Policing and Social Marginalisation in Ireland

Aogán Mulcahy

Eoin O'Mahony

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Abstract
This report considers the relationship between policing and social marginalisation in Ireland. It is based on empirical research with residents of deprived areas of Dublin, members of the Travelling community, and representatives of the Garda Síochána and other organisations involved in addressing crime-related issues. The research found that while some improvements in policing were noted, members of marginalised communities consistently voiced a strong demand for greater consultation with the police and involvement in the policy-making process.

Keywords: policing, social marginalisation, partnership

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Disclaimer

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1. Introduction: the context of policing and social marginalisation in Ireland

The police play a fundamental role in the maintenance of social order. Through routine patrol and crime prevention activities, as well as more targeted initiatives, they are in a unique position to contribute to a sense of public safety and security. The centrality of the police ensures that when their effectiveness is inhibited or public confidence in them is damaged, the consequences can be profound.

Despite the significance of these issues, the relationship between the police and marginalised communities in Ireland has received little sustained attention. This report considers the links between policing and social marginalisation on the basis of empirical research carried out in deprived areas of Dublin and with members of the Travelling community. We discuss the historical context within which relations between the police and those communities unfolded, and examine the attitudes of members of those communities towards the police in light of this background and other more recent developments. In doing so, we argue that issues of policing are fundamentally related to the broader context of social inclusion and exclusion in Irish society.

(a) *The dynamics of police-community relations*

Relations between police and the public are complex matters. Some sections of society – often older people – closely identify with the police and have a very positive opinion of them, viewing them as a last pillar of safety and stability in an increasingly insecure world. For other sections of society, however, the police represent not so much an idealised form of social control, as an alien force that all too often exacerbates local problems and fails to provide effective solutions to crime and anti-social behaviour.

Research on relations between the police and young people, ethnic minority communities and other marginalised groups has consistently documented high levels of harassment, confrontational policing styles, overt misconduct (such as violence towards members of those communities), and other behaviours that emphasise the control rather than the service aspect of policing (Bowling 1999; Chan 1996; Crowther 2000; Ellison 2001; Holdaway 1996; Loader 1996; Newburn 2002). The enormous licence the police have historically enjoyed when dealing with marginalised communities signified that certain groups were, in effect, 'police property' (Lee 1981), on the grounds that the police could, and often did, treat them as they wished.

In addition to 'over-policing', relations between the police and marginalised communities are also characterised by 'under-protection'. This involves failing to respond appropriately to crime-related concerns. It can take several forms: not appearing at the scene of the crime; attending the scene but failing to recognise that the complainant has been the victim of a crime; or accepting that the complainant was victimised but failing to treat the complaint with appropriate seriousness either by failing to investigate thoroughly or by devoting insufficient resources to the case (Bowling 1999). This entails, in effect, a double victimisation: first, by the perpetrator of the crime, and second, by the police (and the criminal justice system generally) in failing to provide an appropriate response.

Such policing – harsh and abrasive on the one hand, and minimalist or non-existent on the other – yields a predictable outcome: low levels of public confidence in the police. This, in turn, may impact on crime and community safety in two particularly significant ways.

First, if the public trust the police, this is reflected in a steady flow of information from the public to the police. While other factors certainly contribute to police effectiveness, this low-level information is crucial in enabling the police to detect and prevent crime (Reiner 2000).

When the public's levels of trust in the police diminishes, that information flow is reduced and with it, police effectiveness.

Second, and related to the above, as the police seek ways of compensating for this reduced information flow, they often resort to more intrusive and abrasive measures, such as stop and search tactics. This may lead to a further drop in public trust – and with it, a further drop in the provision of information to the police – leading to the use of increasingly aggressive policing strategies that further alienate the public. Under certain conditions, this may escalate into widespread disorder and violence.[1]

Such concerns about policing are at the heart of this project, as policing remains the institution that has the most direct impact on people's status as full members of any society. Issues that inhibit the public's ability to avail of a policing service, or that generate a policing service that does not meet the public's needs, are matters of fundamental concern. The following section considers these issues in light of the historical development of policing in Ireland and the tradition of police-community relations that developed from this.

(b) Policing and the public in Ireland

For much of the twentieth century policing in Ireland was characterised by continuity and stasis, a pattern reflected in Irish society generally. High levels of emigration, low levels of economic growth (if not outright economic decline), and high levels of social stability generated a social climate characterised by quiescence to the prevailing authority structures, whether in terms of family, religion, education, or policing. This situation was also related to crime levels in Ireland. For much of the twentieth century, Ireland's levels of recorded crime were negligible compared with other countries, and by most indices Ireland remains very much a 'low-crime' society (Brewer et al. 1997; Institute of Criminology 2001; O'Donnell and O'Sullivan 2001). In this context, demands for changes to policing structures were minimal.

The stability of policing throughout much of the twentieth century also relates to the political context in which the Garda Síochána was created. While the organisational structure of the Garda Síochána closely mirrored that of its predecessor, the Royal Irish Constabulary, important symbolic changes were introduced to emphasise the Garda Síochána's role as a civic (rather than paramilitary) police force (Allen 1999; Brady 2000). For example, officers were to be unarmed, and numerous cultural initiatives were undertaken to orient the force towards serving as an expression of national identity – by providing training through the Irish language for a period, maintaining close links with the Catholic church, and promoting widespread involvement in Gaelic sports (a feature of policing in Ireland to the present day). All in all, these measures were evidence of the force's desire to constitute itself as 'Irish in thought and action' (McNiffe 1997).

The claim that there existed an innate link between the police and the public undermined any calls to develop structures that would facilitate or mediate police-public consultation. As a consequence, there was a general failure to develop a system of organisational oversight or any structured means for developing and consolidating formal links between police and public. That is not to say, however, that there was a complete absence of progress on these issues, as the Garda Síochána operates a number of prominent schemes that straddle the various issues involved in community policing and community-based crime prevention

[1] Using community crime surveys in a number of deprived areas, Lea and Young (1993) argued that local concerns about crime were often linked with concerns about policing. Antagonism towards the police was linked with scepticism towards police motivations and effectiveness, whereby the police were judged to have largely abandoned crime prevention measures in favour of an aggressive law-enforcement approach that criminalised entire communities by focusing on exercising control at the expense of delivering a community-based service.

measures. These include Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert (McKeown and Brosnan 1998), Community Gardaí, a longstanding scheme of youth diversion operated by juvenile liaison officers, and various Special Projects which function as crime prevention measures in what typically are socially-deprived communities (Bowden and Higgins 2000). More recently the Children's Act, 2001 has established a system of restorative justice conferences. The Garda Síochána also operates a system of consultation with the public – albeit on a very limited basis – through the establishment of Community Policing Fora in Dublin (see below).

While these developments are laudable, the reason why they have occurred in such a minimal and piecemeal manner reflects the traditional role the police have occupied in Irish history and culture. The manner in which they seemed to embody the cultural nationalism that dominated Irish political life provided them with considerable legitimacy. As a consequence, many commentators claim that the Garda Síochána became firmly established as 'one of the striking successes of the new state' (McNiffe 1997: 175), and as one of the 'in-groups' of Irish society (MacGréil 1996). MacGréil (1996) stated that 'It would be difficult to find a police force in any other country with such a high national standing.'

Survey findings generally support these claims, recording high levels of public satisfaction with the Gardaí. A large postal survey conducted in 2002 recorded overall satisfaction levels of 87 per cent (Garda Research Unit 2002). Other surveys provide findings consistent with this. A study published in 1987 reported that 85 per cent of a national sample said they had confidence in the Gardaí (Bohan and Yorke 1987). Brewer et al. (1988, pp.102-3) cite a 1985 study that recorded an 86 per cent level of public confidence.

These findings, however, must be contextualised in relation to two significant factors. First, it is important to recognise that, from the 1980s onwards, in particular, a number of issues propelled questions of policing into public debate. Rising crime levels (recorded crime increased six-fold between 1963 and 1983) and far-reaching social and cultural changes (particularly in relation to urbanisation, individualisation and secularisation) were the context in which conflict between the police and various sections of the public – particularly young males in local authority housing areas – became increasingly common. By 1982, for instance, the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors claimed that, due to rising crime levels, 'there is a feeling abroad that things are getting out of control' due to a number of incidents of Gardaí being 'set upon' by suburban residents and the fact that in parts of Dublin city 'the Gardaí are, to put it mildly, unwelcome' (AGSI 1982: 5, 7). Sporadic instances of serious disorder occurred in some Dublin housing estates through the 1980s and continued into the 1990s, prompting a Dáil Committee to investigate matters on one occasion. Its findings echoed those of the earlier Whitaker Report (1985) in drawing a clear link between social marginalisation and antagonistic relations with the Gardaí (Interdepartmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder 1992).

These findings are supported by other research which found that residents in disadvantaged areas typically have far higher levels of involvement with the criminal justice agencies, both as victims and offenders, than the general population, and they are massively over-represented among the prison population (Bacik and O'Connell 1998; National Crime Forum 1998; National Economic and Social Forum 2002; O'Mahony 1997). Local concern over illegal drug use has frequently been the basis for criticism of the Gardaí (Bennett 1998; Connolly 2002a, 2003; Fahey 1999; Murphy-Lawless 2002).

Second, within these survey findings it is important to recognise that high levels of confidence are not shared by all social groups, and that attitudes towards the Gardaí are nuanced in key respects. For instance, the Bohan and Yorke (1987) study cited above which reported that 85 per cent of respondents had confidence in the Gardaí, also found that 57 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that the Gardaí sometimes abuse

suspects physically and mentally, and 40 per cent agreed that 'in court, some Gardaí would rather cover up the facts than lose face'.

Similarly, while the above surveys found that confidence levels were generally high for all age-groups, the lowest levels of confidence were consistently found among the young males from working-class backgrounds (see, for example, McCullagh 1998). Related to this, research also suggests that policing styles vary according to community profile. For example, one study found that the policing style in 'Parkway', a Dublin suburb with an 'established, negative history' in the eyes of the Gardaí, was noticeably 'more confrontational' than that evident in the city centre research site (Institute of Criminology 2001: 67-9). Gardaí tended to view 'Parkway' negatively, and routinely used belligerent language to resolve public order situations, such as 'f**k off home, now'. As the researchers noted, 'Gardaí feel no sense of obligation to engage sympathetically with potential public order offenders at 'Parkway'. They simply asserted their authority and appeared unconcerned about the nature of the reaction that might be elicited as a consequence' (p.69).

A public attitude survey conducted by the Garda Research Unit (2002: 20) also found stark differences in the public's experiences of policing in different divisional areas. Although it recorded an overall satisfaction rating of 87 per cent, an average of 12.3 per cent of respondents in each division responded affirmatively that a Garda officer had 'ever behaved towards them in a way they considered unacceptable'. This figure varied by division from a low of 6 per cent to a high of 25 per cent. Dublin divisions accounted for six of the seven highest figures, and in four of the Dublin divisions the figures ranged from 18 per cent to 25 per cent.

Consistent with these broad findings, an *Irish Times* (10 February 2004) survey was the first to show a sizeable proportion of the population expressing a lack of confidence in the Gardaí. It found that 58 per cent have confidence in the Gardaí, but 37 per cent do not. In Dublin it was more evenly balanced, where 48 per cent of respondents expressed confidence, while 46 per cent did not (7 per cent had no opinion). This survey was conducted shortly after an RTÉ Primetime television programme was broadcast (*The Force of the Law*, 8 January 2004) that dealt with allegations of serious police misconduct, including several allegations that Garda officers assaulted members of the public, and against a backdrop of several ongoing inquiries into police behaviour. Significantly, a majority of respondents in a number of social categories responded that they had 'no confidence' in police fairness or impartiality, including 54 per cent of 18-24 year olds.[2]

These findings confirm the need to examine more closely the links between policing and social marginalisation. However, before proceeding to an analysis of our research findings, we discuss the methodology used in this study.

