

## POLICE - PUBLIC RELATIONS: A General View in the Light of British Sources

Polis-Halk İlişkileri: İngiliz Kaynakları Işığında Genel Bir Bakış

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### Özet

Polis, suç ve kanunlara riayetini sağlanması, çok içli-dışlı kavramlar olarak görülür. Diğer taraftan halk, polisin görevini tamamlamasında suçla mücadele stratejilerinin merkezinde görülür. Bu sebeple, polis-halk ilişkilerinin bozulması veya geliştirilmesi konusu, suçla mücadelede temel bir konudur ve polis ve halk arasındaki ilişkilerle ilgili bu konu, suçla savaşta, geçtiğimiz on yıllarda, hatırı sayılır bir dikkati çekmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, polisin ve halkın birbirlerine yaklaşımlarını tartışmak ve bu yaklaşımlar ile başarılı polis halk ilişkileri arasında bir ilişkinin veya etkinin olup olmadığını tespit etmektir. Bu konuda temel faktörler nelerdir ve bunlar polis halk ilişkilerini nasıl etkilemektedir? Polisin ve halkın algılamalarını şekillendiren sebepler nelerdir? Ayrıca, insanların bizzat ihkak-ı hakka başvurmaları (hukuku kendi ellerine alıp uygulamaları) da 'neden bazı insanlar polise başvurmayı tercih ederken diğer bazıları kendi başlarının çaresine bakarlar' bağlamında kısaca incelenecektir. Son olarak, bu çalışma, Türkiye'de bu sahada eksikliği hissedilen çalışmalara ve alanlara bir örnek olması ve karşılaştırma imkanı açısından, İngiliz kaynaklı, bilgi ve araştırmalardan yola çıkılarak yapılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Polis, Halk, Tutum, Polis Halk İlişkileri, İhkak-ı Hak.

### Abstract

Police, crime and law enforcement appear to be very closely connected. On the other hand, the public is widely seen at the very centre of strategies for crime fighting to complement the police task. Therefore the question of deterioration or improvement of police-public relations is a fundamental issue in tackling crime and the issue concerning relationships between police and public has attracted considerable attention in fighting of crime in recent decades.

The main purpose of this study is to discuss the attitudes of police and public towards each other. Whether there is any impact or relation between successful police-public relations and those attitudes. What are the main factors which have an impact and how do they influence police-public relations? What are the reasons and factors which shape their perceptions vigilantism will also be examined briefly in the context of 'why some people try to solve their problems by themselves rather reporting them to the police? Finally, the sources and information used in this article were derived from British based researches. However, it has been aimed to give a guide to the area which lacks in Turkey.

**Key Words:** Police, Public, Attitudes, Vigilantism, Police Public Relations.

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## Introduction

The police and the public have both ambiguous relations with, and attitudes towards each other. These relations and attitudes are mixed with deference and hostility, fear and respect. Since both sides are human-beings, each party is fallible in its judgement. Interestingly, both sides can be right in a case at the very same time. As narrated in a story<sup>1</sup> two men in dispute submitted their case to a third for judgement. The first man was told that he was in the right. The second man then stated his side of the case and was told that he too was in the right. At this point, the wife of the 'judge' was surprised and asked her husband: 'How can you say that both of them are right in the same case.' The 'judge' replied: 'You are also right.' This story reflects very clearly the relationships between the police and the public. If one listens to both sides and looks at the same case, one may come to the conclusion that both sides are right.

In recent years, the deterioration of relationships with the public has been one of the most important problems to confront the police. It is frequently alleged that over the last few years there has been an increase in public dissatisfaction with police performance and the public is less happy with the policing they receive than they were in the past.

In many societies, an increase in crime rates is ascribed to a lack of strong police-public relations as well as economical and political failures. If the gap between the police and the public that the police serve widens, the public may be inclined not to report offences, give evidence and help the police in various situations against law-breakers. This reluctance of the public renders the work of the police more difficult and isolation of the police in the community increases. If the police feel that they are surrounded by a hostile public with distrust, this will cause different attitudes than if they receive respect, co-operation, understanding and 'approval' from the society as a whole.

