Linking community policing activities with social disorganization theory: Examples from Turkish National Police[1]

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Abstract

Police departments in Turkey utilize community policing philosophy in an effort to create a social bond between police and the citizens they serve. Although Turkish National Police has a centralized organizational structure, the way community policing is implemented is not the same at every police department. Most police departments use project designs as means to create community policing programs. This study suggests implementing a community policing program by using social disorganization theory (SDT) as a theoretical framework. According to SDT, one of the major predictors of social control in a community is the level of control by the community over adolescent groups. It is argued that uncontrolled teenagers often turn into gang groups and display delinquent behaviors. Therefore, the community's ability to supervise its teenagers is a way to stop the creation of gangs and delinquent behaviors. In explaining the linkage between social disorganization theory and different types of community policing implementations, Mardin Police Department's project "Ideallerimizdeki yarinlar" is offered as a case study. This project enables young individuals to understand and value the importance of community involvement and hard work in creating a better future both for them and for their families.

Keywords: Social disorganization; Community Policing; Turkish National Police; Crime; Terrorism

Introduction

Community policing has been the new paradigm in policing since it has been first introduced two decades ago. Although Turkish National Police (TNP) implemented this philosophy just after the start of the Millennium, it has been widely used throughout the organization. The way TNP implements community policing is based on project designs. In doing this, Community Policing departments create new projects and are always open to new ideas about how to best implement the philosophy. This is actually a very major step because any

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effort that does not have a doable plan or an effective objective will only result in loss of time and organizational resources.

Actually, one way to implement community policing projects is the use of sociological studies. In fact, community policing and such policing philosophies are created with the help of criminological theories. These theories help identify the problems that lead to criminal activities and offer solutions in order to minimize criminal activities. One of the sociological theories that match with community policing activities is social disorganization theory. This study examines community policing activities of police departments in Turkey and identifies the activities that utilize the teachings of social disorganization theory. Particularly, Mardin Police Department's project "Ideallerimizdeki yarinlar" is used as a case study.

Criminological Theories

Before explaining how we could link community policing to social disorganization theory, it is best to offer a glimpse of criminological theories that paved the way to social disorganization theory.

Since crime is a fact that destructs communities and create many problems, academic works about crimes and criminal behaviors were always in the interest of social science thinkers. During the Enlightment period, sociologists searched for ways to understand and deter crime. Until that time punishments were mainly harsh implementations. While opposing harsh and inhumane punishments for crime, Beccaria offered that punishments would be just enough to deter people from committing a crime (Peternoster &Bachman, 2001). In other words, criminal behaviors should be punished in a way that would be enough for restraining people from comitting them so that law-abiding citizens could enjoy their lives free of being a victim of crime.

The Enlightment period created the Classical school of criminology. Scholars of this school were mainly concerned about how to deter people from committing a crime by creating punishment laws that would outweigh the benefits of committing a crime (Peternoster &Bachman, 2001). They were not concerned about the reasons for crime because they saw people as rational human beings making their own rational choices for committing crimes as crime was a way to obtain benefits without hard work. Put in another way, instead of understanding the root causes of criminal behavior, they chose to deal with the consequences of criminal behaviors by creating a punishment system known to all people. Beccaria was in favor of the thought that "it is better to prevent crimes than to punish them" (Beccaria, 1764/1963:93). Named "Deterrence Thory", this idea was to prevent crimes by warning people that they would be punished if they engage in criminal behaviors. One of the early criminologists, Jeremy

Bentham, suggested that in administering punishment, Utilitarianism should be considered; that is, the actions should serve to the favor of the most people in the community (Brown, Esbensen, & Geis, 2010).

The new classical school of criminology emerged with similar ideas of classical school about the rationality of people in committing crimes. Theories like rational choice theory and routine activities theory were based on deterrence; however, added several other variables to the theory including the possible victims. According to the rational choice theory, the would be offender not only decides to commit a crime to obtain benefits, but also decides on the type of the crime, place of the crime, and the type of the victims. It is argued that if the would be victims take necessary precautionary measures for not being a victim of crime, it would deter would be offenders from committing that type of crime (Peternoster &Bachman, 2001, p.18).

Positivist school of criminology, on the other hand, emerged after classical school of criminology and was mainly concerned about individual characteristics of people in explaining criminal behaviors. The first prominent figure in positivist school was Cesare Lombroso, who argued that criminality is due to physical characteristics of people. In other words, Lombroso explained criminal behavior as a genetic reality and that the criminals were born with that reality. Numerous studies were conducted in order to understand the link between the biological characteristics of people and crime, such as IQ (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001).