[2] The survey also found that 54 per cent of Green Party supporters and 61 per cent of Sinn Fein party supporters expressed a lack of confidence in the Gardaí.

2. Methodological issues

This project adopts a community-based methodological approach. Community-based research offers one strategy to help overcome the constraints of survey methodology based on national random samples. It provides a methodological approach attuned to local variation and to the marginalised position occupied by disadvantaged groups who typically are underrepresented in conventional surveys (Jones and Newburn 2001; O'Mahony et al. 2000). Many differences in experience and outlook are overlooked by considering data in aggregate-level, as these tend to blur differences that may be specific to locale or community structure. This is particularly so in relation to issues of crime and policing, where, for instance, the victimisation of one individual may be viewed locally as the intimidation of an entire community.

Methodologically, the project focuses on relations between the Gardaí and communities within the Dublin metropolitan region that reflect different aspects of disadvantage and marginalisation, namely, urban poverty and minority ethnic status as Travellers. We use the term marginalisation, rather than other related terms such as deprivation, because of our focus on community- rather than individual-level issues. While measures of material deprivation and poverty clearly highlight core dimensions of disadvantage, our focus on community-level issues led us to consider how these groups saw themselves, and how they believed the rest of society – and the police in particular – saw them. While there is usually enormous overlap between marginalisation and deprivation, that is not always the case. Within any specific community, there is likely to be considerable variation in terms of individuals' personal circumstances. However, while members of any community are likely to differ somewhat in terms of their individual levels of income, etc, membership of a particular community – even if only at the relatively 'thin' level of simply residing in a particular area – may still be significant in terms of residents' collective sense of marginalisation.

Moreover, we believe that the communities represented here have suffered not simply economic deprivation, but also political exclusion. Individuals may find themselves treated by the general public or by state agencies on the basis of their assumed membership of that community, irrespective of their personal circumstances. It is in that sense of these communities being marginalised in relation to other sectors of Irish society that we use the term here, and in doing so our aim is to highlight whether an understanding of police-community relations is enhanced by adopting such a community-level focus.

In terms of communities characterised by urban poverty, two geographically distinct communities were selected that share high concentrations of different aspects of disadvantage: St Teresa's Gardens and its surrounding area in Dublin's southwest inner city, and Darndale and Belcamp on the north-eastern periphery of the Dublin metropolitan region. Both areas feature high levels of unemployment, long-term unemployment, single-parent households, and other factors persistently associated with poverty.

In relation to ethnicity, the project set out to examine the experiences both of Travellers and of members of new ethnic minority communities, particularly in light of previous research which had highlighted a serious lack of confidence in the police on the part of those communities (O'Mahony et al. 2001). As the project continued, time constraints led us to concentrate on Travellers and it is those findings that we present here.[3]

The research was mainly conducted through interviews and focus groups, with some additional observational research. Almost 40 interviews and 10 focus groups were conducted with residents or members of these communities. Most of the interviews were

[3] The research we did not use in this report will be developed in other work.

conducted between September 2002 and May 2003, with some follow-up interviews being conducted in late 2003 and early 2004.

Interviewees were mostly contacted through community groups and other organisations based in particular communities. The selection of interviewees inevitably reflected this reliance on established community organisations and networks, and 'community activists' of various hues feature prominently in our findings. However, efforts were made to ensure that a broad selection of community members were interviewed, including groups of women, the elderly and young people.

Approximately 10 further interviews were conducted with public figures and key individuals involved in issues relevant to the research topic, including political representatives, and representatives of key statutory and non-statutory bodies.

These data were supplemented by interviews with serving and retired police officers gathered as part of a related research project (funded by a Government of Ireland research fellowship) on 'policing and social change in Ireland'. In all, over 40 serving and retired Gardaí were interviewed, ranging in rank from Garda to senior officer level. Many of the Gardaí interviewed had considerable experience of police-community relations work, and it is generally recollections of that experience that are reflected here.

The process of conducting the research also shed some light on the contentiousness of police-community relations. Two events in particular highlighted this. First, some schools in the inner-city area were contacted to discuss whether pupils could be interviewed. With the consent of the principals, letters were sent to pupils' parents seeking written permission for their children to be included in focus groups. Only pupils whose parents gave their written permission were interviewed.

Following one focus group, however, the principal of the school involved informed us that a participant in the focus group had been subjected to bullying on the basis of comments made during the interview. The comments related to an incident in which the pupil stated that her parents had called the police because of the loud music being played by their neighbours. Although the individual identified as the source of the bullying had no known links with the focus group participant or her family, the fact that calling the police in such relatively innocuous circumstances was the stated rationale for the bullying was striking. While the school principal involved stated that he was surprised at this development, our concern at the pupil's distress and the possibility of further similar incidents led us to terminate that strand of the research.

The second instance relates to our fieldwork with Travellers. While some Travellers were very eager to participate in the research, others were much more reticent. Some of the focus groups in particular were painfully silent affairs in which our efforts to open up discussion on policing issues were largely unsuccessful. Further evidence of our failure to generate a trusting relationship with interviewees was also evident in individual interviews. During several interviews, for instance, the interviewer was asked repeatedly if he was 'a guard'. Even after assurances were given that neither of us were Gardaí, that the research was not being conducted by or for the Gardaí, and that confidentiality would be maintained, some interviewees concluded the interview by again asking whether the researcher was a guard. While some of this mistrust may reflect a general mistrust of researchers, because of the circumstances involved we believe that it partly reflects the fact that our research concerned the issue of policing, about which many Travellers harbour deep reservations.

There are some important qualifications to be made about the concepts and focus at the heart of this research. Firstly, use of the term community to describe a particular geographical region or a specific group of people should not be taken to indicate that we

view the term as straightforward or unproblematic. The term is often used to depict social groups in a positive way, and its alleged 'absence' typically denotes some deficiency on the part of those involved (evident in the implied criticism of such phrases as 'there's no community there'). The reality, however, is that communities are contested entities. They may be characterised by similarity and shared characteristics, but they are also the sites of struggle over identity, resources and other issues. While they are the focal point for mobilising to advance local or group-specific interests, these efforts to mobilise are often characterised by contests over who 'speaks' for the community or is its authentic voice. Any analysis or discussion of community must, if it is to reflect the diversity that exists within what comes to be defined as a community, acknowledge and take account of the complex mix of cohesion and conflict that underpins community life.

Second, this project is by definition limited in its scope. While the research addresses an issue of enormous importance to the communities involved (as well as to other marginalised communities and to the wider population), it remains an exploratory project, and one based on a sizeable – but limited – sample of respondents. Further research should, as a matter of urgency, be conducted to explore these issues in further detail, and establish the similarities and differences between the experiences and attitudes of the communities depicted here and those of other communities.[4] Exploring relations between 'new' ethnic minority communities and the police is clearly an area in which research seems particularly important. Relations between young people and the police are also clearly an issue of major significance that future research should address.

Finally, we stress that this is a study about perceptions rather than empirical reality. We have no means of verifying or assessing many of the claims about policing that our research uncovered; such a task was not within the scope of this project. However, in making this point we wish to highlight that it is often in light of such perceptions – whether those held by members of the communities discussed here, or by Garda officers – that accounts of events come to be accepted as fact. Accordingly, irrespective of the objective truth of these accounts, public perceptions of the police can have a very real and tangible impact on how people interact with the police, their willingness to provide information to the police, etc. Police perceptions of particular communities can also determine the level of service provided to them. As such, perceptions of police-community relations have real consequences and they must be addressed in that light.

[4] While this research was partly undertaken to assess conventional wisdom that the Gardaí are very well regarded in Irish society, our focus on marginalised communities does not permit us to make a direct comparison with other communities. However, given the perception strongly held by our interviewees that the policing they received was of an inferior quality to that received by other communities, we believe that such comparative research would be very valuable.

3. Urban deprivation

(a) Context

The context of police-community relations in deprived urban areas is shaped by two important factors. First, some areas of the city – initially north and south inner-city areas, and then subsequently the overspill estates on the city outskirts – have a long tradition of hostile relations between the police and the residents. In 1963, for instance, the renowned Garda Jim Branigan observed that 'St Teresa's Gardens is a trouble spot and Gardaí are constantly being assaulted and every night gangs of youths are fighting and throwing bottles.' In August 1964 concern about gang violence in Dublin led to the establishment of the Garda Riot Squad, headed by Branigan (Neary 1985: 75, 77; see also Kearns 1994).

Second, the creation of these large local authority estates seemed to provide relief from infamous city-centre slums. However, in practice – and in no small part due to the allocation policies through which accommodation was assigned to potential tenants (see below) – such estates were characterised by a number of factors which proved to be extremely damaging in promoting the stability of those communities. The 'exodus of economically active households, and the influx of marginal people', and the rapid turnover of tenants (Power 1997: 283-4) all impacted in various ways on issues related to crime and disorder (Fahey 1999).[5]

These factors were the background against which the issues of crime and police-community relations, in what were largely but not exclusively local authority housing estates, became increasingly prominent from the 1970s onwards. A rapid rise in crime levels and problems of urban disorder – particularly in relation to joyriding, vandalism, and youth crime generally – led to persistent claims that the traditional social order had broken down and posed a legitimacy crisis of no small significance for the Irish state.[6] While these various factors caused the issue of urban deprivation to assume a more prominent position within governmental discourse on crime and policing, the issues of drugs is central to understanding the dynamics of police-community relations.

(b) Drugs, crime and quality of life

Prior to the late 1970s and early 1980s, problems associated with illegal drugs in Ireland were minuscule by international standards, and attracted little attention from the Gardaí. As such, the advent of a serious heroin problem found the Gardaí ill-prepared for this development. One retired senior officer recalled attending a drugs seminar in the early 1960s at which a colleague predicted:

> 'That will never take on here. Never happen.' And look at the way it's gone! It almost took us by surprise, I think. Yes, it took us by surprise … one day you'd think it wasn't there, and the next day it was rampant.

Another senior officer noted that during the 1970s drug use 'was left to the Gardaí, seen as a Garda problem. "Multi-agency" was not a word you heard in the 1970s. So the 1970s was largely a decade of inaction' (quoted in Mulcahy 2002: 287).

The rapid increase in heroin use in the early 1980s was not merely evident in the health issues involved, but also in the wider social consequences of a large number of addicts concentrated in particular areas of Dublin. In the inner-city areas discussed here, the

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[5] For discussion of related issues in a British context, see Hope and Foster (1992) and Sheridan (1996).