In police-public encounters, both the police and members of the public believe that it is other side's 'duty' to behave in certain ways. Recent decades have witnessed a long series of surveys carried out for the purpose of ascertaining peoples' attitudes towards the police and vice versa. Although, in general, the police enjoy a great deal of public satisfaction and approval, there are certain sections of society with negative attitudes toward the police or some of their practices and behaviour. Crime will not be prevented through exhortation. It requires a change of both public and police attitudes towards dealing with the problem.

In this study, police-public relations will be examined from both police and public viewpoint. This will be done by looking at their attitudes towards each other. As a pattern of police public relations, vigilantism will be considered briefly.

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<sup>1</sup> This anecdote is attributed to a witty man called 'Nasradden Hoja' who supposedly lived in Turkey (also claimed to be a Pakistani, an Arab, a Bulgarian) in the Twelfth century. He is famous for his witty remarks, and his jokes are commonly referred to by people from all ranks. UNESCO announced that 1996 will be celebrated as the year of Nasradden Hoja.

### Police Attitudes Towards the Public

In gauging how police and public interact and, in judging their behaviour, it is necessary to make some evaluations. So how are we to judge police performance and behaviour? What is to be the touchstone of police actions? Whose standards will play a decisive role in this judgement? "The law itself can provide no general answer to (these) questions but it comes fairly close by providing the concept of the of 'reasonable' men or women" (Southgate, 1986:10) which is too vague and loose concept to interpret and bring into practice.

The police have different opinions, assumptions and expectations that can influence their approach. In a study, deference was shown to the police in one of ten encounters. On the other hand, the police showed this deference on just one encounter in a hundred (Southgate, 1986:35). The police seem to have an expectation that their status as being guardians of the law deserves the deference from the public more than the reverse situation. Black and Reiss (1967) suggest that two points can be drawn from data related to police conduct in response to the demeanour of the public:

*"Citizens who behave antagonistically towards the police are more likely to be treated in a hostile, authoritarian, or belittling manner by the police than other citizens; and though a majority of any kind of police behaviour is directed at citizens who are civil towards them, a disproportionate part of 'unprofessional' or negative police conduct is orientated towards citizens who extend no deference to them"* (cit: Russell, 1985:26).

When the police feel a considerable rejection of respect for their competence from any section of the community, they may develop anger against this section of the society (young, male, blacks are the best example). In instance where 'deference' was shown to the police, they used their discretion and took official action in only 5% of the cases, whereas they enforced the law 'by the book' against encounters in 45% cases where they encountered ruddiness and hostility (Southgate, 1986:47). Perhaps one important point should be put here: the level of deference and sincerity from both sides must be balanced. There are pitfalls of excessive 'respect and friendliness' as much as in the opposite attitude. As Banton points out: "If a policeman is too involved, he forfeits respect. If he is too detached, people resent his implied claim to moral superiority" (cit: Whitaker, 1982:61). Too much deference by a person can be perceived by the police as sarcasm or toadying. The reverse is also the case. Furthermore, if the police are offered some gifts -as simple as a cup of tea- it may result in putting the officer in an inoperative and less dominant position, and it may give that person false hopes so that if the result does not come out as he expected, he may tend towards hostile behaviour. Finally, there may be situations which require a certain level

of 'formality'. If a very friendly atmosphere is established, it may be difficult to change it into a formal one. 'Formality and friendliness' are two major factors in public relations and require a satisfactory level of skill, experience, training, intelligence and good manners.

