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## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICE YOUTH BUREAU OFFICERS

WILLIAM W. WATTENBERG AND NOEL BUFE\*

The study reported in this article concerns a problem with not only immediate practical significance, but also with strong implications both for theory as to juvenile delinquency and for the design of programs to reduce delinquency. The study had its origin in the desire of officials of the Detroit Police Department to develop a more scientific basis for the selection of officers to be assigned to the Youth Bureau.

The theoretical significance of the research derives from the fact that the major viewpoints as to cause of delinquency seem to call for remedies which require relatively intensive individual treatment or far-reaching changes in the social structure of communities.

It is no secret that in the study of delinquency there tends to be emphasis as to cause which implicates either powerful social forces on the one hand or deep-seated personality difficulties on the other. In this article we shall not reopen the perennial debate between the sociologists and the psychiatrists. In passing it may be noted that as of the early 1960's a renewed interest is manifest in attempts to deal with social structure, possibly as a result of disenchantment with the effectiveness of various individual therapeutic techniques.

Without discussing or forecasting future swings of the theory pendulum, it should be stressed that the essential significance of both streams of thought is that delinquency being the result of very powerful forces must be attacked by equally powerful weapons. If one accepts what might be called loosely either a psychiatric or social work approach, as these would be found in the works of such

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pioneers as Alexander and Healy<sup>1</sup> or such present-day workers who use the insights of psychoanalysis as Redl and Wineman,<sup>2</sup> the implication is that the correction of the pathology involved calls for application of psychotherapeutic skills of a high order over a long enough period of time to permit genuine personality change.

The practical implications of sociological theories call for very different attacks, but these may involve equally high levels of skill. It certainly would be no simple matter to carry out the type of reversal of ecological forces which drew the groundbreaking attention of Clifford Shaw<sup>3</sup> and his co-workers, or to remake the social structure of a community in the fashion called for by Cloward and Ohlin.<sup>4</sup>

Seen from the perspective of any of these theories as to profound causation, many measures used day-to-day by many individuals who work with delinquents in recreation programs or in the functioning of law enforcement agencies or courts would appear to be very superficial. Compared with the possible need of a youth for psychotherapy, how effective can be the solemn little sermon with which a judge or referee in court embellishes his announcement of the disposition of a case? As contrasted with the need to reverse sub-cultural attitudes fostering delinquency, of what value can be the two or three hours of interviewing and possible advice-giving by a police officer?

Despite the apparent superficiality of such devices, court workers and police officers will continue to do what they see as within their power. Even if found to be ineffectual, they still would be strongly inclined to continue to do these things.

Yet, in the overall design of delinquency prevention programs by communities it may be significant to know what real contribution to delinquency reduction can be achieved by the relatively "superficial" means. If it is a major contribution then

<sup>1</sup> ALEXANDER & HEALY, *ROOTS OF CRIME* (1935).

<sup>2</sup> REDL & WINEMAN, *CONTROLS FROM WITHIN* (1952).

<sup>3</sup> SHAW & MCKAY, *JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND URBAN AREAS* (1942).

<sup>4</sup> CLOWARD & OHLIN, *DELINQUENCY AND OPPORTUNITY* (1960).

these should be viewed more seriously as components in a community's efforts. If they are useless, there is no point in encouraging well-meaning individuals to fritter away badly needed time and energy going through meaningless motions.

It was against this background that the authors welcomed an opportunity to do a study designed to compare effective with less effective police officers. For, in order to make such a comparison one would have to be able to get some measure of relative effectiveness.

