reduction – still make up less than one-fourth of the total strength of the cadre. This posits why 'detection' and 'apprehension' continue to remain the norm in our policing.

Alongside this, the India police is also criticized for conducting random patrols at selectively chosen areas. Such a patrol generally ignores high-crime times and places, and the concentration of offending among a small group of active offenders. This results in mismanagement of police resources, and colossal waste of taxpayer's money.

Declining Effectiveness

What do public want from the police? Several [public opinion studies](#) indicate that reducing the fear of crime, and keeping the public safe should be the top priority for police. But unfortunately, the performance of Indian police has been far behind this expectation, and the pace at which it is improving is slower than other modern democracies. For example, while police in foreign countries are trying to lower their response time for priority-calls – reports of imminent threat to life or public safety – to [4.5 minutes](#), a victim of serious crime in India, still need to wait for scary long time, before the police arrives on scene. Of course, critics would argue that there's no excuse for failing to provide quality services to the public. But, considering the serious shortage of manpower in the police forces, it appears that, there is very little policemen can do to cover wide geographical areas, and deal with more calls for help.

Besides poor police-to-population ratio, the Indian Police is also hamstrung by the obligation to provide security services for special events (e.g., local and religious processions), and involving in multi-agency police-intelligence meetings and liaisons. All of these activities substantially limit the time spent on patrolling in the community.

Eroding Trust

India's 'VIP culture' is one of the leading reasons for erosion of public trust in the police. This culture goes well with the doctrine that even though all citizens are equal before law, some lives are more equal (important) than others. The [latest data](#) compiled by Bureau of Police Research & Development provides a [striking example](#) of this inequality; it shows that an average of 3 police personnel are allotted for the protection of every VIP in the country, while 663 ordinary citizens are at the mercy of 1 police member. This explains why police officers are stretched to the limit to cover staff shortages, and struggle to keep up with an increasing people and crime after 8 p.m.

Lessons Learned

What is the way out? It is important to bear in mind that public administration is an institution which provides numerous services to the people. Of which, ensuring security and protection of the citizens lie at the core of public administration. Therefore, there is nothing wrong if the Indian Police borrows some of the best practices which could reduce crime, improve public safety, and yet, save the

tax payers money. I am not, for a moment, suggesting that we should draw lessons from experiences of foreign countries. Rather, I am pleading for readiness to emulate the models of service followed by some of the states in India.

The first model that comes to my mind is the *'Trained Criminologist'* form. This model was jointly introduced by Ahmedabad City Police (City Police from now) and Raksha Shakti University (RSU) in 2017. The founding premise behind this model is that the quality of public life (and governance...) will improve if citizens are provided with enhanced safety and protection from police. To meet this commitment, the City Police signed a memorandum of agreement (MoA) with Raksha Shakti University for identifying the crime patterns in Ahmedabad. As a part of this MoA, RSU hired three criminologists for a pilot project, and attached them with city police. This project threw up several interesting findings about crime occurrences in Ahmedabad, and culminated into giving concrete suggestions for public safety. A close source to the project has confirmed that "[R]SU is now conducting regular follow-up with the Commissioner of Police to ensure that the proposed strategies, aimed at preventing and reducing victimization, are effectively implemented".

How did this partnership work exactly? This partnership served as a [two-way street](#): in one direction, the city police described the challenges they face in curbing the re-occurrence of body offences – such as murder, attempted murder, and assault – against vulnerable sections of the society; in the other direction, the trained criminologists examined the relationship between different criminogenic factors (e.g., victim-offender relationship, place and time of incident, socio-economic status of victim as well as offender, hunting style of offender) surrounding body offences, and disseminated the information about newly-discovered crime patterns to the fellow police. These exchanges normally occurred during internal strategy meetings, and allowed the police executives to consider the scientific evidence, as they decide how to address the safety of disadvantaged population. Such an approach to decision-making represents what former U.S. National Institute of Justice Director, John Laub describe as [translational criminology](#) – a concept where academics and police practitioners work as equal partners in applying scientific knowledge to develop policies and programs.

Availability of crime data is another interesting feature of this partnership. Throughout the course of this project, the trained criminologists were authorized to access the crime and victimization data compiled by State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), Gandhinagar. This arrangement was made possible because the police executives wanted to achieve a greater understand of 'what's going wrong with their policing' and 'how can they improve the public safety outcomes'. Equipped with strong data analysis skills, the trained criminologists, however, responded effectively to these demands. They used critical data sources to review the strategies pursued by the police department, and delivered high-quality description of the conditions that caused crimes to persist. Added to these insights were the characteristics, frequency and likelihood of criminal victimization which [enabled the city police](#) "[t]o target their resources (e.g. patrolling, deployment and surveillance) on high-crime areas and those at greater risk of violent victimization". This strategy, also known as predictive policing using hot-spot analysis, helped prevent crime before it took place.

Henceforth, this model reinforces the notion that criminologists (unlike other police staff...) can assist the IPS officers in knowing how, when, and where to focus limited resources, besides evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies. In fact, these benefits (to police practices and research...) have already been acknowledged by Ahmedabad Police Commissioner, A.K. Singh, as he [recommended the state government](#) for regular appointment of criminologists in police units".

Finally, I would cite the 'Embedded Criminologist' model, which is institutionalized in Kerala Police Academy (KPA). This model places a firm emphasis on indoor training, and is led by an academic criminologist. The adoption of this model came as a result of close scrutiny of state police, after National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) ranked Kerala among the most crime-prone states in the country (see Crime in India Compendium (2008) by NCRB; and also [NCRB statistics 2012](#)). This scrutiny raised broader questions about police practices and their capacity to carry out public safety responsibilities. For example, can the police investigate a problem of crime without knowing the causal factors of crime? Whether the skills level of the officers is right for the roles they perform or they merely graduate as professionals without equivalent education? Do the police officers have access to the evidence about

what works in cutting crime, and the training and information required to help them?

Simply put, the Kerala Police Administration recognized the need to 'reorient' its police officers with new skills and knowledge to meet the 'public security' challenges of the future – it was despite the low expenditure of state on police training. But regardless of the current performance of Kerala Police, we ought to ask ourselves one rhetorical question: aren't the police forces across the country facing an acute skills shortage, and still distrust the scientific discoveries? Yes, they do. And, it appears that embedding criminologists inside police academies could make their workforce more contemporary, skilled and autonomous.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

[1]. Chandra, R.R. (2017). *Contemporary Status of Indian Criminology: A Qualitative Assessment*. (MPhil Thesis). Raksha Shakti (Police & Internal Security) University.

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