The nature of police work can be considered as the main factor in determining the police attitudes towards the public. The public should remember that police work is not an ordinary type of job but a way of life with a mission and worthwhile purpose, at least in principle. Working as a 'team', being obliged to do form filling and some other organisational demands may prevent the police from promoting appropriate relations with the public. It is a sect like a religion, as stated by Reiner (1993:111). Moreover, they live with the fear of being killed. In 1993, some 18,000 assaults on officers -equal to one in eight officers- were recorded (The Daily Telegraph, 1994:4). Where the officer reacts and injury is caused, it is claimed that this reaction is normally because of fear of assault and threat. In these circumstances, more than 150 physical and physiological changes take place in the body (Boatman, 1993:24, 26). Everywhere they exist in an adversary relationship with mass publics. The environment in which they work is charged with emotion, suspicion, antagonism and violent opposition. For some people, "the only good policeman is a dead policeman." Furthermore, the anti social hours, the extent of social isolation, and dealing with 'problematic members' of the public such as drunks, criminals, drug addicts, etc. can make officers believe themselves unappreciated. Although it would be an over simplification to draw the conclusion that police expectations of public hostility are merely the result of unpleasant contacts with a comparatively small part of society, there is a danger that police can develop a distorted viewpoint because of the characteristics of the people they regularly meet during their normal duties and see them as 'typical' of the society. Thomas and Hyman (cit: Morris and Heal, 1981:40) also pointed out that the police image of public coolness towards them is mostly the fruit of their encounters with certain sections of the public such as the young, black, etc., who are, for some reasons, more critical about the police. (Similarly, the public may form negative image of the police because of unfortunate encounter with a single police officer who is unrepresentative of the force in general (bad apple theory). But, both the police and antagonists of the police are seen as 'groups' not as 'individuals'. However, an integral part of their task, perhaps their art, is to be able manage, crisis politics.

After working in a particular area for a while, an officer inevitably develops his/her own ideas about the people who live there. Stereotyping is quite common among police officers. This problem has been observed and recorded by Reiner. For him, a 'typical' officer's view of his/her 'public' can be categorised in seven groups. These are "generated by their power to cause problems, and congruency to the police value system" (Reiner, 1993:118-121). This problem of stereotyping

by police officers is detrimental to police performance. Officers will obviously have knowledge of social groups, but they must not look to pigeonhole everyone and treat them in a preconditioned manner as this can have serious consequences. The categories listed by Reiner help create an 'us and them' mentality by defining people according to their perceived likelihood of causing trouble.

Police officers may know some members of the community better than others. These acquaintances, as members of a group or class, as residents in the same area, as villains, or as law-abiding citizens, can influence police officers' behaviour to similar persons they contact. It is felt that certain members or classes of the public are regarded by the police as 'deserving' or 'non-deserving' according to previous encounters with those sections of the community. For example, they have very positive attitudes to law-abiding citizens, indeed they should. They exhibit preferences to those groups and are inclined to develop their relations with them, e.g. shopkeepers. It should be considered that neither the police nor the 'labelled group' are the 'innocents' in this issue. In the case of 'young' people, for example, as expressed by a young girl; if "the police do not have any respect for the young people, so young people have no respect for the police" (Sharpland and Wagg, 1988:145). According to this particular public stereotype, the like of evil attracts evil. It is rather a vicious circle which must be broken by both sides to be able to develop a virtuous circle with mutual respect and understanding.

Police contact with the public consists of a variety of people with diverse behaviour and sensitivity. The police, generally, claim that they do their best; they try to suit their approach to the individual by adapting their words and demeanour. This, sometimes, may not produce the intended result. It is quite difficult to convince a mentally disturbed or a very upset and distressed person, even if the best manner is shown. Generally, the police seem to be ignoring these situations due to reasons such as fear of time wasting, difficulty of coping with the problem, or unwillingness to be involved in emotional cases. But these reasons are taken by the public differently, for example, thinking that police are insensitive about their problem. Among such varieties of people and incidents, to be able to perform his role, a police officer may be required to understand physiology, sociology, the art of public relations, effective talking, child minding, medicine, acting, politics, journalism, espionage, business, parenthood, watchmanship, law and appropriate use of force. In the words of August Volmer, a veteran American policeman, police officers required:

*"The wisdom of Solomon, the courage of David, the strength of Samson, the patience of Job, the leadership of Moses, the kindness of the Good Samaritan, the strategical training of Alexander, the faith of Danial, the diplomacy of Lincoln, the tolerance of the carpenter of Nazareth, and an intimate knowledge of every branch of natural, biological and social science"* (cit: Bowden, 1978:16).