A survey of the literature unearthed a number of statements showing some faith that police officers could make an important contribution, although none of the statements had the type of documentation or research evidence that would be convincing to a tough-minded sceptic. For example, Kuharich after asserting, "The method used by police officers in handling these children during initial contacts may have a lasting effect on their lives, and may well determine whether they will respect community authority and the law," becomes quite specific as to how the officers should conduct themselves without citing any evidence as to the effects of the recommended behavior.<sup>5</sup> Similar warnings were voiced by Votaw in reporting on observations made by the National Advisory Police Commission.<sup>6</sup>

That there was need for an evaluative study of the methods and techniques used by special police services for dealing with juveniles was recognized by the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders as reported in this *Journal*.<sup>7</sup>

In the well-worn expression, "Easier said than done!" the closest thing to an evaluation was Weber's report on personnel in institutions based on clinical data.<sup>8</sup> For what interest they may have for comparison with the findings later to be reported in the present article, here is the essence of his findings:

"These determinants indicate that irrespective of technical or professional training, rehabilitative work with delinquents in institutions requires

people who have genuine interest in children, who are emotionally mature and stable, and will react to problems with a high degree of adaptability and versatility; who will make a sincere attempt to understand human maladjustments and will react with personal warmth when dealing with personality problems of children; who can work agreeably with associates, and who can act with initiative, perseverance and leadership; who are sufficiently intelligent to learn quickly and deal constructively with the difficult problems arising in institutional rehabilitative work; who have the ability for critical abstract thinking yet can apply themselves to concrete problems; and who are free from social and religious prejudices."<sup>9</sup>

For use in the present study the Youth Bureau of the Detroit Police Department made available all files involving contacts by its officers with boys in the period 1952 through 1959. These files and the IBM cards incorporating their data included information on all contacts with each boy between the ages of 10 and 17 and recorded the badge number of the Youth Bureau officer who interviewed each boy and made the decision as to police disposition for each contact.

On the basis of these records it was possible to determine whether or not each boy became a repeater, that is, whether he had a second police contact prior to his 17th birthday. The follow-up period after the first police contact was not the same for all boys, because the age of first contact was variable. For most of the boys, the first contact was at age 14 or 15.

These data enabled us to determine for each officer what proportion of the boys for whom he was the first Youth Bureau contact became repeaters on the one hand or remained non-repeaters on the other. If we can consider it a sign of effectiveness for an officer to have a high proportion of non-repeaters among boys for whom he was the initial police contact, then we have a measure of the relative effectiveness of each officer. The size of any difference in this index would provide a clue to the over-all importance of the police work. If differences were large this would indicate roughly what reduction in the delinquency represented by repeating could be attained if the least effective officers could be upgraded so they achieved the records of the most effective officers.

Because the differences in delinquency rates vary

<sup>5</sup> Kuharich, *What Can We Do About Delinquency?*, POLICE 58-59 (Nov.-Dec. 1958).

<sup>6</sup> Votaw, *Programs for Delinquency*, 31 STATE GOVERNMENT 110 (1958).

<sup>7</sup> Lopez-Rey, *The First U.N. Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders*, 47 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 526 (1957).

<sup>8</sup> Weber, *Clinical Approach to Selecting and Training Personnel for Institutions Serving Delinquents*, 47 J. CRIM. L., C. & P.S. 33 (1956).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 38.