As demonstrated, classical school was concerned with how to deter people from committing crimes, while the positivist school claimed that the criminal behavior was due to personal characteristics. A new way to approach crime came to attention during the early 19th century, when Shaw and McKay decided to include the element of crime to what Park and Burgess had started as an ecological study. In their study, "The City" Park, Burgess and McKenzie examined the effects of urbanization in Chicago and how that urbanization affected the city particularly in terms of housing (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925). They draw a concentric zone model in which they divided the city into five different zones and explained how mobility between each zones occurred. They were mainly concerned about the planning of the city and how variables such as, urbanization and industrialization affected the city. However, after exploring the fact that certain areas of the city were regarded as high-crime areas, Shaw and McKay decided to include the crime factor into ecological studies.

Social Disorganization Theory

Social disorganization theory rooted in the spatial distribution of crime. While studying crime, many criminologists realized that certain areas have high rates of crime while other areas

have low levels of crime. This fact inspired criminologists such as Bernard Shaw and Henry D. McKay and gave them the idea of working on the groups of people or neighborhoods instead of individuals. According to Shaw and McKay, criminal activities remained higher in certain neighborhoods, despite the change in the population (Basibuyuk & Karakus, 2010). In other words, even though the people who had lived in those neighborhoods moved away and other people came to live in those neighborhoods, the area remained a high crime place. Therefore, in addition to the personal factors, deviance should be explained by examining the community activities (Basibuyuk & Karakus, 2010). Shaw and McKay are referred to as environmental criminologists and their thought is referred to as the Chicago School. This name has its roots from the event that the first comprehensive experimental and academic work was done in the University of Chicago (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001).

On the other hand, the first compiling of spatial data occurred in France. Quetelet worked on the statistical data reported by prosecutors throughout the country to a central unit (Andresen, 2010). This data consisted of the types and locations of crimes, with the details of the suspects. Scholars from the University of Chicago also worked on criminal data compilation. Chicago, with a rapid increase in industrialization and population, was a good place to conduct such a study (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001). Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay worked on juvenile delinquency and their work focused on exploring the relationship between delinquency and the types of place (Basibuyuk & Karakus, 2010). They believed that individuals display behavior in accordance with the type of neighborhood they live in. They observed the neighborhoods on the basis of poverty, heterogeneity, and mobility (Browning, Feinberg & Dietz, 2004). They applied Concentric Zone model and divided the city of Chicago into five different zones (Wong, 2011). The zone of transition, which is a residential area adjacent to a business district, had the highest rates of crime, whereas the residential and commuter zones had the least rates of crime. Despite the change in the ethnic structure of the zone of transition, the rate of delinquency remained the same (Paternoster & Bachman, 2001). Having these results, they argued that in areas where the crime rates are very high, people actually commit crime as a response to the disorganized nature of the neighborhood. In other words, crime occurs because of the absence of community-based social control (Shoemaker, 1996).

Community Policing

Throughout the history police organizations used various types of policing styles in order to maintain public order. The most recent policing philosophy introduced during the late 70s is community policing. Community policing philosophy was created because of the failure of

traditional policing in terms of maintaining public order and creating a social bond between citizens and the police (Delice and Duman, 2012).

One of the phrases that we have been frequently observing is the term "quality of life". While governmental organizations are still doing their jobs in order to serve their citizens, they have taken new steps to increase their way of service to a further level. Community policing, with its objectives, help many governmental organizations to achieve this goal. Particularly, police departments can help citizens have a more quality of life by simply adhering to the principles of the philosophy.

There are many dimensions of a quality life, one of which is the absence of the fear of crime. Kelling asserts that visible police involvement in the community by means of foot patrol helps reducing fear of crime among the citizens (2000). One of the methods community policing use is the utilization of foot patrols which perfectly matches with Kelling's assertion. Instead of being in vehicles, by being on foot police officers become more accessible to citizens.

Community policing activities also reflect proactive policing philosophy. According to Clark, proactive policing enables police departments to make organizational decisions based on intelligence which will enable them to efficiently and effectively allocate organizational resources (2006). The intelligence data is created with the help of community policing activities. These activities oblige officers to be among public, obtain information about the community from direct sources (citizens) and figure out potential problems in their precincts.

Nevertheless, community policing is implemented in several ways. Some police departments employ community policing as an intelligence gathering method. They learn crime hot spots in the jurisdiction by the use of community policing officers. Others use community policing activities in order to create a social bond with the citizens and not necessarily focus on criminal activities. Furthermore, some police departments use community policing to create neighborhood awareness in preventing and fighting crime. Notwithstanding the differences in methods, they all promote police-community partnership.

