



More police, greater powers, less paperwork?

Often we hear people in the media saying that more police on the beat will decrease crime: *We need more police, We need police doing less paper work; Police need more powers.*

Actually, it's a bit more complicated.

Police already hold substantial powers. As the 1997 Wood Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service found, "The powers entrusted to police to carry arms, to use coercive force...and, in extreme circumstances, to take lives...to deprive citizens of their liberty...are very substantial powers."

The Royal Commission also recognised that the use of these powers was concentrated in the hands of the youngest and least experienced officers. What police need is not **more power**, but better training and supervision.

While 'paperwork' is often criticised, it can actually protect citizens – by making police more accountable for their actions.

Does having more police reduce crime?

Crime rates are not always dependent on the number of police. Victoria, the state with the lowest crime rates, also has the smallest number of police per capita. On the other hand, the Northern Territory has the largest number of police per capita – more than double Victoria – and is ranked number 2 in *both* personal and property crimes.

The idea that "More Police = Less Crime" doesn't always add up.

One study found that a 10% increase in police numbers would result in a 3% decrease in burglary – and that was the biggest impact across all forms of crime. In New South Wales, 10% more police would mean about **\$385 million per year**. Having more police is a very expensive response to crime prevention.

Imagine what else could be done with \$385 million to prevent crime. We could invest in community development, education, health and social services. This kind of spending has long term implications for reducing crime.

Spending more money on extra police might increase the numbers of people who are caught for some sorts of crime, but it is not a long term or cost effect crime reduction solution. Some studies indicate that crime could actually rise with more police on the street, because less risky crimes become more prevalent. More police may cost our communities in more ways than one.

Do sniffer dogs and police on the streets make communities safe?

Many people do feel safer seeing police on the streets. Sniffer dogs also sometimes make us feel safer. Again, it is important to look at the amount that is spent on this style of policing. Each of the 30 sniffer dogs owned by the New South Wales police force cost the taxpayers **\$90,000.00** – the equivalent of the annual salaries for 2 teachers.



Beyond bars: alternatives to custody

NSW Council of Social Service * Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW) * Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace * Guthrie House * NSW MRC Forum * CRC Justice Support * Shopfront Youth Legal Centre * Youth Justice Coalition * Justice Action * ACTCOSS * Hepatitis C Council of NSW * Indigenous Social Justice Association * NSW Council for Civil Liberties * Youth Action & Policy Association * Intellectual Disability Rights Service * Prison Reform Council * No New Women's Prison Campaign * Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre * Men's Health & Wellbeing Association (NSW) * JewishCare * Eileen Baldry (UNSW) * Russell Hogg (UWS) * Chris Cunneen (USYD) * Julie Stubbs (USYD) * Ann Symonds * Tony Trimmingham (Family Drug Support) * Tim Anderson * Cleonie Quayle * Melinda Smith

Imagine the difference that 60 extra teachers in our school system would make. Education has the ability to combat crime more effectively than sniffer dogs.

In a recent “sting”, using sniffer dogs, during which dozens of police officers - being paid overtime - were involved, of the 500 people who were detained needlessly, only 9 people were charged with minor offences. It is pretty clear that dogs do not sniff out dealers. The question is do we want 60 teachers educating our children or 30 dogs sniffing out petty offenders?

Even though having police on the street can make us feel safer, it is important to remember that many serious crimes like murder, attempted murder, assault and sexual assault are usually not perpetrated by strangers on the street, but by people we know. Feeling safe on the street is important, and having police on the street is one way that this can happen. However, there are a whole lot of other approaches we can take to make our communities safer.

Does Zero Tolerance Work?

The idea that “Getting criminals early stops crime later” doesn’t always hold up. Involving youth and minor offenders into the criminal justice system actually *increases* the likelihood of repeat offending. So the ideas of zero tolerance (that if police crack down on minor crimes than this will lead to an overall reduction in future crime) are deeply flawed.

Studies have shown that the factors affecting repeat offenders are poverty, inadequate education, intellectual disability, poor health, negative parent-child relations, social inequality, racism, unemployment and general lack of opportunity. Once you’ve been to gaol, you’re more likely to go to gaol for any future offences. On the other hand, when people are involved in community-based solutions, targeted not only

towards crime reduction, but also skill development, crime decreases.

Crime is a Social Problem.

Police are just a small aspect of our criminal justice system. Laying blame on them is as unhelpful as putting them on a pedestal. As the New South Wales Police Service Submission to the *Inquiry into Crime Prevention through Social Support 1999* says, “Given that police often only deal with one aspect of the problem, they cannot be the total answer and can only play their part in a broader crime prevention approach.”

Our communities need real crime prevention. We need to address the social factors that influence why some people get into crime. Police strategies are often not very good at long term crime prevention. A broader and long term crime prevention approach would include looking at issues of unemployment, lack of access to health services and educational opportunities, child neglect and poverty.

These are complex problems with multi-faceted solutions. Spending money on extra police or sniffer dogs is not as effective in reducing crime as investing seriously in long term crime control strategies.



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