TABLE I  
 INTRA-PRECINCT COMPARISONS OF NON-REPEATER  
 PERCENTAGES AMONG FIRST CONTACTS  
 BY OFFICERS

Precinct	Number of Officers	Percentages for Officers Having Thirty or More First Contacts		
A	6	(1)-54%; (4)-42%;	(2)-47%; (5)-36%;	(3)-43%; (6)-28%;
B	8	(7)-59%; (10)-53%; (13)-48%;	(8)-54%; (11)-53%; (14)-46%;	(9)-54%; (12)-52%;
C	10	(15)-61%; (18)-54%; (21)-48%; (24)-45%;	(16)-61%; (19)-54%; (22)-46%;	(17)-56%; (20)-51%; (23)-46%;
D	10	(25)-57%; (28)-44%; (31)-42%; (34)-29%;	(26)-50%; (29)-43%; (32)-35%;	(27)-46%; (30)-43%; (33)-31%;
E	3	(35)-46%;	(36)-46%;	(37)-41%;
F	5	(38)-55%; (41)-46%;	(39)-53%; (42)-44%;	(40)-47%;
G	2	(43)-46%;	(44)-39%;	
H	5	(45)-49%; (48)-45%;	(46)-47%; (49)-44%;	(47)-46%;
I	7	(50)-54%; (53)-43%; (56)-37%;	(51)-49%; (54)-42%;	(52)-46%; (55)-39%;
J	12	(57)-47%; (60)-42%; (63)-40%; (66)-32%;	(58)-46%; (61)-41%; (64)-37%; (67)-31%;	(59)-42%; (62)-40%; (65)-36%; (68)-31%;
K	6	(69)-59%; (72)-56%;	(70)-57%; (73)-50%;	(71)-57%; (74)-46%;
L	12	(75)-54%; (78)-47%; (81)-45%; (84)-41%;	(76)-51%; (79)-47%; (82)-45%; (85)-40%;	(77)-50%; (80)-46%; (83)-43%; (86)-36%;
M	8	(87)-75%; (90)-63%; (93)-59%;	(88)-71%; (91)-61%; (94)-55%;	(89)-65%; (92)-59%;
N	6	(95)-61%; (98)-54%;	(96)-60%; (99)-49%;	(97)-59%; (100)-41%;
O	8	(101)-62%; (104)-50%; (107)-43%;	(102)-53%; (105)-45%; (108)-38%;	(103)-53%; (106)-44%;
P	9	(109)-56%; (112)-46%; (115)-45%;	(110)-56%; (113)-46%; (116)-45%;	(111)-53%; (114)-45%; (117)-41%;

cided to confine comparisons to officers within each precinct. For this purpose each officer was assigned to the precinct in which he had spent the largest proportion of this time. In Table I the reader will find the intra-precinct percentage comparisons. All data have been reported in such a way as to safeguard the identities of the men who made this study possible. The letters reported in the designation of the precincts were assigned randomly and bear no relation to either the number or name of the precinct. The number assigned to each officer is unrelated to his name or his badge number.

Comparisons were limited to officers for whom the records showed 30 or more first contacts during the 1952-1959 period. Table I should be read as follows: During the period, in the precinct we have given the fictitious designation, "A," there had been six officers who had served the preponderance of their Youth Bureau time in that precinct and had been the first Youth Bureau contact for 30 or more boys. Among them the officer to whom we gave the fictitious badge number 1 had 54 percent of "his boys" become non-repeaters, for Officer 6 only 28 percent remained non-repeaters.

The reader will note that the differences are quite large in some cases. For some of the "worst" precincts the best officer had been twice as effective as the one with the lowest non-repeater rate. The fact that the non-repeating rate in the "worst" precincts was so low for all officers attests to the power of social causation; the size of the repeating rate in the "best" precinct probably reveals the importance of individual psychological factors. In any case, the size of the differences indicates that had all Youth Bureau officers in every precinct been as effective as the most effective in that precinct there would have been a sufficient reduction in total delinquency in the city to have been worth the effort expended in either a selection program, a training program, or both, if such a program or programs could have so improved officers' effectiveness. This portion of the study, if it can be taken at face value, indicates that development of a good police youth set-up will pay off in delinquency reduction in a manner which compares quite favorably to effects thus far objectively measured for any of the presumably more profound efforts. This is not to say that a good police organization can be an adequate substitute for programs geared to deal with fundamental causes, but it cannot be ignored as a major ingredient in a community program.

widely in any large city it was necessary to take this into account. To eliminate as far as possible the influence of neighborhood factors it was de-

Statistically sophisticated readers may well raise the question as to the possibility that the differences might have been due to chance. To get at this question and prepare the ground for comparisons between officers, the following procedure was employed:

For each precinct, each officer was paired with every other officer. In Precinct E, for example, Officer 35 was paired with Officer 36 and, then, with Officer 37. Officer 36 was also paired with Officer 37. The standard statistical formula to determine the statistical significance of differences in percentages was used to determine the probability that the difference could have arisen by chance, in view of the number of cases for each officer upon which his percentage was based. In all, there were 445 pairings. Table II indicates for how many of these pairings the statistical level of confidence shown in the first column should have occurred by chance and for how many it appeared in reality.