Community policing and social disorganization theory

Community policing activities should be linked with criminological theories in order to achieve better results. These theories can guide policing policy makers in creating goal oriented community policing projects. Some may argue that even basic community policing activities have remarkable results such as, understanding crime patterns and trends, and reducing fear of crime and disorder. However, police departments can achieve better results if they adhere to a set of principals and convey these principals to their officers. This would create an organizational

culture that embraces community policing. Otherwise, police departments may have to rely on the practices of police officers on the street which may differ from one officer to another.

As noted earlier, social disorganization theory argues that criminal behaviors occur in neighborhoods with low social bonding. One of the major principles of community policing is the creation of a social bond between the police and the citizens. Therefore, having the theory in mind, police organizations can work on creating a social bond both with the citizens and among the citizens.

Having a theory based community policing philosophy would also help police training facilities in designing police training activities. As a police educator and police administrator, I have experienced that community policing is understood totally different by officers of the same police department. Some argue that they should act as social workers in order to aid people, such as finding shelter to homeless people and providing food for the needy families while others believe that police should talk to citizens and try to understand their problems related to criminal activities. These differences in the perception of community policing create differences in the acts of community policing officers and this may confuse the citizens in the community. Knowing the philosophy requires setting specific goals and the steps to be taken in order to achieve those goals.

Examples from Turkey

Turkey has a national police force that maintains public order throughout the country. Other than the rural places that are policed by gendarmeries, Turkish National Police (TNP) is the only authority in policing. TNP decided to utilize community policing philosophy in the late 2000s. The first implementations were not official and were implemented by some police departments with their discretion. In 2003, Turkish National Police and Spanish Authorities created a joint project as a part of European Union twinning project entitled "Increasing accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness of Turkish National Police"(TDP Hizmet, 2006). Creating community policing units in police departments became an essential part of the project. In 2007, the General Directorate of Turkish National Police published an internal circular and made Community Policing an official implementation (Aksu, 2008). The first implementation included eight major police departments in Turkey including Ankara, the capital city of Turkey and Istanbul, the largest city in Turkey (Aksu, 2008). Currently, almost all city police departments created community policing units and are carrying out community policing activities.

Having one national police force requires one single policy in terms of community policing; however, the practice of police departments across the country shows otherwise. Some

police departments apply projects like family police project of Erzincan Police Department, whereas others organize regular meetings with the citizens. Generally, the way community policing works reflects the ideas of the chief of police in that particular police department.

Among those practices, some of them adhere to the teachings of social disorganization theory. There are 81 provinces in Turkey and each province has multiple community policing projects. In this paper, three different implementations used by community policing units of most police departments are briefly explained. Furthermore, a unique implementation of a community policing project that takes place in the city of Mardin is thoroughly portrayed.

General Implementations

Peace meetings

Peace meeting are organized by community policing officers in an effort to create awareness among communities. These meetings are held in different neighborhoods and citizens from those neighborhoods are invited to participate, listen, and share their opinions. According to social disorganization theory, creating a social bond among citizens in a particular neighborhood might reduce crime and the peace meetings create such an opportunity. Particularly, with the affects of internal migration in many cities, the newly formed neighborhoods offer residence to people with limited commonalities. Therefore, it is essential for those people to get to know each other, share their experiences with the neighborhood and try to establish a peaceful community.

Balıkesir Example:

Balıkesir Police Department Community policing units organize regular peace meetings with the community. In these meetings, the role and the scope of community policing is described to citizens who attend the meetings. Then citizens are informed about how criminal activities occur in their neighborhoods and how they can survive from those by applying simple preventive measures. While community policing officers warn citizens about criminal activities, they try not to cause fear of crime or disorder (Huzur toplantilari, 2009).

In Turkey, apartment complexes are not owned by companies like the ones in United States. Each apartment is owned by a different person and tenants have meetings in which they make decisions about the apartment complex. Community policing officers attend to those meetings and advise the tenants about the ways to make their apartment complexes safer (Huzur toplantilari, 2009).

Abandoned Buildings Projects

Broken windows theory was written by George Kelling and James Q. Wilson in 1982 and opened a new era in policing philosophy of United States law enforcement agencies (Kelling, 2000). Kelling argued that abandoned vehicles or buildings send a message to the community that there is no order in that place and criminal activity might occur at anytime. Moreoever, these places attract people who might create public disorder (Kelling, 2000).