[6] See Inglis' (2003) excellent discussion of social change in relation to 'Kerry babies case'.

personal costs, family disruption, crime and social division associated with widespread heroin addiction probably register as the single most important characteristic of the area and are routinely described as plunging the area into crisis. One Dublin City Council official described it as the 'biggest problem' associated with local authority housing estates, while one resident simply stated: 'Drugs, it does overwhelm things.' Heroin use in particular was an enormously emotive and contentious issue, and one interviewee described the scale of the issues involved: 'In this area, I must know 300 people who died, from drugs, HIV, suicide. And other people would know more. Now that's going back decades, but *over 300 people!*'

Drug-related criminal activity became a prominent feature of the area, contributing to what one resident described as the 'absolute chaos here, in terms of social disorder; the situation was shockingly bad', and to conflict between residents and the police. Keogh (1997), for instance, estimated that known drug-users committed two-thirds of all crime in the Dublin metropolitan area between September 1995 and August 1996. Senior Gardaí noted that drugs had been 'the biggest single influence on the crime profile during their time of service', with its impact exceeding that of the Northern Ireland conflict, while government officials were 'shaken' by the scale of heroin-related problems in Dublin (Brewer et al., 1997: 46-7). Residents also saw a clear link between the widespread availability of drugs and the advent of a more visibly dangerous culture. One resident contrasted this earlier non-drugs related crime with the more violent culture that followed it:

> You didn't have the same drugs and all … You had mainly stolen cars, a lot of stolen cars, and people breaking into houses and that kind of stuff. But you could do things. You could approach people. Like, I mean, I approached people at that stage. I mean, if I saw a stolen car, I'd get into my own car and you stop it and get it back, right? You couldn't do that now because you'd be knifed … the whole climate to that extent has changed and a certain innocence that was then … is gone now. . I mean I'd go up to somebody that I know who had a stolen television and you'd ask for it and they give it to you back. Now, you couldn't do that now. So the whole climate to that extent has changed and a certain innocence that was then…is gone now. So I think society is more polarised and it is much more violent.

The problems associated with drug use also intersect with other features of the area, including high unemployment levels, adding cumulative layers of disadvantage one on top of the other. Given the scale of deprivation that characterises the area, residents are acutely aware of the symbolism attached to their community. Several residents, for instance, noted the frequency with which the media used the area to highlight generic aspects of urban deprivation ('your typical let's wheel out the drug-users or the victim or whatever'), reinforcing the area's 'bad' reputation; others noted past instances in which media coverage of the area had been 'outrageous'.

Within the area, the perceived inadequate response to drugs and drug-related problems is firmly associated with the low political capital of the area and a failure to mobilise effectively to press for resources to tackle local needs:

> For 20 years you had drugs and nothing was done about it. So now you have second and even third generation families on drugs. I mean to us it was noticeable, but nobody would do anything about it … With drugs, the truth was that no-one cared. The people that were most effected didn't vote; they weren't a political threat to the system. You could knock on every door in a flat complex, go around for hours, and you wouldn't get one vote for it. So they had no clout. [City Councillor]

Such allegations of unconcern on the part of state agencies were routine. Groups such as Concerned Parents Against Drugs (CPAD) organised to address heroin use in particular.

CPAD argued that the police response to the heroin problem was inadequate, and that direct community action was necessary against suspected drug dealers. This included surveillance and information gathering as well as public marches on the homes of drug-dealers, forced evictions, and, in some instances, violence (Bennett 1988; Connolly 2002b; Murphy-Lawless 2002). The impact these factors had on police-community relations was immense:

> There were a lot of bad attitudes towards the police, and you had a lot of violence… and CPAD and Sinn Féin were very involved. Some in CPAD were genuine concerned parents, others were more interested in political gains, in using the situation to further their own aims. People would march on a house, and call on drug dealers to move out. You had star chambers, a bit like the Roy Keane[7] story, you were guilty before saying anything, you had to justify yourself. 'Someone saw you selling you drugs. What have you got to say to that? You've got 24 hours to move out.' With the vigilantes, some of them were selling drugs themselves, and I have to emphasise that some of them were genuinely concerned, others were not, maybe they were trying to cause conflict with the police, maybe to gain control over areas – some might be fencing stolen goods, so they want to keep the police out so they can do that without being caught. Sinn Féin were very involved, like I say, some of them because of concern at the situation, and some of them because of the politics and the support they could get. All that caused a lot of complaint against the guards. You had a march on places to get people to move out, but the police would come and try to stop them, so you had attacks on the police as well. You had baton charges, people being hit. If you get a crack of a baton and you're innocent, you'll never forget it. If you're there because you're concerned about drugs and you get hit by a Guard, you're not going to feel too kind about it.

A key moment in one of the areas heavily affected by heroin use, Rialto, was the death of Josie Dwyer, a heroin addict and AIDS-sufferer, following an assault in December 1996. Local anti-drugs activists were implicated in Dwyer's death and, amidst fears that community action was escalating out of control, the Rialto Community Policing Forum was established as a means of negotiating appropriate methods of social control through dialogue between community representatives and the police. According to Bissett (1999: 7), this 'symbolised a change from a social action movement based on non-co-operation and self-policing to a policy of consultation with the Garda Síochána'.

(*c) Assessing policing and police-community consultation*

Local assessments of policing are strongly informed by the historical legacy of conflict surrounding drugs, vigilantism and community action, and ongoing efforts to secure meaningful community input into policing for the area.

Local resentment continues to be evident towards the police for the manner in which they are thought to have a one-dimensional view of the area as inherently conducive to crime, and the police role within it as one solely of law enforcement. One respondent recalled a meeting at which the senior police officer present stated that he could visit the maternity ward of the local hospital and – solely from seeing the family address – accurately predict which of the babies there would be imprisoned later in their lives.[8] Residents described instances of being stopped by Gardaí and asked 'what they were doing in the area', or mentioned verbal and physical abuse by Gardaí. Such experiences confirmed for residents that the police approach to the area was 'a clear policy of containment … cordon it off, block it in … just stop them coming out from robbing the gaffs in [nearby gentrified area].' In their

[7] This refers to an incident in which the Irish soccer player Roy Keane was sent home from the 2002 World Cup following a public confrontation with the team manager.
[8] This may be the same event referred to by O'Higgins (1999: 169).

experience, the policing of the area 'always was crisis-driven … you responded to whatever the emergencies came from … and that was the consistent approach.'

Even against this backdrop, though, there is a recognition that relations between the Gardaí and residents have improved.[9] One interviewee claimed that a couple of years ago:

> The guards were engaging with local people, particularly young people, in a much more proactive policing manner … You had a situation where someone would say, 'look, you bol***ks, you', [and] the guard wouldn't automatically respond … And so what was happening was, a relationship was starting to build … It was getting to the point where it was nearly cool to talk to a copper.

This, however, is believed to be an uneven process, with the level of policing in the area rising and falling in line with the political salience of the area, particularly since the late 1990s – a process that residents linked with visits from political figures, newsworthy incidents, and so forth. One of the clearest differences that interviewees pointed to was a greater willingness locally to engage with the Gardaí. As one resident stated:

> People in areas like Fatima Mansions didn't see themselves as part of normal society … Now the strange thing is that most of the people in Fatima Mansions can't get enough guards … They want to be policed properly. They're even making suggestions to get a Garda station ... And, if we take areas like Fatima Mansions, Dolphin House, where there is a lot of community development happening, and people are getting more concerned about the quality of life. The quality of life, like, is severely hampered because of crime … And it's only the guards that can really do that peacefully …

Another resident added: '… the community generally, I feel, are much more open to Gardaí and they want the Gardaí now, whereas before they would have shied away.' A local representative further claimed that: 'Sinn Féin have changed. I think they're less militant, they're more willing to be involved with the guards. Before it would just have been conflict, but now they're able to sit down together.'

Attitudes to the police are nuanced in several respects. Residents distinguish between 'local' officers, those Gardaí – usually involved in community relations – who are based in the area and committed to its population (some of whom were described variously as 'respected', 'sound', or as individuals who 'walked the walk') and the more distant and hierarchical organisation. In other ways too, residents demonstrated an appreciation of positive aspects of policing while also highlighting what they believed to be organisational failings. One interviewee suggested that 'training could be better', while another noted the constraints under which community Gardaí worked: 'It's not that they don't take things seriously, it's just that it's overwhelming. The guards we work with are very good, but community guards can't be available 24 hours a day.' This positive perception of individual Gardaí becomes, ironically, a focal point for residents' concerns about the force as a whole, as it highlights their concerns about the level of resources allocated to community-policing initiatives and the organisational priority given to these activities (see below).

Local demand for consultation and involvement in the decisions that affect the policing of the area reflects the broad social trends that have seen greater scrutiny applied to institutions

[9] This view is not shared by all observers. As one local authority figure stated: 'I just heard the results of the survey in relation to the guards … and they were saying that local authority estates, the results were quite good and people were quite happy with the guards. And I find that really hard to believe ... [What is your perception *of* things?] They're totally ineffective and people just don't even, they just don't even exist really in a lot of cases.'

and the professions generally, and a clearer understanding by citizens of their entitlement to accountability:

> … for historical reasons … people were proud of the Gardaí, and I just think that more and more people are losing that pride. Maybe it's happening to all these organisations in Ireland. There's the church, there's the Gardaí, maybe solicitors, doctors are not in the same standing anymore. So, all these institutions are under scrutiny. And unless they stop, they take their heads out of the sand, and start really honestly, sort of, listening and changing, there is no future.

While the legacy of this historical backdrop of contentious relations between the community and the police is mistrust and disillusionment, there is also recognition of the ground that has been gained. As one local representative stated:

> With the community police officers now there's much more of a dialogue, trying to involve the community. I suppose they're not as militant, more focused on the community. The police are much more accessible now, I think people look upon them more favourably. You still hear people saying there's not enough being done, there's not enough of them on the streets, there's a lot of crime not reported. Now you can go to the [community policing] forum to meet the chief superintendent, go to meetings, it wouldn't have happened in the past. You might get things done but it would be special treatment, they'd have to know you to help you. Now it's much more proactive, trying to address community problems, and that's the answer to most problems. 'Cos all those protests, to hold a protest, to go on a march, you must have a reason. You don't do those things for nothing.

One local authority official reiterated this point that Gardaí now 'see the community not so much as something that's a pain to deal with, but actually as an asset in relation to policing the area'. However, the history of conflict between police and public, and in particular the history of vigilantism and community action, ensure that concerns remain about the form this consultation takes. One interviewee acknowledged the clear difficulties that engaging with locals involved in vigilante action must have posed for the police. Another resident described a case in which three men in the area confronted another man engaging in what they thought was drug-related activity, although it transpired that he was an undercover police officer. The three men were later convicted of threatening the officer, and the resident noted how some officers tended to believe it was evidence of continuing organised vigilante activity in the area even though it appeared to be a spontaneous event.

The process of articulating community needs and demands is complicated by the presence of 'huge discrepancies and divisions within the communities'. One individual involved in a local community policing forum recognised the impact that diversity within the community had on efforts to present a coordinated and cohesive front:

> Then again, not all of us at the community might be singing from the hymn sheet either. And some people from the community, like, whereas we might be into community development, we might be into drugs being the major problem. Other people coming might be just interested in traffic. And that would suit the guards as well, because it would let them off the hook.

The establishment of the community policing forum (CPF) in the area was nevertheless seen as a significant step, and since then further CPFs have been established in other inner-city areas. There are, however, several criticisms of the limited nature of consultation with the police and of local input into police policy, and considerable scepticism that the Garda Siocháná as an organisation is willing to accommodate community involvement to any significant or meaningful extent.

First, some interviewees argued that police involvement in community relations was characterised by ambivalence or disinterest. In support of this, it was noted that as the police took greater responsibility for one CPF, it seemed to lose momentum.

> It hasn't done very well at all. Very little meetings. When meetings don't happen, the guards don't get on their bike and try to organise another one. You have to be phoning up and reminding them and all that kind of stuff. So there is a bit of disillusionment.