The import of Table II is that the number and size of the differences found are very unlikely to be due to chance. For example, there were three pairings in the several precincts for which the differences were so great that they would have occurred by chance only once in 10,000 times; and 11 more, once in 1,000 times. Since there were fewer than 1,000 pairings, this should have happened "by accident" or "coincidence" only once. Thus, the number of these differences was 14 times (or 1400%) chance expectation.

The next step in the procedure was to interview all the supervising officers of the Youth Bureau in an effort to determine from their viewpoint what qualities appeared to be responsible for the relative success of the more effective officers. All the sergeants, lieutenants, and inspectors who had served with the Youth Bureau were presented with the names of all those pairs of officers for whom the difference in percentage of non-repeaters had proved statistically significant at the .02 level. Each supervisor was asked to give his judgment as to which man in each pair would have been the more successful in working with youth. Regardless of their judgment they were then asked to describe the salient characteristics of both men in each pair.

As shown in Table III, the supervisors were quite successful in their judgments. In this table, as in the previous ones, the men have been assigned fictional designations in no way related to their

TABLE II  
LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE, CHANCE AND ACTUAL

Statistical Level of Confidence	Number of Pairings Expected by Chance	Number of Pairings Actually Found
.0001	0	3
.001	1	11
.01	4	13
.02	4	12
.05	13	27

TABLE III  
ACCURACY OF SUPERVISORS IN SELECTING MORE EFFECTIVE OFFICERS

Supervisor	Accurate Judgments	Incorrect Judgments	Unable to Give Opinion
A	29	6	4
B	18	6	15
C	4	2	23
D	8	0	31
E	14	2	23
F	19	8	12
G	19	5	15
H	23	4	12
I	23	10	6
J	32	2	5
K	5	3	31
L	6	1	32
M	5	0	34
N	2	0	37
O	7	1	31
P	3	4	32
Total.....	217	54	343

names, badge numbers, or other true identification. This table should be read to say that Supervisor A judged correctly who was the more effective officer in 29 pairs; picked the wrong man in six pairs; and was unable to give an opinion on four pairs. It will be noted that the over-all efficiency of the supervisors is indicated by the fact that they made correct judgments in better than 80 percent of the pairs. This can be considered confirming evidence that the statistics were pointing to a very real phenomenon.

The qualities or characteristics mentioned by the supervisors are tabulated in Table IV. To prepare that table, a record was kept for each man of all the comments about him made by all of the supervisors who knew him. For each item men-

TABLE IV

ITEMS MENTIONED BY SUPERVISORS AS CHARACTERISTIC  
OF THE MORE SUCCESSFUL AND LESS SUCCESSFUL  
YOUTH BUREAU OFFICERS

	More Successful Officers	Less Successful Officers
<b>I. ATTITUDE TOWARD BOYS</b>		
a. Genuine interest in children.	75	23
b. Expended extra effort to help boys.	14	4
c. Got jobs for boys.	15	3
d. No outstanding interest in boys.	3	19
<b>II. EFFECTIVENESS AS POLICE OFFICER</b>		
a. "Time meant nothing".	46	9
b. Complained about overtime.	9	25
c. "Successful policeman".	34	11
d. Thorough as an investigator; digger for facts.	42	10
e. Cooperative with fellow-officers.	12	0
f. Couldn't get along with fellow-officers.	3	11
g. Receptive to new ideas.	9	1
h. Knew "all the kids" in the neighborhood.	21	0
<b>III. ATTITUDE WHILE DEALING WITH BOYS</b>		
a. Manliness.	24	4
b. Quiet and calm.	22	5
c. Firm.	45	10
d. Tough or scolding.	9	24
e. Patient.	12	4
f. Empathic or objective understanding.	28	3
g. Ability to "get to" kids.	30	6
h. "Salesmanship".	27	2
i. Sincere.	27	2
j. Pleasing personality.	22	5
k. Phoney personality.	18	10
l. Aggressive.	8	12
<b>IV. RECORD KEEPING</b>		
a. Good, accurate, complete records.	54	14
b. Below average records.	13	4
<b>V. APPEARANCE</b>		
a. Neat, clean, sharp, above average.	84	30
b. Below average, a little sloppy.	3	14
c. Made a good impression by his appearance and deportment.	18	3
d. Big.	15	2
e. Small.	2	2