Kirsehir Police Department community policing teams emphasized the importance of broken windows theory and decided to take a step in working on buildings that are abandoned or not being used by anyone. They argue that abandoned buildings are targeted by people who may be engaging in criminal activities. Furthermore, people who create disorder in the communities use such buildings. Therefore, they decided to work with the municipalities and have those abandoned buildings restored by their owners.

A similar project is undertaken by Balikesir Police Department. Community policing officers patrol their jurisdictions and locate abandoned constructions and buildings (Olumsuz Alanlarin, 2009). Particularly, small businesses start constructions with great expectations; however, discontinue due to financial inabilities. In such cases, those constructions stay half built for long periods of time and become home to many homeless and criminals. Balikesir Police Department works hard to safeguard those places by asking the owners to either complete those constructions or take measures for limiting entries to the construction.

Beat Assignments

One of the best implications of community policing is to reach citizens in their own environment by assigning officers to particular beats. Many police departments utilize this method and convey a message to that part of the community that they have their personal police officer. This officer acts as an envoy, talks to everyone in the beat, tries to understand problems related to that neighborhood, and work with the police department to overcome those problems. Citizens know that they have access to that officer at anytime.

In terms of social disorganization theory, problems occur in specific neighborhoods as a response to the disorganized nature of the community (Shoemaker, 1996). Having an officer assigned to a neighborhood indicates that the neighborhood will have an order or at least the police department is working on maintaining that order. It is the absence of order that leads to criminal activities and social disorders. Therefore, having someone working on creating such order conveys a significant message to the community.

Bursa Example

Bursa Police Department implements beat assignments for each neighborhood in the city. These officers were carefully selected and trained before they got their assignments. Each officer received in service training about public relations, efficient communication methods, public psychology, body language, and crime analysis (Mahalle polisi, n.d.). These officers normally work during day shift hours: however, they can be reached in cases of emergency at any time. Bursa Police Department asks citizens to contact these beat officers anytime they feel necessary. For example, a citizen may realize traffic problems in a certain intersection and can contact beat officer in order for police to take a precautionary measure. Unless the issue requires immediate police action, such as an ongoing robbery, citizens can contact beat officers to report a problem, share information, or offer solutions. These officers also organize regular meetings with the citizens in the community. These meetings offer them the opportunity to provide valuable information about creating a safer environment in their neighborhoods.

Bursa Police Department utilizes the department's website to introduce beat officers to citizens in the community. Citizens can see the name and contact information of the beat officer and they can also send messages online if they prefer email communication (Mahalle polisi, n.d.).

Case Study: Mardin Project a unique implementation

SDT and Mardin Project

According to Samson and Groves (1989), one of the major predictors of social control in a community is the level of control by the community over adolescent groups. They further note that uncontrolled teenagers often turn into gang groups. Therefore, the community's ability to supervise its teenagers is a way to stop the creation of gangs and delinquent behaviors. It is a well-known fact that terrorist groups often target adolescents because adolescents are easier to manipulate due to their lack of life experiences. In media, we often see adolescents in Eastern parts of Turkey participating in terrorism related demonstrations. Most of the time they are used in the frontlines and we observe them as children who throw stones to law enforcement officers (Ozdemir, 2012,p.74). Furthermore, adolescents are often seen as using molotof cocktails and other kinds of basic explosives. These types of behaviors can be likened to the use of guns and other dangerous materials in youth gangs.

SDT offers a concentric zone model in a city in order to explain the differences in crime patterns between various parts of the city. According to the model, places with high mobility, low SES and low social bonds are more suitable for crime compared to other parts of the city.

Although SDT is offered to explain in-city crime patterns, I argue that it can be used for nation-wide crime problems, such as terrorism.

When we examine terrorist groups, we often observe them targeting young individuals. In their study, Ozuyilmaz and Demir (2012) examined terrorism related activities in Istanbul and found that 3 out of every 4 people arrested for such activities were individuals aged 15 to 25. According to the SDT, unsupervised teenage groups in socially weak communities often engage in gang activities. Like the gang groups who target unsupervised teenagers, terrorist groups target unsupervised teenagers. It is a known fact that the eastern parts of Turkey, with lower educational opportunities and low SES, are suitable for low social control. Also mobility in terms of population is high in those cities, with many people looking to find jobs and better life in major cities, such as Istanbul (Ozdemir, 2012).

One way to overcome crime problems explained by SDT is to create community programs in order to make the community a better place to live. Without achieving this objective, people in those neighborhoods will always be looking for opportunities to leave those places and those places will have no attrativeness for the possible new community members. Likewise, many families in the Eastern parts of Turkey feel like their communities are not desirable because of the demonstrations caused by terrorist groups and the lack of stability. Some children lack schooling because of fear while some lack schooling due to their active roles in demonstrations organized by terrorist groups. In both ways, the community becomes less desirable for ordinary citizens.