Second, interviewees criticised police commitment to community relations in terms of staff deployment. One interviewee recalled being told by a Garda officer: 'I've committed to this area and I'm not going to leave and I don't want any promotion, right?' And in the next two weeks, up he left, because he was [promoted].' Another interviewee described a similar occurrence in which a Garda officer 'was here for a while. Then he left. And then another guy came and he only lasted a couple of weeks … Like, the Garda thing is so hierarchical … they're on a different wavelength. And I don't know to what extent communication is really … free and going up and down … And then you might have a new superintendent coming, a different style, a different personality, you kind of say, what's the point?'

It was felt that while the organisation welcomed evidence of an officer's involvement in the community, it nevertheless attached a low value to this (viewing it instead as the basis on which an officer would be promoted 'out of' community relations activities). One interviewee described what he felt was the low importance attached to community policing within the Garda Síochána: 'the community policing sector is nearly frowned upon. Ah sure that's f**king bleeding doing their do-gooding shite. And that really we're the law and order.'

Third, residents gave several examples of Garda reluctance to engage in community consultation to the extent sought by residents. As one CPF developed, for instance, relations with the police were often strained. Participants described attending 'stormy meetings' and being given a 'dressing down' by a senior officer who 'treated us as if we were members of the police'. Interviewees also highlighted Garda reluctance to countenance public involvement in issues that were seen primarily to relate to operational policing matters:

> It was very hard to get a handle on what their policy was … It was very hard to get an idea of, like, they were always slipping through and saying, well, we can't answer that because that is to do with operational matters that we can't discuss … all that kind of stuff.
>
> I think their hierarchical structure and their whole accountability didn't marry well with, really the whole notion of community policing that we were trying to envisage and want. They were particularly sensitive if we strayed into the whole area of having any say in decisions.

One resident characterised the police approach as defensive, believing that they 'get blamed for Roy Keane, you know, the guards have that same mindset that they get blamed for everything.'

Fourth, perhaps the most forceful criticism made of police involvement in consultation exercises like the CPF was that they were under-resourced. Participants in two separate fora stressed this point:

> … the main problem is the lack of funding. One of the senior guards said that £100 was available for this kind of stuff, but we said that there should be more money, you

> need to do more than have money for tea and biscuits. There should be resources for publicity and research.
>
> Because it hasn't been resourced in terms of personnel driving it, and liaising and mediating, because of those things, it's been lost. Now the only way the policing forum is going to ignite again is if it's resourced.

All in all, interviewees were keenly aware of the public relations dimension of the CPF. Frustration about the perceived lack of momentum in one CPF led an interviewee to observe: 'you get the impression sometimes that it was an important public relations exercise for the guards.'

Local Authorities and Estate Management

Because of the impact that drug-related issues have had on local authority housing estates in the area generally, residents identify policies surrounding the allocation of tenants as particularly significant. Moreover, it is an issue over which the boundaries of 'consultation' and community involvement in official decision-making are tested and negotiated (see also McAuliffe and Fahey 1999).

In recent years, local authorities have become more involved in estate management through such measures as the establishment of area housing offices to provide local on-the-ground services. One local authority official described these as evidence of its more hands-on and consultative approach: 'we really adopted the whole concept of consultation with residents … I think the results of that or the outcome of that are probably not measurable in financial terms, but certainly we have much less problems in our estates than we had years ago.' The most significant development in the process of extending the council's role was the 1997 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act which provided for 'exclusion orders' to be made against 'illegal occupiers' and tenants engaged in illegal or anti-social behaviour. This gave local authorities enhanced powers to sanction their tenants and ultimately evict them.[10] One council official described this as 'the year that we took our role seriously in relation to getting rid of drug dealers out of our flat complexes', and contrasted this with the council's previous 'lack of role':

> Lack of role is probably as close to, like, what we had … Back in the seventies and eighties, we basically built large housing schemes to house people who were on the homeless list, people coming from the city centre. There were no local residents. The only time you heard from Dublin City Council was if you were in arrears in rent. Whereas now, when you hear from us, it's about the start of initiatives. It's about getting crèches for children. It's about perhaps where we can put a playground that's going to be well looked after. It's going to be community involvement.

Some of the difficulties associated with the application of these enhanced powers were crystallised by the death in January 2003 of Noel Cahill. Mr Cahill died after he developed hypothermia while sleeping rough outside the local authority flat from which he had been evicted in October 2002 by Dublin City Council following allegations that some of his

[10] According to figures supplied by Dublin City Council the number of evictions for anti-social behaviour has dropped steadily since the 1997 Act was introduced: from 44 in 1998 to 30 in 1999, 12 in 2000, 10 in 2001, 8 in 2002 and 15 in 2003. The Council carried out a higher number of evictions of 'illegal occupiers' allegedly involved in anti-social behaviour, although this figure too has dropped since the introduction of the Act (from 97 in 1998 to 23 in 2003). While these powers can become an important resource for the police, one Garda officer interviewed nevertheless spoke of his concern at the 'massive powers' involved, wondering whether they were 'draconian'.

acquaintances had been engaged in anti-social behaviour in his flat (*Irish Times* 2 and 3 February, 2003). One housing official stated:

> And this has presented us with particular difficulties when you look to the rights of the individual compared to the rights of the community as a whole … there is a difficult balance there for us to strike. But this guy had several interventions. We would have met him personally perhaps over ten or fifteen times, trying to link him up with various services … But again, it just raised particular issues. About five years ago we were very inactive in relation to dealing with these problems. Five years on, we're very proactive and that brings its own problems.

This proactive approach also has implications for the nature of the consultation that occurs with local authority tenants. One official explained the process of consulting with representatives of residents' groups and the complex issues involved:

> We would ask them do you have any information that we don't know about why this person shouldn't get an allocation. Now they've no veto on it … but they do have an input. … Now in some estates, there's no doubt that the residents would have felt that they should have total say in who comes into their flat scheme or flats complex… It could just be very politically motivated. They could feel that the corporation has let them down so often before that they would like control for themselves. We would never be able to admit that they ever had an absolute veto on allocations…But it's always a difficult battle for us if we meet a Resident's Association where there might be 2 or 3 extremely strong people … Because they're very active and very strong doesn't [mean] that they're actually doing better for their community. They could have personal agendas, they could have political agendas. So we do have to be very careful about who we deal with and make sure that they do have some kind of representation or some kind of mandate. But there's no doubt at times there's people that have become the spokesperson for a community and mightn't be acting in their best interests. It's just something that we have to deal with. We have to dance around because you have to keep people on board at the same time.

The greater involvement of local authorities in estate management and with it the greater availability of the sanction of eviction have given added weight to allocation decisions. Away from the glare of publicity and the procedural requirements of the formal criminal justice process, these hugely consequential decisions become a quasi-policing environment in which the resource of accommodation (and its potential removal) is dependent first and foremost on a contract with a landlord, with the potential input of residents' representatives. The ambiguity surrounding this process is further highlighted by the following account of police involvement in it:

> At the moment there's a certain number of houses that are being built, and fifty families have to be moved over to them. And before those families are moved over … letters were sent out warning twenty of them or something … about their children or their anti-social behaviour or tendencies … And then each of those tenants were asked to attend Dublin City Council offices. And at those meetings, the Garda Síochána were present and taking notes. Now that's a new phenomenon. That hasn't, that never happened in the past, where the f**king police officers were present in relation to housing allocations.

Although this interviewee noted that the practice has been discontinued, he observed, 'it's amazing how something shifts … you know, that the policing takes on entirely different connotations than it has in the past.' Another noted: 'if, you know, the guards need to be involved in, you know, in assessing somebody's right to live in a particular area, it's like, there's a worrying aspect about it as well.' This emergence of local authority housing

decisions as a key component of crime prevention activity is evidence of a wider shift in the management of crime and disorder generally, one in which partnerships involving local authorities feature prominently (see conclusion).[11]

(d) Marginalisation in the urban periphery

In addition to the research conducted in areas close to the inner-city, the project also involved research being conducted in the Darndale/Belcamp area. The research findings from fieldwork conducted in Darndale/Belcamp mirror those described above for the south inner-city area, but with some clear points of difference.

Residents persistently expressed their concern at the negative media coverage of Darndale/Belcamp. This includes people stating that they are 'worried about the press they receive,' 'how people ring up talk-shows', and so on, and the general view that people in other parts of Dublin think that the area had 'a bad name'.

The area is characterised by deprivation, with high levels of unemployment, long-term unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, high levels of single-parent families, and other key indicators of disadvantage. The geographical location of Darndale/Belcamp – essentially on the edge of the Dublin metropolitan region – contributes to its sense of isolation and marginality. The high levels of deprivation in the area also contribute to the sense that is it 'on the margins':

> There's a huge drop-out rate in schools here … kids standing around corners, not going to school at all … The quality of life is different … It's harder, things are harder to attain, just that bit harder … you're being dragged down. It's like there's weights on your feet …

This assessment that the area is marginalised is also made against a backdrop in which community development activities seem to be significantly less prominent than, for example, those in inner-city areas.

Much of the area's poor reputation, according to residents, is associated with crime and disorder, and residents themselves complained about a range of behaviours that, while not involving the most serious forms of crime, nevertheless contributed to the sense that anti-social behaviour or low-level disorder was a fact of life in the area. This included young people drinking alcohol openly, people taking drugs in an open area on the edge of the estate, and a spate of wheelie-bins being burnt over the course of several days. These concerns, described as problems specifically associated with the physical environment of the area – the 'gable end of houses' and other locations, including open areas, where mostly young people congregate – were persistently raised and clearly were sources of considerable anger and frustration. Beyond these activities, most of the complaints about serious or high-profile criminal behaviour related either to drugs or to joyriding.

One community worker observed that most social routes to material success involve 'education and … connections and a good address. And … people don't have that here.' As a consequence, people are 'just sidelined, people don't vote here, in terms of general elections, local elections'. This unambiguous sense of social exclusion is viewed as directly implicated in the crime problems of the area. As one individual stated, because of the unemployment and poverty, 'There's a huge drug problem here.' A community worker noted

[11] Despite these concerns about police involvement in this process, residents are nevertheless keen to secure their own involvement in allocation decisions, viewing this as an important opportunity to have input into decisions that are deeply consequential for the character of the area.

that joyriding is also linked to a sense of exclusion, summed up in the belief that 'there's nothing to lose by joyriding':

> [Kids] see the television [and they see] people driving along in their jeeps or whatever it is they have. And the children here, the young people here want those things as well. But they know quite well they're not going to get it. They just know they're not going to get it … You know you're not going to attain that because no-one around here ever has … family and generations and generations have been the same way. And you've never known a parent to have had a job. Or you've never known a parent to have gone past sometimes primary school, you know that's not going to be you… So do you care if you take someone's car? … nothing to lose, there's nothing to lose by joyriding, there's nothing to lose.

Joyriding has been a persistent problem in the area since the early 1990s, and in 1998 the Priorswood Task Force on Joyriding was established to address it. The proximity of the area to the M50 motorway contributes to the prevalence of joyriding, but the persistence of joyriding also appears to be related to its cultural aspects, particularly the manner in which it provides a 'buzz' and 'kick' in contexts where alternative sources of social status for young males are in short supply.

Experiences of and attitudes towards the police are mediated through this broader context of disadvantage. For example, some residents voiced a palpable degree of resentment towards young people who had been involved in crime or nuisance activities. This was due to the perceived negative consequences of this behaviour for the area's general reputation, although it also took the form of complaints that children who may have been in trouble with the police 'get taken for fishing trips and given courses on self-esteem', whereas law-abiding children did not receive these 'rewards'. This complaint that 'our kids never got that' appears to reflect a sense of concern at the lack of resources generally available in the area.