TABLE IV—Continued

	More Successful Officers	Less Successful Officers
<b>VI. OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</b>		
a. Boy Scouts.	19	28
b. Active in neighborhood and business men's clubs.	30	12
c. Church.	10	4
d. "Fanatical" about extra-curricular activities.	0	10
e. Not too active in community activities.	34	10
<b>VII. LEADERSHIP</b>		
a. Leader, organizer, "take charge" type.	47	10
b. Not too strong as a leader type.	27	6
c. Follower.	12	20
d. Promotional material.	8	3
<b>VIII. DEALINGS WITH PARENTS</b>		
a. Worked hard with parents.	47	13
b. Visited homes.	12	2
c. Contacted parents only as required by departmental regulations.	14	12
<b>IX. COMMUNICATION ABILITY</b>		
a. Good speaking or talking ability.	41	18
b. Couldn't express self orally.	2	7
c. Good report writer.	29	8
d. Couldn't express self in writing.	2	9
e. Could "con" information from a kid.	15	2
f. Lowered his intellectual level when talking to a boy.	13	0
<b>X. FILING</b>		
a. Considered cases on individual merits.	52	6
b. Quick to file.	8	18
c. Slow to file.	9	17

tioned a cumulation was prepared for all officers who in fact had been the more effective in their pairings, and for those who had been the less effective. The totals presented in Table IV, then, represent the total number of times a characteristic was mentioned by any supervisor for any man. This gives a rough picture of the qualities which were noted by supervisors.

If the items which most strongly differentiate the more successful officers were to be combined into a word description, the picture would be somewhat different from that of Weber earlier re-

ported for institutional workers. In summary, the effective Youth Bureau officer can be described as follows:

As might be expected he has a genuine interest in young people, which shows itself in extra effort on their behalf. He is a good police officer, tending to give each task the time it requires to do a thorough job; he works well with his fellow-officers. In his dealings with juveniles he is calm, manly, firm, and patient. He talks well to them, wording his remarks to their level. He keeps his promises to young people and exerts "salesmanship" in support of a law-abiding course of action. He presents a good appearance and keeps his records well. Outside activities, surprisingly, did not loom as important. In fact, so strong an allegiance to an outside organization as to unduly influence dispositions appeared on the negative side. Leadership ability did not appear to be critically essential. However, competence in speaking and writing were highly important. So was willingness to work hard with parents. As to disposition, the key attribute was a tendency to judge cases on their merits as contrasted with a policy of either quickly filing charges with the juvenile court or being reluctant to do so.

Of these attributes, the ones which might appear at the time of selection would be attitude towards young people, general effectiveness as a police officer, appearance, record-keeping, and ability to speak and write.

#### SUMMARY

This was a study of Youth Bureau police officers in Detroit in which effectiveness was measured by comparing officers serving in the same precincts as to the percentage of non-repeaters among boys for

whom they were the first police contact. Highly significant differences were found among officers. The characteristics which supervisors considered salient in the more effective officers could be described.

The most significant result of the study was to produce evidence which would appear to indicate that the relatively brief contact between a boy or his family and a police officer may be highly influential on a future "career" in delinquency. Although such contact may tend to be regarded as relatively "superficial" by theorists impressed with the profound nature of the demonstrated causes of juvenile delinquency, its influence would seem to justify considerable attention being given to it as one element in any community effort designed to bring about substantial reduction in delinquency.

If this is the case for Youth Bureau contacts we need to examine with objectivity the effects of other presumably "superficial" elements which could be incorporated in a community program. These could include the manner in which juvenile judges or referees conduct hearings, discussions of moral issues in schools, chaplain interviews, church preaching, and public rallies. We cannot afford to neglect these without a detailed effort to appraise their worth.

In conclusion, it must be recognized that this study was based on one group of police officers in one city using one source of statistics. It is essential that its fundamental conclusion be submitted to a variety of tests in other situations using other techniques and different types of evaluation. Only after such modified replication can we speak with the conviction required for the multitude of practical decisions which would follow from the results.