The incidents in which they are asked to interfere and become involved and the people they meet on their duties touch every aspect of human life. Perhaps it is the public who need to change attitudes towards their expectations of the police.

### **Public Attitudes Towards the Police**

Public attitudes to the police are derived from different sources. Many of these sources of opinion are out of the control of the government, but the public's own experiences with the police play a more important role in forming their impressions: It is evident that the public may gain their assumptions about the police either through personal experience (first or second hand), or through outside factors e.g. media. They may be influenced if their perception is based on other sources, but it seems rather difficult to persuade people to change their opinion about the police if it is formed by their own experience.

There are different perspectives in public assessment of the police. The public may assess the police either according to their ability to deal with the crime, or their civility in dealing with the public and their fairness towards different sections of society, or simply on basis of their existence as a legal entity. In doing so, they assess the police either as an institution or as those with whom they had first hand experience. Most of the public surveys focused on the police as an institution rather than as their police and, attitudes towards the police, varied by type of survey. The legitimacy of the police as an institution was regarded more positively than the evaluation of their work (Morris and Heal, 1981:39).

In relation to the police success at dealing with crime, this varied by the 'package' factors<sup>2</sup> and degree of victimisation. But the general assessment was quite critical about police performance for certain categories of crimes ranging from sexual assault to street fights. The Islington public (overall) see police handling as 'unsuccessful' in five out of seven types of offence three of which were crimes in the public priority. The five crimes were 'vandalism, burglary, harassment of women, mugging and street robbery, and sexual assaults on women'. The two areas in which police are to be seen successful are 'teenage rowdiness and street fights' (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987:111-112).

The state of police success can be understood better if the public is divided into categories by age, gender, race and extent of victimisation. By age, 16-24 and 24-44 were significantly more critical about police success than the 45+ class. The over 45 category had positive attitudes about police performance in dealing with crime. By gender, in every crime category, males see the police as unsuccessful more than females do. Concerning race, although there were differences by type of offence for each race, overall Asians' evaluation of police performance was slightly higher (63.6%) than blacks (61.1%) and whites were the least cri-

<sup>2</sup> They are: sex, age, status, location, race, etc

tical race (54.1%). Not surprisingly, the same survey (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987:112-114) also showed that the tendency to see the police as unsuccessful increased by the extent of victimisation: those with no experience of victimisation were the most positive about police ability in dealing with crime followed by those with one or two victimisation experiences. People who experienced more than three crimes held the most negative opinions on police success.

Impartiality in dealing with the various sections of the society is a crucial issue in police-public relations. Although it is hard to make all sections of the society feel 'confident and positive' about the police behaviour, the extent of the public belief in police fairness must be kept high.

To be able to evaluate public assessment of police fairness, it is necessary to judge their 'belief' in the police under 'package' factors. The first Islington Crime Survey (ICS) (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987:127-129) made this analysis and found these results: overall the younger generation (16-24), the blacks and the jobless believed that police do not treat all people fairly and equally. There was almost no difference between male and female respondents and around 32% saw police injustice. The most positive age category was 45+ group; only 13.5% perceived the police as unfair. The most significant difference was with race: whereas Asians and whites were almost the same in their assessment, blacks were over twice as high in viewing the police as behaving unfairly (61.1%). If these factors (age, gender, race, status) are examined under sub-categories, the results are more variable; for example, irrespective of gender, the young, black, and unemployed were the most negative about police fairness. For the 45+ age category among the employed, over 90% of whites had positive attitudes about police fairness whereas Asians in this category held the most negative opinion (although they were markedly more positive in other age categories than whites).