This perception that criminals are treated with 'kid gloves' is not, however, supported by the statements of those interviewees who had convictions for various offences, often drug-related behaviour. For them, abrasive encounters with the Gardaí were commonplace. One individual who had served a prison sentence for drugs offences noted that since he had stopped dealing drugs, 'they don't bother him. But when he was dealing, they knew he was dealing, so they did bother him. And he'd get an awful lot of hassle…[T]here's a big difference in the attitude of the Gardaí now, as opposed to two or three years ago when he was dealing' [Interview notes].

Other youths described getting 'slaps' from the Gardaí, either when they had been stopped by the Gardaí or were in Garda custody. One young male alleged that the Gardaí used strip searches as a means of punishing suspected drug dealers or users, and that drugs legislation or public order legislation was routinely used to harass young people rather than to press charges. A community worker in the area stated that: 'there seems to be, just from some anecdotal stuff I've heard, the Gardaí are beating up the young kids, and intimidating them.'

Beyond these concerns, several other aspects of policing were raised as problematic. The absence of a local Garda station was criticised, as was the perceived low level of Garda presence in the area. Over the course of the research project, the Garda presence in Darndale/Belcamp was not highly visible. On one occasion, the researcher observed a Garda squad car on one of the adjacent main roads, but otherwise he did not see any Garda patrol in the residential areas during his fieldwork trips there over several weeks. Several interviewees noted the fact that the nearest station (in Coolock) was not only geographically distant, but was felt to cater to a different community.

The level of policing was also criticised on other occasions. One respondent described a situation in which a woman was being threatened by a group of youths outside the building she was in:

> They were intimidating her. They told her that if she took her mobile phone out of her pocket they would, you know, beat her up, and tried to kick the door in. She was left inside and she rang Coolock Garda station and they told her to dial 999 – they couldn't send a car – and use these key words, they told her to say that 'I'm under attack, I'm fearful', all the [keywords], and she did that, and they never arrived … [W]e were saying later, okay, if you rang from Foxrock and said there was [kids] outside your door, I'd say, now, helicopter! … You know, she was very vulnerable in that position. And nothing happened.

As this quote makes clear, residents' concerns about their own levels of policing are constructed and expressed against their perceptions of the policing provided in other areas. In simple terms, they believe that more 'respectable' areas get a better policing service, and moreover that this occurs simply because of the greater respectability, status and wealth of other communities. Concern over the quality of policing in the area is further heightened by anxiety that seeking to involve the police will result in reprisals from those involved in criminal activity. In that sense seeking to involve the police when it is anticipated that they will not respond appropriately or effectively becomes a difficult issue to resolve:

> Other people are afraid too, there's a fear there as well, co-operating with the guards and there's a fear because there's intimidation as well of the joyriders intimidating, of driving to people's front doors, and of driving people's cars and targeting people who they know rang the guards, who they know they're dealing with Gardaí…But there's certainly a fear amongst people of engaging with the Gardaí … because they're seen as snitches or whatever. They will be intimidated and I know some of the community people here are, and purposefully the joyriders drive up and down in front of their houses at night, revving their cars and driving to their front doors, into their own cars … So they're stuck between a rock and a hard place. Even if they did believe in the guards and say, okay, we'll give them our support, they're targeted then.[12]

Concern that the police response to crime and disorder is ineffective is further associated with the likelihood of direct action against suspected criminals. As one interviewee stated:

> People just get fed up, you know, literally, and just kind of feel, well, what are we going to do? You do get frustrated and I think that's when it gets dangerous. And I think that if there's a vacuum there … things happen. And I mean, that's when vigilantes come to the fore.

This nuanced and complex relationship between police and community is evident in the ambiguous attitudes expressed towards the police. One respondent described this 'very mixed kind of attitude towards the Gardaí in the area':

> When they do drive in, sometimes they're not wanted here. And on the other side of it, they can't win … when they do actually come into the area and if they don't sort things out, they're the worst in the world. So they're kind of wanted and they're not wanted.

To illustrate this point, he recalled an incident in which a joyrider drove a lorry into the area:

[12] One community worker who lived outside of the area reinforced this point: 'Sometimes it's easier for us to deal with the guards in terms of, we're not in the community ...'

> [He] was driving around very erratically, really dangerous, about two o'clock in the day or something … and the young student guard ran out, ran up onto the lorry, and dragged this young fella out, while it was moving and stopped the lorry. People … started [laughing and jeering], you know, and I remember one person saying to me that he was really disgusted, on the one hand you're saying go out there and do something, and when he does, and he risks his life literally, you're laughing at him.

Overall, then, residents' assessments of policing are mixed. On the one hand, there is concern that the local police are not adequately supported by the organisation as a whole: 'They're very, very badly resourced.' With this, there is considerable appreciation of the hard work and commitment evident in the case of specific officers. As one interviewee put it, 'I know that one of the guards [we work with] would come on his days off. You know, that attitude is there as well.' Additionally, there is a sense that within the force, community relations activities are not highly valued ('it's not as sexy as being, you know, the detectives'): These various factors lead to a qualified assessment of the force, in which highly rated and committed individuals, and a broader concern about organisational priorities and resourcing, both feature: 'it's like, most people say, individually they're great, as a force, terrible …'

(e) Police officers' views

Police officers' views on the areas discussed here reflect the general practice of sending new Garda recruits to busy city-centre stations. This is considered valuable experience for new recruits, and the physical demands of policing those areas are also considered more suitable to younger officers. Given the historical pattern of Garda recruitment whereby most officers originated from rural areas, and the western counties in particular (although this pattern has changed), being stationed in some of the most deprived parts of Dublin came as a culture shock for many of them (see also Bissett 1999):

> Growing up in small-town Ireland as I did, I was inexperienced. I hadn't really seen anything like it before. It was all new to me. And when I saw the state of Dublin, some parts of them, I thought 'What have you got yourself into?' You know, you're thinking, they eat their own young in there, the place is filthy and run-down, and … I thought 'Oh my god, what have I done?'

Given the prevalence of this initial inner-city experience early in their policing careers, the difficulties of policing some of the best-known inner-city housing estates form an important element of Garda culture whereby areas became associated with violence, and often violence towards the Gardaí:

> … there were no-go areas, maybe where you'd only go out in twos, especially at night; maybe you'd only go in the van. Fatima Mansions and Teresa's Gardens, they were the hardest places…And there you'd get trouble. If you went in there, you could expect trouble.

Gardaí interviewed who had served in the south inner-city area all recounted hostile experiences in the area, including being stoned by youths, having items ranging from toasters to dirty nappies thrown at them, being threatened with syringes by addicts, having metal poles dropped through the roof of the patrol car, and other dangerous and abrasive encounters.

Despite these difficulties, most Gardaí nevertheless draw a distinction between decent and troublesome residents in even the most deprived areas. A Garda observed that one area contains 'an awful lot of decent people … and it's only a small group of people who make things difficult'. Another officer described how 'some of the best *craic* I've had, and the most

genuine people you could meet, have been under conditions of being stoned or in a tight corner in the flats. Some of the most decent people you could meet, some of the best times, I'd say, were in Teresa's Gardens and Fatima Mansions.'

While Gardaí formally welcome opportunities to liaise with residents, they also appreciate the potential benefits it brings in terms of greater co-operation from the public. One officer described an incident in which locals intervened when a community Garda was violently attacked. He noted that other officers: 'looked upon him as a role model, he was so highly thought of, but it showed to the police the benefits of community work.' Despite this, there remains considerable scepticism about the limits of involvement with the community. One Garda described how some of his colleagues were outraged at the establishment of a community policing forum and the prospect of attending community meetings at which residents would 'criticise' them (although this view appears to be in decline; see Bissett 1999). Additionally, the history of vigilantism in some deprived areas has, not surprisingly, coloured officers' views to some extent. The motivation behind such action generates the most concern:

> Concerned Parents against Drugs. I suppose the concept was a great idea. The problem was where it came from. It was infiltrated from a very early stage by subversives, very much involved in it, in my experience. [Is that how the guards saw it?] Yes. And there was a lot of heavies or thugs that used it as an opportunity as well, to flex their muscles. It was also another avenue I suppose in the political domain for people who were trying to set themselves up for that …

Consultation with the public is also limited by other factors, including the secrecy that necessarily surrounds Garda undercover operations and the use of informants. In those circumstances, police secrecy may fuel residents' scepticism that the police are insufficiently committed to community consultation.

4. Travellers

(a) Context

By most indices, Travellers are one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society, and historically relations with the settled community have been characterised by considerable antagonism and hostility (Helleiner 2000; Fanning 2002). The limited data available suggest that this background of hostility is the context in which relations between Travellers and the police must be understood. A survey commissioned by Amnesty International in 2001 on the experiences and attitudes of ethnic minority residents of Ireland included a number of questions on policing (O'Mahony et al. 2001). It revealed considerable levels of mistrust on the part of respondents towards the guards, attitudes which were strikingly divergent from the received wisdom that public attitudes towards the police are uniformly positive and supportive. It also found that 25 per cent of respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against by Garda officers at least once. A survey on Travellers' experiences found that 38 per cent of respondents said they had been discriminated against by Gardaí (*Irish Times* 28 February 2001: 1). As one Garda report stated: 'From a policing perspective much of the interaction between the Traveller community and the Police is in a negative context and this makes it difficult to develop any degree of trust between both groups' (Garda Síochána 2001: 8; see also Pavee Point 2000).

In light of the growing multiculturalism of Irish society, several recent policing initiatives have occurred. In 2000, on foot of a large policing conference entitled 'Intercultural Ireland', the force established the Garda Racial and Intercultural Unit. Following this, in turn, ethnic liaison officers were appointed in each sub-divisional area throughout the country. Other initiatives included the provision of training to recruits on race and multiculturalism (including dealing with racially motivated crime), and preparing information booklets in a number of languages of ethnic minority communities. A training module specifically on anti-racism is also due to be provided in the Garda Training College. Recently the commissioner noted how, due to the low profile of these issues traditionally, 'the Garda Síochána has not had to change its service to meet the needs of diverse groups until now' (Garda Síochána 2001: 9). For instance, in a force of approximately 12,000 individuals serving a national population of approximately 4 million, the total ethnic minority representation in the Garda Síochána comprises two visible ethnic minorities and up to three individuals from Traveller backgrounds.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given this context, our research suggests that relations between Travellers and the police are extremely difficult and contentious. Among the Travellers we interviewed, there was a shared view that hostility towards Travellers circulated widely within police culture. As one Traveller stated: 'the majority of them are very prejudiced against Travellers'. Interviewees spoke of being called 'knackers' (or 'cream crackers') or other derogatory terms by guards, or being told to 'go back to your jungle'. However, Travellers' concerns about the policing service they receive extend beyond name-calling. One Traveller described the relationship between Travellers and Gardaí as based on 'control, containment and harassment'. Another echoed this, characterising the police's approach to Travellers as 'a tendency either to go towards heavy-handed policing, or a kind of hands-off approach'. This following sections elaborate this broad point by discussing Travellers' perceptions of being over-policed and under-protected.