Another aspect of SDT is the prevalence of incivilities and disorder in neighborhoods. Similarly, many terrorist organizations create incivilities in easterrn parts of Turkey in order to prove that governments neglect those places. In order to do that, they use their members to draw graffiti on walls and create disturbances among citizens of those neighborhoods.

In the case study, the community members direct adolescents of different age groups into participating in the project. This project enables these young people to understand and value the importance of community involvement and hard work in creating a better future both for them and for their families.

The Project

Mardin Police Department initiated a unique project called "İdeallerimizdeki yarınlar (Tomorrow in our ideals)". Although the project originated in Mardin, it encompassed several neighbor cities such as, Batman, Bitlis, Bingol, Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Mardin, Mus, Siirt, Sanliurfa, Sirnak and Van (Ideallerimizdeki yarinlar, 2009). These cities are located in the Eastern part of

Turkey and they are not as developed as the cities of Western Turkey. Turkey experience terrorism related problems in that area for over 30 years and is looking for ways to overcome the problem by using means other than military intervention. Since many terrorist organizations carry out recruit activities in those cities, creating social projects like this one becomes significant.

Although not mentioned in the description of the purpose, this project uses social disorganization theory as a framework. Social disorganization theory posits that certain places in a city have higher crime rates and these parts of Turkey have terrorism related problems. The theory also argues that using social programs might reduce crime problems in that particular area which can be adapted to using social programs in order to reduce signing for terrorists groups in the area.

This project might act as a social program in order to motivate young people in the region. According to the project description, education can solve any problem in the community and providing opportunities for education might reduce barriers between the citizens and the government (Ideallerimizdeki yarinlar, 2009). In this project, education departments and many governmental agencies collaborated with Mardin Police Department. A writing contest about how children visualize their future was organized among high school students. More than 20 thousand high school students participated in the contest. The children depicted how they want to see their future and most of them dreamed a world putting peace in the center. Many students were awarded and given various presents. Furthermore, the best essays were included in a book entitled "110 ideal 11 gercek hayat" (110 dreams 11 true stories).

One aspect of the project that is mentioned in the book is the importance of a role model for young people in shaping their lives. According to the book, young individuals often find a role model and try to become like their role models. If they make the right decision in choosing their role models, than there is a great chance for them to become successful people. For that reason, it is important to offer young people role models who had originated from their own hometowns and become successful people (Teymur, S.2010). Therefore, this book also included interviews with 11 distinguished personalities from Turkey. These interviews were very important, since each person was selected carefully based on their hometowns which also represented the 11 cities included in the contest. The participants were reminded that each of their cities brought out successful people who work for the best interest of their country and if they work hard enough, they can succeed such as those important people. It is extremely motivating for young people to see a person who started at their level to climb up the ladder for being an important figure for the country. Furthermore, winners of the essay competition had a chance to meet with the role models in an organization that took place after the competition.

Conclusion

Examples from Turkey suggest that community policing activities are not based on criminological theories. Nor they focus on finding specific hot spots or understanding crime trends. While, some implementations resemble the common activities of community policing worldwide, the overall presentation of community policing in Turkey is leaned towards creating a bond between the police and the community they serve. Although this is one of the major components of community policing, it does not reflect the whole ideology.

All of the different implementations of community policing activities present hard work from police officers and an achievement of a social bond from the citizens. However, had those activities been organized in accordance with a theory, they would have been more successful. In other words, when community policing activities are backed up theoretically, both the police and public will have a chance to observe measurable outcomes. In most cases, police administrators oppose to community policing projects due to the lack of measurable outcomes. When the administrators are not sure about the benefits of a community policing project, they become reluctant to use the organizational resources including manpower.

Nevertheless, social disorganization theory seems to be a good start for community policing activities and it can help police administrators to focus on certain parts of the city or even the country. While terrorism related problems seem to originate from certain parts of Turkey, their effects reach to the country as a whole. In other words, almost every citizen is affected from terrorism like problems. Therefore, in accordance with the theory, Turkish National Police should focus on the Eastern parts of the Turkey and treat them as socially disorganized neighborhoods and offer solutions that would enable social organization in that part of the country. If the citizens, particularly adolescents, understand the value of their nation and believe that they have a chance to shape their future by studying and contributing to their community, they would be less likely to join terrorist organizations and become problematic or delinquent citizens.

While this research stands at this position, there must be further research in order to understand the true effects of community policing when linked to social disorganization theory.

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