There are some other elements which influence public judgement about the police such as income, types of victimisation, frequency of contact, risk of crime and neighbourhood relations. On income and public perception of the police, an interesting and noteworthy point emerges: though there is a tendency for the jobless to express that the police are unfair, the same belief is held by better off people. Besides this, there is a directly proportional relation between income and perception of police unfairness. The belief in police partiality increased with rising income, particularly in the case of blacks. Regarding crime risk, fear of crime and neighbourhood; those with high risk of crime saw the police as 'unfair' more than those with low likelihood of crime. There was no remarkable difference between people with different levels of fear of crime but interestingly, people with low level fear of crime were more negative about police fairness. The greatest difference occurred in neighbourhood satisfaction: people with a high level of neighbourhood satisfaction did not have the idea that police were unfair (just

5.6% did so). Conversely, half of those with low satisfaction of their neighbourhood doubted the fairness of the police. Finally concerning victimisation and contact with the police, perception of unfairness increased by the frequency of victimisation and contact with the police, and household victimisation rated more than personal victimisation. Similar results can be found about public perception of police understanding of problems in the area (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987:130-133).

Public perceptions of police practice must also be evaluated so that one can obtain a more detailed knowledge about their place in the eyes of the public. The negative aspects of police practice (malpractice) can mainly be examined under these titles: police use of excessive force, planting evidence, violence at police stations and taking bribes. For example, ICS (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987:133-135), 21% reported that police use undue force on arrest and fabricate evidence, 16% claimed that police use violence at police stations and 13% believed that the police take bribes. Those who believe that these things occur sometimes rated between 34% and 42%. These figures are the general picture of the Islington public. If they are examined under 'package' categories, again the younger age groups, blacks and people with more than one or two victimisation or contact experience with the police were markedly negative about police conduct.

In the assessment of victims, in the 1992 British Crime Survey (BCS), 89% said that the police were 'very/fairly polite'. In terms of the police performance, 78% of victims who had received police service expressed that they had no 'unreasonable wait'; 64% were happy with the interest shown to them by the police and 56% thought that the police made enough effort. The most dissatisfaction came with 'failing to keep the victim informed', only 29% expressed a positive feeling. Public satisfaction with the police varied according to class and also by the type of contact, reason for the contact and consequences of the contact. People's perceptions of how their problems were dealt with or how they were treated by the police were invariably related to factors such as age, gender, race, status, the area they live in, the reason, type, and consequences of the contact and their personal expectations and feelings.

Referring to the nature of public contacts with the police, it gives some clues about public attitudes towards the police: how they see the police and what kind of matters they take to the police. In this regard, public attitudes to the police are both various and contradictory.

Whatever the purpose and whoever the person, being contacted by the police can be a major source of embarrassment. Furthermore, the police are necessarily involved in detection, investigation, stop and search, charge and arrest, so they are labelled as 'agents of force, sanctions and punishment' (Richards, 1992:14). Perhaps, the method of contact and the personal state of the person may affect



their attitude. To tackle this problem, it is necessary to find out the reasons for embarrassment and be able to deal with them. In many cases, because of the procedures and organisational requirements that the police are bound to observe and consider, this is overlooked. Furthermore there are limits to their capabilities. They cannot be expected to be psychologists or sociologists.

Essential to this question of public perception is their 'source of information': fictional or non-fictional dramas, newspapers, radio TV news, etc., or contact with actual police work. In a study (Skogan, 1990: 18-19), participants were asked about their sources of information. Those who indicated that 'they had seen the incident' or it 'happened to them or someone they know' consisted of 32% of all respondents. The other groups got their information either from a local or national newspaper (53%), or relied on radio or television (59%), or by talking to other people (35%). But the noteworthy point here was the impact of personal experience on shaping their attitudes towards the police; those with indirect information held more positive attitudes towards the police. In another survey, ICS (Jones, MacLean and Yong, 1987), the responses to the question "how have you come to know about it?" concerning use of excessive violence by police on arrest were very illuminating. 39% of people gained their impression from their own experience, and 45% from the experience of others; whereas those who got their impressions of this 'malpractice' through media channels were over 83%. This could imply the need to develop 'constructive' relationships with the media.

Inspector P. J. Driver in his Gold Medal Winning Essay of 1986 (Driver, 1987:343) poses this question:

*"What is your impression of dentists, of coal miners, of lorry drivers, of Russian politicians? It is very likely that you will have some impressions about each of these groups. It is equally likely that there is not one of these groups whose entire membership you have met."*

It seems that many people form their perception of the police through indirect channels. As the police are aware of the situation they try to inform the public by publishing and distributing papers such as 'Is your picture of police work coming through the right channels?' (Benyon and Bourn, 1986:47).