(b) Harassment and disproportionate policing

In terms of being over-policed, several Traveller interviewees identified routine harassment by the police as one of the most enduring features of the relationship between Travellers and the police. Moreover, many Travellers believe that the police view any contact with them as

an opportunity to trawl for evidence of illegal behaviour. Constantly questioning Travellers about vehicle tax and insurance in particular is one of the prime examples of this. One Traveller described it as 'a typical ruse used by members of the force when harassing Travellers'. Another interviewee said that her Traveller relatives from Cork 'are incredulous when they too get pulled over when visiting Dublin, and they cannot understand why they get stopped so often.' She said that she tells them 'not to bother your head calling them up for it as nothing will happen – just accept it'.

Other concerns involve what can only be described as allegations of clear misconduct on the part of police officers, including physical assaults and being 'beaten physically' while in police custody. One interviewee described a case he was aware of that involved:

> not just the verbal kind of abuse, but you know, kicking the chair, knocking cigarettes out of their hands, that sort of thing. But also the verbal, you know, putting everybody down, so Travellers are all thieves, they all beat their wives, they all do this, that and the other – extremely heavy sort of stuff.

One case involved allegations of misconduct towards a young boy detained by the Gardaí: 'when people said they would like to make a complaint or were interested in how they would make a complaint or something like that, they were told they could be detained even longer.' Another case involved a young woman who said that the Gardaí stopped her from begging in the city centre by driving her to an industrial part of the city she had never been to before and leaving her there with the warning that she was not to return to the city centre.

Travellers also express concern about the 'disproportionate' police response to incidents involving Travellers, particularly when it involves a dispute between Travellers and settled people. One Traveller claimed that 'little incidents blow into something out of control … because the police take the side of the settled person on each occasion'. Another interviewee's statement that 'Twenty Gardaí turn up to deal with a small argument between a landowner and a Traveller family' is typical of Travellers' views on this issue. All in all, although with some clear exceptions, the police are viewed in any dispute between Travellers and settled people as strongly biased in favour of the latter: 'When it's Travellers and settled people, nine times out of ten it's the Travellers who get the blame. And nine times out of ten it's the Travellers who are asked to move on or to go away.'

This perception that Travellers are policed at the behest of the settled community is firmly related to disputes over access to social venues and over the location – if not the very existence – of Traveller encampments.[13] The police are in a unique position to oversee – whether by facilitating or impeding – public access to particular locations. In that regard, they assume a fundamental role in the everyday lives and the broader cultural identity of Travellers. The experience of being 'moved on', in particular, is at the core of Traveller identity, as is the role of the Garda Síochána in this process. One woman recalled that when she moved to Dublin as a child, within six weeks her family were moved on: 'and the guards came out and they were saying "Come on, come on, you have to move on, you have to move on." And I just remember even at 14 years of age thinking that it was very odd that these guards were coming and that they were treating us like shit.' Another recalled how evictions were 'fairly frequently violent as well, and emotionally, I suppose, in terms of your whole life being destroyed in one piece, and no care has been taken for it'. Irrespective of how calm or violent the event was, the police were profoundly implicated in the practice of evictions:

> It's either the guards coming to evict you or the guards coming to remove you out of the pub or premises or a shop, or wherever it would be. And it's always in relation to

[13] See Taggart (2003) for a discussion of some of these issues in a Scottish context.

> discrimination or racism, in most cases, that Travellers have contact with the guards. There are some instances of feud-fighting and that kind of stuff where the guards come in and intervene, but the majority of the time it is because people are being removed because they're Travellers on a premises, or being evicted from a site. And the guards come and do it.

The practice of police being actively involved in the eviction process is important here. Police attendance at an eviction is usually on the basis of ensuring that order is maintained. The eviction itself is supposed to be carried out by the legally responsible party involved. However, Travellers allege that police routinely intervene and assist with the eviction itself, even in the absence of any disorder, despite the fact that they have no mandate to do so. On that basis one male Traveller described the police as 'the enforcement arm of a settled state that bears no relation to the life of the Traveller'.

A further related point is that halting sites and Traveller encampments are easily accessed by the police. The police may tend to avoid such areas unless there is some clear necessity for them to enter them (see below), but Travellers view police behaviour on encampments as rather less formal than would be expected in other locations. For instance, one complaint concerned a Garda car being driven at speed through a site while children were about. Another complaint concerned the allegation that a Garda had planted a gun on a site during a search, and the related allegations that the legal requirements for conducting searches were ignored. Overall, these experiences, whether experienced at first hand or not, can come to be viewed as indicative of a general police attitude towards Travellers, inevitably shaping Travellers' perceptions of policing:

> I think there's a lot of my family wouldn't go near the guards or a police station if their life was depending on it, because their experiences have all been negative in relation to the guards … and if a community guard came onto our site tomorrow morning … the guards would be ran out – they'd think they were trying to take the children away from them or something, because there's been no relationship, or no proper relationship with the guards; it's always been negative.

Many issues surrounding accommodation for Travellers came to the fore following the enactment of the 2002 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act which changed the status of trespass from a civil to a criminal offence.[14] Enacted without consultation with Traveller organisations, this legislation was described as 'shit' by one interviewee and, given the role of the Gardaí in enforcing it, as having clear potential to damage their relations with Travellers. Given the failure of local authorities to provide the required level of Traveller accommodation, Travellers view this legislation as the criminalisation of their culture and their cultural practices.

(c) Victimisation and the demand for a police response

In addition to the over-policing described above, the second recurrent criticism Travellers make in describing their experiences of the police relates to under-protection when Travellers are the victims of crime.

> And even when Travellers are robbed, they're abused or raped or whatever it is, very often because they're Travellers they're looked at differently. And it's tolerated in a different way … they very much have an attitude that Travellers, regardless of age-group and sex, that they are all in some way lawbreakers or criminals.

[14] The legislation emerged following several high-profile incidents involving Traveller encampments.

The most basic complaint made by Travellers here is that the police do not respond to their requests for help, whether in relation to reporting criminal matters or other issues, or even when they do respond, they fail to intervene appropriately. One Traveller woman described one police response to a fight among Travellers: 'As long as you keep it inside the gate of that site, we don't give a shite what you do. Kill one another if you want, we'll come in and pick up the bodies.' Another interviewee described an incident between Travellers in which one Traveller received a serious head injury. When the Gardaí arrived, 'they literally, they wouldn't move from their vans', whether to check on the condition of the injured party or to arrest the individual responsible. This interviewee characterised the police view as: 'It was just between Travellers, they're going to be alright, they're used to that. But you know, like there's children on the site, women, and everything. Like anything could happen, like. If you haven't got the Gardaí for support, who have you got? Like, who can you turn to?

This question of 'who to turn to' is a complex and significant one, as Traveller experiences of contacting the police often prove unsatisfactory and yet Travellers also describe the need for appropriate and effective policing. Interviewees repeatedly noted that the police response often oscillated between a failure to attend at all, or else to attend in disproportionately large numbers: 'Like they'd been called out probably to the site and they haven't come out, and then if they did there was always too many of them …' The practice of turning up in such large numbers reinforces Travellers' perceptions that the police view them as 'trouble' and adopt a law-enforcement ethos from the outset. Travellers also complain that if the police do respond to an incident, they often use their presence at a Traveller encampment as an excuse to conduct a general police investigation of the area: 'The guard comes around, and rather than dealing with what they've come out for, they would go round and look at menial stuff, like go round and check all the cars to make sure they're taxed properly and insured'.

Travellers seeking to resolve crime-related problems often find themselves caught in a bind. Among Travellers, the police attitude is viewed as being fixated on easily prosecuted offences (such as 'the tax and insurance thing', which for Travelling communities dependent on vehicles has an enormous symbolic and material significance) while ignoring many other issues of concern. One Traveller advocate characterised this attitude as 'let them deal with it themselves', while another interviewee described how the police adopt a 'sort it out yourselves attitude': 'And on one occasion I've been told, again there was violence, severe violence, involved, and the Travellers were told definitely to take the law into their own hands, by the guards.'

The belief that the police will fail to intervene, or if they do intervene may do so ineffectively, leads to an acute sense of vulnerability.[15] Community and kinship bonds among Travellers can serve as an important resource in resolving disputes, either by informally discouraging overt conflict from occurring in the first place, or by providing some form of mediated solution to it when it does occur. However, such mechanisms cannot remotely be viewed as adequate protection in many cases. As one Traveller stated:

> What that can lead to is a kind of vacuum, you know, where anything goes and there is … impunity – you can do what you like and know that you'll get away with it. So what that means for people is fear, really, living in fear. And not feeling that you have any back-up or support.

The public hysteria surrounding allegations that Travellers are innately violent often finds expression in concerns about 'feud-fighting'. Feuds among Travellers may originate from a number of factors (such as disputes arising from inter-marriage between members of

[15] The significance of this lies in the fact that much 'social' space is not equally 'owned' by all members of a community. In particular, public space is not gender-neutral, and the failure to provide adequate policing services is likely to impact particularly negatively on women.

different families), and feuding may persist, to some extent at least, due to the sheer weight of tradition. However, feuding also arises from this context of strong dissatisfaction with the policing service received, coupled with the pressures to secure some form of resolution to ongoing disputes. As one Traveller interviewee put it, 'many Travellers want the guards to intervene because the feuds get out of hand'. Another interviewee highlighted as an example of positive policing the manner in which Gardaí had mediated between two feuding families in the west of Ireland: 'Travellers would see that as a positive interaction with the guards, and it was seen as very significant.' However, this sensitive and successful intervention was again seen as the exception that proved the rule:

> People are very reluctant to go to the Guards. And as a result they sometimes take things into their own hands, and deal with the situation themselves. Because they've no faith in the Guards in terms of responding to it…It's becoming more acceptable that people would go for the guards, but I mean, traditionally Travellers would have dealt with it themselves. Hence the amount of feud-fighting that you have among Travellers. And a bit of it is that things have gone more violent within the Traveller community anyway, but the other bit of it is that the guards themselves don't respond to the situation when they're called to it. And as a result, then it escalates and if people don't see them getting any kind of recourse through legal mechanisms, with the police coming down and charging somebody or doing something, well then they'll deal with it themselves.

The necessity for an appropriate Garda response was described on several occasions in terms of the growing impact that illegal drugs was having among Travellers. However, a lack of confidence in the Gardaí and a fear of subsequent victimisation are each seen as inhibiting the willingness of people to provide relevant information to the Gardaí.

(d) Assessments of Garda initiatives

Traveller experiences of policing are not uniformly negative. Pavee Point (2000: 3) noted 'very commendable examples of good practice' where Gardaí had sought to prevent the media sensationalising criminal incidents involving Travellers. Instances of positive policing were also mentioned by the Travellers we interviewed. Overall, though, examples of positive policing tended to relate to specific officers rather than to the force in general. Several interviewees described similar 'individual' examples, and some units within the force were singled out for particular praise.

Again, though, the manner in which these units and their staff were singled out for praise frequently highlighted the broader failings associated with the organisation as a whole. For example, one interviewee suggested that without an introduction from a 'sympathetic' guard, other guards would not have responded so positively: 'I think the reaction would have – the outcome of it would have been completely the opposite. Where he actually talked to me, I found, like a human being, not as a Traveller. He just talked to me, like he was talking to a person in the settled community, he treated me just as good as anybody else.'

Another interviewee highlighted the distinction between individuals and the organisation: 'There are sympathetic individual guards but there is no sense of a good service'. Again, though, the difficulties of availing of a policing service that is mediated through approachable and helpful individual guards are clear, particularly 'where people would feel that they know nobody'.

