

**Have Community Policing Initiatives Changed Police Perceptions of
Accountability in Macquarie Fields and have they led to Better Police-
Community Relations?**

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ABSTRACT

In February 2005, riots involving local youth against police erupted in Macquarie Fields following the deaths of two local young men who were in a stolen vehicle being pursued by police. The riots at the time were dismissed by the serving Government, the Opposition, NSW police management and sections of the media, as merely a handful of young thugs behaving poorly. However, subsequent media coverage, political debate recorded in Hansard, academic literature and the findings of the Standing Committee on Social Issues (2006) revealed discontent amongst some residents concerning the behavior, attitudes and inconsistent actions of Macquarie Fields police. This study, through interviews conducted with government and non-government service providers servicing the Macquarie Fields community and interviews/observations conducted with Macquarie Fields police participants, examined perceptions held by Macquarie Fields police concerning their accountability and partnership with the community. It sought to discover whether police-community programs implemented following the 2005 riots impacted upon police perceptions of accountability to the community and led to improved relations between police and community.

Findings indicated that despite the attempts of Government and police management to improve relations between Macquarie Fields police and community, the relationship remained problematic. Police participants were found to hold variable notions of accountability and partnership towards the community. This combined negatively with the primary crime reduction strategy of 'stopping searching and moving on' local youth socializing in public places, which was reported by community service respondents as being conducted by younger inexperienced police in an adversarial manner.

Findings from this study also indicated that poor police attitudes towards the community were influenced by a problematic work environment in which police predominantly came into contact with a small percentage of the community, namely youths from the Department of Housing estates. Many of these interactions consisted of police being subjected to verbal and sometimes physical abuse. Furthermore, police considered they

were not respected, unappreciated and being used by these community members. These constant adversarial interactions have led to police negatively stereotyping other members of the Macquarie Fields community. In addition, police participants saw themselves different to the local community members with whom they came in contact. Police regarded these residents as ‘others’ and perceived vast dissimilarities between themselves and the residents in terms of: ambition; care of children; morals and values; drug usage; education; employment; hygiene; motivation and respect for authority and family. This impacted negatively upon the manner in which police interacted with community members.

Findings from this study are significant in light of the commitment of Australian police organisations to be more accountable to local communities through the implementation of community policing initiatives. The adverse impact of the socially disorganised Macquarie Fields community upon police perceptions of accountability to the community and subsequent fluctuation of service may be of relevance to the policing of other Australian disorganised communities where tensions exist between communities and police.

In terms of police policy and practice, this study recommends that police management at Macquarie Fields need to recognise the adverse impact of the socially disorganised Macquarie Fields community upon police attitudes. Furthermore, strategies need to be undertaken by management to address this issue. These include; addressing the ‘crime fighting’ mindset through the encouragement of a service-oriented approach; experienced police being paired with inexperienced officers; additional deployment of female officers; a greater emphasis placed upon problem oriented policing strategies. Also, the education of police plays a pivotal role in assisting to combat the adverse impact of social disorganisation upon police attitudes and behavior. Education, involving social difference; effective communication with young people; community policing; de-escalation and conflict management techniques; and an awareness of the negative impact of certain police defensive tactics, may assist police in their role and help alleviate the strained police-community relationship at Macquarie Fields.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature of Candidate

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	I
CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
APPENDICES	xi
LIST OF DIAGRAMS	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
GLOSSARY	xiv
ABBREVIATIONS	xv

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction	1
Research aim	6
Research question	7
Overview of thesis	8
Summary	15

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction	16
Overview of literature review	18
Accountability in policing	20
The meaning of the term ‘police accountability’	20
Bodies to which police are said to be accountable	22
The need for police to be held accountable	26
The problematic nature of policing for accountability mechanisms	30
NSWP accountability reform	35
The Lusher Inquiry (1981)	37
The Wood Royal Commission (1994)	42
The Wood Royal Commission’s findings concerning community policing, community consultation and accountability	46
Review of reform post Wood Royal Commission	48
Facilitating accountability through community policing	56
The use of community policing initiatives to facilitate police accountability	56
Concerns regarding the effectiveness and practicality of community policing	59

The commitment of Australian police organizations concerning accountability and community policing	64
The importance of public support for community policing and the policing role	67
Factors impacting upon the success of community policing initiatives	69
The effect of police misconduct	69
The negative impact of social disorganisation upon community attitudes towards police and support for community policing	72
Factors adversely impacting upon noble intentions of police recruits leading to negative attitudes and conduct in their policing role and a resultant decline of services to the community	78
The noble intentions of policing students and the positive impact of academy training	78
Attitudes and conduct of police towards communities affected by the socialisation of police recruits to the negative aspects of the police culture and the unconstructive experiences associated with operational policing	79
Detrimental impact of socially disorganised communities upon police misconduct and attitudes of victim deservedness	84
Social disorganisation and police perceptions of accountability	88
Summary	92

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction	95
Research design	103
Sources of data	103
Interview data collection design	105
Observation data collection design	107
Triangulation of data	109
Research Process	110
Ethics approval	110
Making contact with the field	111
Participants	114
Participants 'stories	114
Bias and Bracketing	119
Transcription of interviews	119
Data analysis and coding	120
Limitations of the research	124
Ethical considerations	128
Summary	131