In summary, as a result of the nature of police work and diversity of community members, there are many dilemmas and paradoxes, inherent in the public's attitude towards the police. Whitaker put all these paradoxes together:

*"We expect him (the police) to be human, yet at the same time para-human. We welcome official protection, yet resent official interference. We employ him to administer the law, yet will ask him to waive it. We resent him when he enforces a law in our own case, yet demand his dismissal when he does not elsewhere. We offer him*

*bribes, yet denounce his corruption. We expect him to be a member of society, yet not share its prejudices and values. We admire violence, even against society itself, but condemn force by the police on our behalf. We tell a policeman that he is entitled to information from the public, though we ostracize informers; we ask for crime to be eradicated, but only by the use of 'sporting' methods. Yet we also expect to cut corners to fight crime, without being willing to share responsibility for this with him. We criticise, fail to support, and deceive him; yet we cannot escape depending on him"* (Whitaker, 1982: 293-294).

These paradoxes may not be unnatural given the ambivalent relationship between the public, the criminal and the police, all of whom share the same society.

### **Vigilantism : A Symptom of Police-Public Relations?**

As the public are part of the police, and vice versa, it is clearly rational to encourage public participation in good policing as much as possible in order to form and achieve an interdependent mutual interest. But there is a great pitfall with self-policing: it can be difficult to control the fine line between 'being a responsible citizen' and 'a vigilante'. There are two fundamental differences between 'citizen self-help groups' (vigilantes) and 'crime prevention specialists'. Firstly, a community crime prevention specialist is a public police agent. It is an alternative and complementary to the police task, and it is established with a certain programme by the legal agents. On the other hand, citizen self-help groups are formed as a result of a failure to form these community crime prevention organisations and, mostly, lack of confidence in the police and the system. They are not recognised as legitimate crime control groups. Secondly, citizen crime prevention members (like Neighbourhood Watch (NW) membership) are responsible or required to be so, for any possible crime against anybody. They are also confined to a certain degree of involvement in dealing with crime and criminals, and they are asked to take part in community surveillance based upon police (official) definitions and responses. This makes them the 'eyes and ears of the police'. On the other hand, vigilantes are people who try to take the law into their own hands and solve problems in their own way and according to their definition of crime and criminal without resorting to legal procedures. In the end, they constitute a new criminal group. Once this distinction between legitimate 'community involvement' and 'self-policing' (vigilantism) is lost, the whole criminal justice system collapses.

There is a tendency to see 'vigilantism' as a sign of public attitudes towards, and confidence in, the police and criminal justice system. As the police are per-

ceived by the public as an active agent of the criminal justice system, they are the first people to be questioned by the public for being ineffective and held responsible for the deficiencies in the system. There has been an increase in both vigilante actions and public approval of these actions and dissatisfaction with the efficiency of the police and the criminal justice system. A survey, carried out by Gallup in 1993, on public attitudes to law and order shows that 75% of those interviewed sometimes justify vigilantism. Moreover, only 15% thought that the government would succeed in fighting crime compared with 82% who believed there is nothing or little which government can do about it. Police performance, on the other hand, receives a complex recognition: 55% had 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence in the police, whereas 44% said that they had 'not very much' or 'none at all'. For most crimes, a majority of the people interviewed believed that the police are not very/at all likely to catch the criminals or recover stolen property (The Daily Telegraph, 1993:1, 2).

As the confidence in the police and law and order decreases, the actions of the vigilantes increase and receive some degree of support not only from the public but also from the official authorities themselves. In most of the vigilante actions, public sympathy was shown to the vigilante and the vigilantes were regarded as heroes. The vigilantes are vindicated by public support and perceptions. David Golding, president of the Superintendents' Association, told the Home Secretary: "We do not condone vigilantes but we understand their motives. These are normal citizens who believe the system is failing them." He added: "Police officers are sick and tired of being made scapegoats for failings elsewhere in the system" (Police, 1993:10). Also the local Tory MP for Macclesfield, Nicholas Winterton, spoke approvingly of vigilante actions:

Local, responsible, sensible people had to take the law into their own hands in dealing with a persistent young, juvenile offender, who has appeared before the courts on many occasions, but also has been released back into the community (BBC2, 1994).