One of the main initiatives to improve relations between police and Travellers is the training sessions that Travellers have for several years provided to Garda recruits at the Garda Training College in Templemore. While the availability of this training was welcomed by all interviewees who mentioned it, several aspects of it were highlighted as problematic. One

interviewee found that there was 'a great deal of hostility towards Travellers' among recruits. This can involve 'people saying provocative things to get others in the class going and sometimes stop short of people throwing paper aeroplanes'. In addition to these concerns about providing the training itself, interviewees expressed further concerns about the impact that the training itself would have once recruits became incorporated into the routine activities and culture of the organisation:

> We'd find when they go into a police station that it's very hard to practise any of the stuff that we were trying to do with them. So it needed to be done at a number of different levels, and not just with new recruits, but in terms of the whole police station and the police force in terms of the way it's run and that.

Beyond the training itself, the main criticism that interviewees made of the Garda Síochána in terms of the institutional response to working with Travellers was that Garda efforts were compartmentalised rather than mainstreamed throughout the organisation as a whole. The establishment of the Garda Racial and Intercultural Unit was repeatedly highlighted as a positive measure, not least for the manner in which it assisted Travellers in negotiating their way through the organisation. Again though, it was viewed as somewhat peripheral to the police organisation as a whole: 'The weakness I would say is that for any organisation that needs to be mainstreamed, and it's not mainstreamed.'

However, as stated earlier, the presence of accessible and committed individuals was viewed as no substitute for co-ordinated action across the entire organisation: 'There seems to be a sense in which there are committed individuals at a certain level of the organisation – a small number – but there isn't really, like there isn't even a mandate coming from the top … We would see a lot of reluctance, to be honest, to change.'

(e) Police officers' views

In a manner similar to police officers' depictions of other communities, Gardaí typically distinguish between Travellers who are 'decent people' and those who are criminally active or otherwise 'disreputable':

> I've dealt with Travellers both at the end of a baton and sitting down having a cup of tea with them. You get very, very bad Travellers and you get very, very good Travellers … and the vast majority are grand, no problems with them at all.

While this view is frequently stated, it is often submerged beneath a strikingly negative depiction of Travellers that circulates within police culture (one that also finds close parallels within attitudes of settled communities generally). Garda terminology for Travellers is often explicitly derogatory, whether in relation to the terms 'knacker', 'stills' (on the basis that Travellers are *still* 'knackers'), or other terms. Such terminology appears to reflect a deep, underlying hostility towards Travellers. As one Garda put it, 'a lot of guards *really* dislike Travellers, like *really* dislike them' [Interview, original emphasis]. This officer became very animated once the formal interview was completed and the tape-recorder was switched off. He then claimed that most guards 'can't stand' Travellers, that they are more hostile towards them than any other group in society. He said that even the thought of having to deal with Travellers gave most guards a stress-induced facial tic (mimicking this as he was describing it).

This hostility towards Travellers is based on a view that mirrors the dominant social imagery of Travellers as being grossly irresponsible, innately criminal and violent, and of little

consequence to the settled population.[16] Many police officers appear to view Travellers as inherently untrustworthy, to the extent that obtaining accurate information from them is viewed as near-impossible: 'They're compulsive liars … to the point of not even telling you their name.' The frustration evident in police depictions of Travellers frequently focuses on issues of disrepute – of dishonesty and attitudes towards authority generally. As one officer put it, 'Probably any police force in the world will tell you they're the most frustrating people to deal with … truth just goes out of the door … they don't trust anybody in officialdom'. As a consequence, even Gardaí who appear highly sensitive and responsive to the needs of Travellers view them as 'very difficult to police, absolutely'. The mobility that defines Travellers itself is a problem for the police (or for any other bureaucracy for which processing information is central): 'You'd need a special unit really to deal with them. You would, really, to keep track of them. Because you see they're moving all the time. How do you police someone with no address? 'The Field, Tallaght'?'

Much of the antagonism between police and Travellers is rooted in a deeply contentious history. Among Gardaí, there is a clear acknowledgement that, certainly in the past, relations between Travellers and the police were usually uneasy and occasionally hostile. Gardaí also acknowledge that police behaviour towards Travellers has, in some instances at least, been inappropriate if not explicitly illegal. As one retired officer recalled: 'I'm not saying the guards are angels too. Certainly there was jurisdiction applied I'm sure, in incidents where it wasn't warranted … they would have been moved on … [They got] short shrift maybe in the way that they were dealt with.' Another Garda described how: 'when Travellers would come into an area, the local residents would ring up and the guards would go down and ask where are you going to be staying tomorrow night?'

Traditionally, the standard police approach when dealing with Travellers was containment, which largely involved ensuring that Travellers did not behave inappropriately in terms of their contact with the settled community ('You didn't bother with them unless somebody complained'). In particular, it involved protecting the settled community from unwanted contact with Travellers, or from Travellers' perceived 'incursions' into town centres or other prominent locations. In general, then, Travellers posed a problem to the police when they strayed from their established areas. As one officer put it: 'Travellers are alright in their own place, easily dealt with'. Much of the policing of Travellers involved being moved on from various campsites. Police tactics to ensure this involved both informal requests to move on – albeit ones that would likely have been backed up by sterner measures if the request was refused – as well as more sustained attention to the campsite, including using prosecutions as a means of ensuring that Travellers complied with Garda demands.

> I mean, they bend, literally fracture and bend every rule you can make. They stroke and you're just an inconvenience to them really. But they move on then when the heat comes on. And that's really the way they were dealt with. If you wanted to move them on, you just kept prosecuting them and you knew you were going nowhere with the prosecutions, and they knew it was going nowhere either, but at least they moved on then, and they became someone else's problem.

This tendency to rely on legal sanction as a means to an end rather than an end in itself (that is, to launch a prosecution for the purpose of getting Travellers to move on rather than to secure a conviction) itself reflects a general reliance on informal policing strategies in dealing with Travellers.

[16] Several prominent incidents have occurred in recent years in which the gathering of large numbers of travellers for fairs, weddings or other events was associated with widespread disorder. Most of these occurred in the western counties of Ireland or in rural areas generally. Issues associated with this did not feature highly in interviews with Gardaí perhaps because they were largely stationed in Dublin.

A number of the Gardaí interviewed consider Travellers to be involved in considerable amounts of crime. While some of this involves allegations of serious criminal behaviour – including violent robberies and other serious crimes – much of it is considered to be more minor in nature, including theft, pilfering, crime associated with the black economy, or motoring offences. But Garda assessments of Traveller involvement in crime is also mediated by a concern at the attitude underlying such alleged behaviour, notably a disdain for the police: 'They've got cheeky, out of hand, and they put it up to you', as well as a belief that Travellers are more likely to use violence than others ('Travellers won't hold back. When they get physical you have to defend yourself because the uniform means nothing to them. You're just a target').

Additionally, one officer described how Travellers 'kick up blue murder' when Gardaí attempt to arrest them in an effort to inhibit the willingness of the Gardaí to enforce the law: 'They work on this embarrassment … The whole thing is orchestrated from start to finish, that you'll avoid them rather than having to have the hassle of dealing with them. And then when you do go to arrest them, women get involved …' Anticipating such abrasive contact may partly explain Garda reluctance to intervene in some circumstances involving Travellers. Certainly it can come to be used as the stated reason for avoiding any dealings with Travellers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

(a) Policing and social marginalisation

Based on the findings from this research, several general observations can be made. First, despite the longstanding view that policing in Ireland is largely unproblematic, and that public attitudes towards the police are very positive, for communities characterised by high levels of deprivation and disadvantage policing is viewed as a major source of concern – whether in relation to over-policing (through allegations of harassment, etc.) or under-protection (through allegations of failing to respond adequately to victimisation of members of those communities).

Second, despite the diversity of experience within these communities, there is a shared sense of receiving a policing service that is of an inferior quality – less service oriented, more harsh and abrasive – to that received by other communities. Moreover, interviewees asserted that their social marginalisation was a determining factor in shaping the policing they received. As one Traveller stated:

> I mean, it's not just the Travellers that … have a negative experience of the guards. You look at the asylum seekers, they have brought in that Operation Hyphen – and it's the guards that have to enforce that. You've seen the guards picking up families at 8.00 in the morning and men from families. It's not just with Travellers, but with asylum seekers, with inner-city people, you'll find that, driving along the street, if two inner-city people are walking together, you very often see the guards pulling up right beside them, whereas if two people from Foxrock or Malahide, wherever, you never see two people like that being pulled up by the guards. Whereas the inner-city people who are probably known because they live in a particular area, are pulled in.

As such, policing is seen as reflecting and reinforcing broader patterns of inequality and confirming the subordinate status of marginalised groups.

Third, while the dominant media image of the police is as crime-fighters, one of the main issues to emerge here is the less dramatic but profoundly significant one of the police as regulators of access to public space, including accommodation and service outlets such as public houses. Accommodation emerges as a particularly significant issue here: in terms of tenancy allocation in local authority housing estates, and encampments for Travellers. Moreover, it is clear that the manner in which social space is regulated is an increasingly complex area, one in which the police play a huge role but in which a network of other agencies – especially local authorities – increasingly figure (see generally Vaughan 2004).

Fourth, while allegations of serious police misconduct are quite common, interviewees tend to regard the issue of meaningful consultation with the police as their main priority. The development of appropriate mechanisms of consultation and conduits for policy input is obviously a crucial issue, one that the Garda Síochána Bill 2004 (see below) will shape for the future. But just as this research highlights problematic aspects of policing, so too it highlights the significance that these communities attach to policing as a means of addressing significant concerns over crime and disorder (and, in the case of Travellers in particular, discrimination). It is striking, nevertheless, how persistently respondents raised concerns over police commitment to community consultation, and suggested that without local drive and the commitment of community representatives, much of the progress made on these issues would be lost. The issue of consultation – especially in terms of its potential for improving relations with the police – is itself related to struggles over how to overcome the political invisibility that for so long characterised these communities.

We do not suggest that consultation is unproblematic: concerns about intimidation may impact on the willingness of individuals to engage publicly with the police, and the diversity of opinion and experience within any community may result in competing (and perhaps conflicting) demands being made on the police. Additionally, communities – often those who are most marginalised – that do not have experience of successfully liaising with governmental agencies may find that their input is not recognised or does not conform to organisational categories (see generally Jones and Newburn 2001). What these difficulties highlight, however, is not that meaningful consultation is impossible, but that the difficulties of securing this will not be overcome unless and until sufficient political commitment and material resources are in place.

(b) From invisible 'community' to explicit 'partnership'

The marginalised communities on which this research is based were, in many ways, rendered invisible in standard accounts of Irish history. This surely is partly related to the vision of 'community' that was so actively celebrated in Irish cultural nationalism, that of white, rural, docile communities. Ironically, given that the assumed deficiencies of these communities gave them a minimal presence in public policy debates historically, it is worth noting that they may yet come to be seen as the pivots around which a fundamental rethinking of policing in Ireland has occurred. Some of the potentially most significant and far-reaching initiatives have emerged specifically from concerns involving the policing of those communities, including the establishment of drugs task forces and community policing fora, and multicultural training (although again it must be noted how these measures were largely implemented on a reactive basis, and were heavily dependent on sustained representations from community representatives).

Moreover, the exclusivity of the notion of community that banished the communities described here to the political margins has, in recent years, given way to a more explicit notion of community, one that recognises both the diversity of Irish communities and the role they have to play in developing and implementing policies to address problems related to crime and disorder. This has led to far greater recognition of the need for communities to be involved in the social policy issues affecting them, particularly in partnership with the statutory bodies and other organisations involved.