CHAPTER 4: HISTORY OF MACQUARIE FIELDS RIOTS

Introduction	133
Macquarie Fields riots	134
Analysis of police response to the Macquarie fields riots	137
Description of socio-economic factors concerning Macquarie Fields	142
The silencing of local community discontent	145
Causes of the Macquarie Fields riots	149
Brixton riots of 1981	154
American race riots of 1967	160
Summary	163

CHAPTER 5: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY POLICING AT MACQUARIE FIELDS

Introduction	164
Community policing initiatives implemented at Macquarie Fields prior to and following the 2005 riots	164
Claims of improvements in relations between Macquarie Fields police and the local community	170
Standing Committee on Social Issues findings and recommendations	173
Indicators suggesting that police-community relations since the 2005 riots remain problematic	177
Summary	181

CHAPTER 6: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MACQUARIE FIELDS POLICE AND THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Introduction	182
Profile of respondents	185
Macquarie Fields police management	188
Relations between Macquarie Fields Police and their local community	198
Notions held by street police as to what constitutes effective police accountability	209
Understandings of street police as to what makes up a police-community partnership	213
Tactics employed by police to drive down local crime rate	218
Summary	225

CHAPTER 7: UNDERLYING FACTORS THAT EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MACQUARIE FIELDS POLICE AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Introduction	229
Police attitudes towards the Macquarie Fields community	230
Appreciation	231
Being used	232
Frustration	233
Respect	234
Belonging to the community	235
Deservedness of victims	236
Views of suspects	240
Observations of professional conduct	240
Motivation for professional conduct	242
Factors impacting upon police attitudes towards the Macquarie	244
Police contact with the Macquarie Fields community	244
Police-local youth interaction	245
Stereotyping	252
Police perceptions of difference between themselves and Macquarie	
Fields residents	253
Ambition	254
Care of children	254
Morals and values	255
Drug usage	256
Education	257
Employment	257
Hygiene	258
Motivation	259
Respect for authority and family	260
Police education	262
Initial shock	263
Police training to assist police interact effectively with youth	266
Summary	271

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Introduction	275
Expectations concerning the relationship between police and community	276
Police managements' attempts	276
Continuation of poor relations between police and community	280
Crime reduction strategies implemented by Macquarie Fields police	283

Surprises concerning the relationship between police and local community	288
Accountability initiatives implemented by police management not impacting upon attitudes of street police	289
Community partnership initiatives failing to impact upon attitudes and practices of street police	290
Impact of ‘stopping, searching and moving on’ crime reduction strategy upon the police-community relationship	296
Impact of younger inexperienced police upon police-community relations	302
Underlying factors contributing to the problematic relationship	304
Attitudes held by street police towards the local community	307
Perceptions of difference held by police	311
Summary	314

CHAPTER 9: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE & RESEARCH

Introduction	317
Recognition of the adverse impact of the socially disorganised local community upon police attitudes	319
Address ‘crime-fighting’ mindset	320
Implications for police practice involving police training	334
Training required to assist officers understand social difference	336
Enhancements in police training required to assist young inexperienced police communicate effectively with community members, particularly youth	340
Incorporation of community policing into the curriculum for new police to be undertaken during the probationary phase of their training	341
Impact of certain police defensive tactics upon the problematic police-community relationship	342
Greater involvement of local disadvantaged youth in police-community meetings	350
Summary	352

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

Introduction	354
Limitations of the research	357
Research sample	358
Role of police management in the facilitation of accountability and community policing initiatives	359
Contribution of the research	360
Implications for future research	362
Summary	363

REFERENCES	365
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1	List of government/non-government service providers who gave evidence before the standing Committee on Social Issues	410
Appendix 2	Ethics approval letter from Griffith University	412
Appendix 3	Research approval letter New South Wales Police	413
Appendix 4	Information sheet for community service participants	415
Appendix 5	Information sheet for police participants	417
Appendix 6	Informed consent statement	419
Appendix 7	Demographic questions community service respondents	421
Appendix 8	Demographic questions police participants	422
Appendix 9	Interview schedule for community service participants	423
Appendix 10	Interview schedule for police participants	427
Appendix 11	Information sheet for Macquarie Fields residents	431
Appendix 12	Nodes	432

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1	The relationship between Macquarie Fields police and community	184
Diagram 2	Factors adversely impacting upon police-community relationship	288
Diagram 3	The impact of cycles of rejection and disrespect upon police	305
Diagram 4	Attitudes of street police	308
Diagram 5	Practice and policy implications arising from this study	335

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Problems and events in NSWP leading up to 1981	36
Table 2	Problems and events experienced by NSWP (1982-1995)	39
Table 3	Profile of respondent's employment	114
Table 4	Profile of police participants	187
Table 5	Profile of community service provider participants	188
Table 6	Perceptions of difference held by street police towards residents	312

GLOSSARY

‘COP’	Community Oriented Policing
‘Housos’	Department of Housing residents
‘Person of Interest’	Suspect in a criminal matter
‘Scheduling’	A person suffering from a mental disorder which places them at risk of harm to themselves or others being admitted to hospital by police.
‘Trog Juice’	Antiseptic gel applied by police to their hands following physical contact with Department of Housing residents.

ABBREVIATIONS

CMT	Conflict Management Training
NSWP	New South Wales Police
PARC/VERA	Police Assessment Resource Centre and Vera Institute of Justice
POP	Problem Oriented Policing
RBT	Random Breath Test