Even the former Home Secretary, Michael Howard, although he encouraged the public to help the police and warned people against taking the law into their own hands to deal with alleged offenders<sup>3</sup>, he also said "I know there is widespread dissatisfaction with our Criminal Justice System. I share this dissatisfaction" (BBC2, 1994).

The term 'vigilante' has been applied to a variety of incidents, from kidnaping of suspected perpetrators of local crime to the organising of private security guards for street patrols. While the first category is individual-oriented, the second category works on a group based style. For example, the chairman of Dixon's had employed some guards for his store chain, and said:

<sup>3</sup> The Times, 31.8.1993 (Reported from his talk for BBC Radio 4)

*“We need to legitimise the meaning of vigilantism. It is an honourable word and must be seen to be so. I have no doubt there will be a series of groupings of crime fighters who will have to be given some sort of semi-official status. This will be opposed by the police but it is inevitable... You have to be really thick and slow to get nicked these days”* (The Guardian, 1993: 3).

People who feel the law is unfair are less likely to help the police. Sometimes the law is not up to date with changes in public opinion or standards; at other times the reverse may be the case. (Either way, it is the police who are likely to bear the burden and stress and when people or even the law do not adequately help or support the police, they may develop their own less desirable methods against criminals). Although vigilante actions are not as a result of public dislike of police, it is clearly as a result of public distrust of, and dissatisfaction with, the police (‘police could do nothing’) and related establishments; and in the long term, it can easily deteriorate the fabric of police public relations. If the public view the police with considerable distrust ‘in their effectiveness or attitudes’ they may relinquish ‘reporting crime’ and they resort to take care of themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Since the inception of the police service it has been recognised as essential for the police to secure the co-operation of the public. Where hostility arises between the police and the community, the task of policing becomes more difficult. However, some public relations problems are caused not by the inadequacies of the people involved but by the rules, principles and structures in which they perform their task. Some problems are unavoidable. In this respect, policing, by its very nature, involves ‘arresting, investigating and questioning people. Whatever the police do and however they behave, a certain group and number of people will be left unsatisfied, and there is nothing that can be done to change this.

In most cases, public confidence with the police generally is high. It is important to aim at altering the attitude among the groups of the population (male, young, black, unemployed) whose attitude is less positive. The main concern must be given to these sections of the society.

The reasons why the public is (dis)satisfied with the police will be many and varied, but it seems very likely that the most immediate malady to be remedied is the Criminal Justice System itself. Most people believe that there is nothing the police can do, therefore they try to take the law into their own hands. Perhaps the police are paying for the failures of the system as a whole.

Along with the reasons explained in the study, the evaluations of the police and the public in their performance and attitudes towards each other stem from the shared community to which they both belong. As Sir Robert Mark states:

“The police force is the best reflection of a society. If society is violent, so are the police; if society is corrupt, so are the police; but if society is tolerant, literate and humane, the police will act accordingly” (Whitaker, 1982:8).

The police, as a part of the community they police, cannot separate themselves from this fact which shapes their attitudes. The public get the police they deserve.

This study can be concluded with another anecdote.<sup>4</sup> A man’s house was burgled and he asked his neighbours about the situation. Everybody was accusing him of being careless, leaving valuable things in the house, etc. He answered: ‘OK. I am wrong and made mistakes but what about the thief? Does he not have any fault?’ If there is a deterioration between police-public relations, there are two parties<sup>5</sup> responsible for this: the police (in the wider sense, as representative of the state) and the public themselves. Their existence depends on each other. Both sides have misconceptions and misunderstandings. The permanent solution to this malady is to develop mutual understanding and acceptance.

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4 Nasradden Hoja (see footnote 1 ).

5 There are, of course, some other parties like media, school (education), families etc. They have also been touched throughout this article.

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