These measures represent part of a gradual change in governmental thinking and policy formation that, in relation to specifically policing matters at least, can be traced back to the influential reports from the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System (Whitaker 1985) and the Interdepartmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder (1992). Recognising the limits of the 'fire-brigade' model of policing, the reports highlighted the clear links between crime, deprivation, and antagonistic relationships with the police, and emphasised the need for sustained multi-agency partnership approaches to crime prevention issues. This theme of partnership was further promoted in a number of interventions in these debates, including the Department of Justice's paper, *Tackling Crime* (1997), the *Report of the National Crime Forum* (1998), and the more specifically policy oriented reports of the National Crime Council (2002, 2003).

This move from implicit understandings of community to a more explicit stance in which communities are recognised and incorporated into policy debates is deeply significant. Its appearance is likely due to a number of interrelated factors, including: rapid social changes over the last decade or so; the greater prevalence of 'policy transfer' (Newburn and Sparks 2004) when developing policies; the prominence of social partnership in recent Irish social policy debates (particularly in relation to community development issues); the increasingly interventionist criminal justice policies adopted by recent governments (O'Donnell and

O'Sullivan 2001); and the impetus that Sinn Féin's electoral successes in deprived urban areas has given to other political parties to develop measures to promote social inclusion.

Overall, the rise of partnerships represents a considerable departure from established practices in the field of criminal justice policy in Ireland, some of which are reflected in the draft provisions of the Garda Síochána Bill 2004. There is, quite simply, no tradition of formal police-community consultation in Ireland. Under the draft provisions of this bill, however, the force will have a statutory requirement to obtain the views of the public, providing – for the first time – a legislative footing for police-public consultation in Ireland.

In addition to requiring each local authority to develop and implement policies directed towards 'the reduction of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in its area of responsibility' (33.1), the Bill also provides for the establishment of 'joint policing committees' in each local authority area. These committees would constitute an organisational umbrella under which a network of locally based community policing fora could be established in each local authority area.[17]

This Bill is likely to provide the most significant shift in the structures of police-community relations since the creation of the force. Its specification of formal links between police and community is far from the implicit understandings that hitherto dominated police thinking and practice in terms of police relations with communities of high and low social capital. The Bill still constitutes communities very much as 'junior partners' in the provision and regulation of community safety, and limits their involvement to consultation. Nevertheless, how these proposals will develop in practice is obviously a matter of enormous public importance, and their implementation must be subject to proper scrutiny and assessment.

The key lesson to be drawn from the research presented here is the demand for consultation and input into policing that marginalised communities constantly voice. The changing network of policing and crime prevention described above firmly establishes the importance of community involvement in establishing goals and policies on these issues. Despite some notable improvements in policing and the presence of dedicated individuals within the force, persistent concerns remain about the force's willingness to be fully inclusive on this matter, and to complete the journey from promising initiatives to fully-resourced and mainstreamed approaches to the improvement of relations between the police and marginalised communities in Ireland.

(c) Summary of findings

- In urban areas characterised by high levels of deprivation, residents view issues of crime and disorder as detracting from the quality of life there and posing a serious challenge to efforts to improve the infrastructure and reputation of the area. In both the inner-city and peripheral areas, issues of crime and disorder are enormously significant.

- The nature of the built environment is viewed as contributing to criminal and disorderly behaviour in the area. The different physical environments generate different concerns – proximity to the M50 contributes to the prevalence of joyriding in Darndale/Belcamp, while its relatively dispersed layout creates spaces in which people can congregate to drink alcohol or engage in other behaviour that causes concern to other residents. In St Teresa's Gardens and other nearby estates, proximity to the city centre contributes to

[17] The Bill also provides for the appointment of unpaid Garda volunteers. Related measures include the establishment in February 2002 (under the auspices of the Department of the Environment and Local Government) of a scheme of community wardens that is currently being piloted by five local authorities.

the drug problems of the area by facilitating easy access for those who want to buy or consume drugs there.

- In both areas, youth-related disorder, vandalism, burglary and theft, and joyriding were all identified as serious concerns, but drug-related problems generated the largest concerns. In inner-city areas in particular concerns about the impact that drugs have exerted on communities are on such a scale that it would be hard to exaggerate them.

- Accounts of serious police misconduct circulate widely within marginalised communities. These claims centre on allegations of minor or moderate physical mistreatment (although allegations of more severe misconduct did emerge), particularly in relation to police treatment of young males. Other forms of misconduct, including threats and verbal abuse, were also alleged. This research is not in a position to assess the validity of these allegations, but the prevalence of these claims is indisputable (see also McVerry 2003) and many of them appear to be accepted as fact by members of those communities. This perception of police misconduct has clear implications for police-community relations.

- Younger respondents prioritised police misconduct as the most significant difficulty with the police. Older respondents were more concerned with issues of consultation and with the quality of police responses to community needs, especially addressing crime and related issues.

- Members of marginalised communities view the police as being concerned with the containment of those communities. They view themselves as frequently being policed at the behest of other, more established and/or 'respectable', communities. They also view themselves as receiving a poor quality of policing compared to those other communities. This is partly viewed as the result of low political capital among those communities, which itself is partly viewed as the failure of these communities to mobilise successfully at a political level.

- Members of marginalised communities believe that criminal victimisation within their communities is often ignored or accorded a low priority. This is viewed as particularly damaging to residents' quality of life as it compounds the initial criminal victimisation by failing to provide redress for it; it is also taken to symbolise their lesser worth in the eyes of the state.

- Many respondents interviewed as part of this research were highly complimentary about specific police officers, and accounts of sensitive and committed policing were frequently provided in support of these views. However, these accounts invariably highlighted the activities of officers as individuals rather than as representatives of the police organisation. The activities of the police officers concerned were usually depicted as exceptions to the general pattern of policing experienced by marginalised communities.

- Members of marginalised communities believe that they are given little substantial opportunity to provide input into the policing they receive. They also believe that opportunities for consultation are minimal and that those that are in place are often undermined by their perceived peripheral position within the police organisation. They believe that without strong community involvement, and the activities of local community leaders, the momentum of these initiatives would diminish significantly.

- Respondents criticised the hierarchical structure of the Garda Síochána and felt that this generated an ethos within the organisation that was not conducive to community input. Additionally, they felt that 'community relations' activities were not highly regarded by the

police hierarchy, and did not constitute a priority in terms of the organisation's overall structure and activities.

- Respondents recognised the public relations benefits that the police drew from community relations activities, and often queried whether the organisation's commitment to community relations extended beyond a concern with the police image.

- Police involvement in community affairs activities such as community policing fora was often viewed as less than wholehearted, and sometimes as ambivalent and even disinterested.

- The transfer of community officers from an area (or to a different role within the same station) was viewed as detrimental to the development of good police-community relations, and was criticised for occurring without any apparent regard for local policing needs.

- The most telling indictment of the Garda Síochána's commitment to police-community relations was in terms of the resources allocated to these activities. Despite community demands for adequate levels of policing, and despite the clear benefits – both for the communities involved and for the police – that respondents believed would ensue from this, persistent criticism was made of the inadequate resources made available for community relations activities. This criticism was made particularly in relation to community policing fora, but also in relation to the number of community Gardaí, and other similar issues.

- Relations between Travellers and the police are shaped by a historical legacy of conflict and profound distrust. Travellers believe that the policing they receive is characterised by routine harassment as well as by more occasional – yet commonplace – instances of more severe abuse or misconduct.

- Much of the historical and contemporary difficulties between Gardaí and Travellers is associated with being denied access to, or removed from, particular locations, including campsites as well as social venues such as public houses. Travellers view this 'spatial' policing as a defining feature of their relations with the Gardaí. This policing is viewed by Travellers as reflecting their susceptibility and vulnerability to the wishes of the settled community, in comparison to whom Travellers believe they receive a greatly inferior policing service. Until the issue of Traveller accommodation, in particular, is resolved, considerable scope for conflict between Travellers and the Gardaí will remain.

- In addition to being over-policed, Travellers persistently complain of being under-protected by the police. In particular, they allege that victimisation of Travellers is treated unsympathetically and may involve a failure by the Gardaí to intervene at all.

- Travellers register some improvements in the policing they receive, but they view positive instances of policing as arising mostly from the goodwill and commitment of individual officers or units, rather than representing a general feature of the overall force. There is a strong demand for initiatives like training to be mainstreamed throughout the organisation.

- Gardaí view Travellers as a difficult community to police, due to the mobility that characterises them and to what they identify as prominent features of Traveller culture (particularly the antagonism to authority and propensity to violence that police attribute to Travellers).

- Garda officers recognise the poor state of relations between Travellers and the police, although they tend to believe that these are improving and that individual officers and the organisation generally are more sympathetic and supportive towards Travellers than previously was the case.

(d) Recommendations

In light of the above findings, and in the context of the Garda Síochána Bill 2004, we make the following specific recommendations.

- We recommend that the Garda Síochána *highlights its commitment to improving police-community relations* with marginalised communities in particular. This could take various forms, including an explicit understanding that any community relations posting will be for a significant duration, perhaps a minimum of three years, or a requirement that promotion to senior ranks will require significant experience of community relations activities.

- Much of the background to difficulties between Travellers and the police can be traced back to the issue of *Traveller accommodation*. Given the speed with which the Government enacted the Trespass Act, it remains a striking point of contrast that the same political will has not been applied to meeting government obligations to provide adequate Traveller accommodation. Given the massive negative consequences that flow from this situation, we recommend that this issue be addressed as a matter of priority, in particular through the provision of an adequate number of halting sites.

- We further recommend that *training on anti-racism and multiculturalism* be extended throughout the force immediately.

The establishment of joint policing committees, and the creation under their auspices of community policing fora, gives rise to a number of considerations that will likely impact on their effectiveness.

- The *adequate resourcing* of these consultative mechanisms is crucial. Their effectiveness and impact will be undermined if they are not provided with the financial and institutional support necessary to fulfil their mandate. We recommend that this should include a *dedicated research budget* to monitor and evaluate the committees' operation and impact.

- We recommend that *codes of practice* be established to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of these committees and fora. We believe it is particularly important that, from the outset, such committees are established as arenas in which *genuine public debate* about issues of local concern can take place. It is crucial that such fora do not come to be seen as entities whose primary purpose is to explain the police point of view to the community. If police-community relations are improved through CPFs, this should be on the basis that they enhance local democracy and help generate solutions to local problems, not on the basis that their primary purpose is seen as generating more positive publicity for the police. In particular, it is crucial that the relationship between community input and police policy is clarified. This may involve the shift from 'operational independence' to 'operational responsibility' advocated by the 1999 Patten Report on policing in Northern Ireland.

- To facilitate the effective operation of these consultative mechanisms, we recommend that *adequate and appropriate training* be provided for those involved in these committees. To encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas and procedures, etc, we also

recommend that measures be put in place to encourage and promote *communication and dialogue* across this system of consultative committees. This could take the form of a regularly published newsletter, an annual conference, regular seminars on issues of particular concern, etc.

- While the system of consultation envisaged in the Garda Síochána Bill 2004 appears to focus primarily on geographically-defined communities (given the role of local authorities in this process), we recommend that consideration be given to the establishment of consultative mechanisms that specifically focus on communities that are not geographically defined, or whose limited numbers in a particular local authority area might lead to them being overlooked. We recommend mechanisms of consultation that focus on proportional representation. In particular, we recommend that *consultative mechanisms should be designed to maximise the input of communities whose relations with the police have historically been conflictual*. This might involve a separate committee/forum for specific communities, including Travellers, new minority ethnic communities, young people, and gay and lesbian people.

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