
Reducing Complaints Against Police and Preventing Misconduct: A Diagnostic Study Using Hot Spot Analysis

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This study demonstrates the potential for using complaints data to identify and remedy misconduct problems in policing, and to reduce complaints. The study is distinctive in focusing on units of police management responsibility at the operational level. Drawing on the criminological concept of crime mapping, analysis of complaints was conducted at a more specific level than previously attempted, either in the subject jurisdiction or in published research on the topic. The study is also distinctive in attempting to control for the effects of different “task environments” — by comparing units of similar size and similar duties — and by comparing complaint patterns in terms of concentration and prevalence. A high concentration of complaints was interpreted as indicative of a problem with small numbers of individuals attracting a large number of complaints. A high prevalence was considered indicative of a more diffuse problem that might be associated with negative aspects of the workplace culture of a unit. The analysis found units in all possible combinations of concentration and prevalence of complaints. Out of 436 units, 38 had no complaints and 79 had either a high concentration or a high prevalence. Five units had a combination of a high concentration and high prevalence. A number of implications follow from these findings subject to more refined research. For example, cases of high concentrations of complaints might to be addressed with responses tailored to individual behavioural patterns. The issue of a possible negative culture should be addressed through reviews of management practices, with attention to issues such as supervision and staff morale.

Strategies to prevent police corruption and misconduct draw on two main theoretical orientations based around concepts of “structure” and “culture”. Structural perspectives account for police deviance primarily in terms of the police “task environment” (Bennett, 1984; Savitz, 1970). The development of graft in response to demand pressures for tolerance of crime has been a major analytic focus (Dixon, 1992). Considerable attention has also been given to strategic difficulties entailed

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in supervising operational officers in a highly discretionary and fluid environment (Reiner, 1997; Skolnik & Fyfe, 1993). A structural framework also allows for explanations of specific forms of deviance. Patrol officers, for example, may be more likely to use excessive force, whereas detectives may be more prone to fabricate evidence. Traffic police may be more likely to engage in opportunistic corruption. From the point of view of prevention, the corollary of a structural perspective is to modify the task environment. Options include decriminalisation of vice, removal of police responsibility for regulation of particular offences, the circulation of officers through corruption-prone squads, and the introduction of greater community consultation related to public order issues and policing of minority groups. Attention has also been paid to better regulation of police procedures including innovations such as the tape recording of interviews with suspects (Dixon, 1997; Prenzler, Ede & Harrison, 1996). There are, however, major limitations on the extent to which the task environment can be altered without eroding police powers and responsibilities in crime control (Wood, 1997).

The second main area of theory in relation to police corruption and misconduct concerns the concept of organisational culture. Some studies in this area are prone to exaggerate the distinctiveness of a police culture (Niederhoffer, 1967). However, attention to attitudes, practices and traditions is useful for understanding processes through which misconduct is reinforced (Prenzler, 1997). Central to cultural explanations of police misconduct are the values and practices of secrecy and solidarity (Chan, 1997; Fitzgerald, 1989). These are closely associated with structural influences, such as the need for confidentiality to protect sensitive operations or the camaraderie deriving from stress and danger (Brogden, Jefferson & Walklate, 1988). The problem occurs when these positive values mutate and become pathological. Notable among the reinforcers of "bad culture" have been recruitment and training practices that produced a narrow conformist type of officer. Prevention initiatives deriving from cultural perspectives include recruitment strategies aimed at creating more points of resistance to group pressures. This entails diversifying the personnel profile with more women and minority group members, and older more educated people. Training initiatives include more attention to ethics, to cultural sensitivity and communication skills, and to liberal values of tolerance and scientific understandings of behaviour. These strategies are designed to develop officers who have internalised high ethical standards and are resistant to corruption opportunities. While such reforms have often been enthusiastically supported, there is a growing recognition of the power of both the task environment and the informal organisational culture to undermine these initiatives (Chan, 1997; Brereton & Ede, 1996).

These theories have now superseded traditional discourses about the individualised moral failure of corrupt police. The "rotten apple" explanation, traditionally favoured by politicians and police commissioners, is now rightly viewed with suspicion as a rationalisation of management failure and a means of avoiding systemic change (Lusher, 1981). Nonetheless, a comprehensive approach to misconduct prevention will attempt to prevent the entry of individuals predisposed to non-compliance with organisational standards. It is also a key management responsibility to develop forms of early identification to correct behavioural problems or to remove non-compliant officers, using tools such as complaints

profiling. In that regard, an important element of many reform programs has been to hold line managers responsible for misconduct problems in their section (Mollen, 1994; Sherman, 1977).

There is an ongoing debate about where the institutional locus of responsibility for misconduct prevention should lie and, in particular, where complaints against police should be received and investigated. Three main models are apparent in internal investigations, external investigations and a mixed model. While the purely internal system of police discipline is widely discredited, debate continues over the level of external involvement. Currently, the dominant model is one of "civilian review", involving external oversight of police investigations in a mixed system (Lewis & Prenzler, 1999). Some jurisdictions, particularly those that have experienced significant scandals, have adopted a more developed mixed model where police deal with medium and low level complaints while the external agency audits these activities and investigates more serious matters. This model has been adopted in England and Wales with the Police Complaints Authority and in Queensland, with the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC), following the 1987–89 Fitzgerald Inquiry. The disclosure of extensive corruption in New South Wales in the 1997 Wood Commission report led to responsibility for police conduct being divided between the powerful Police Integrity Commission, the Ombudsman and Police Internal Affairs.

Any system for responding to complaints against police will be faced with a problematic complaints profile. It is likely that the agency will receive a very high volume of complaints with the potential to swamp its resources. The Queensland Criminal Justice Commission, for example, in 1998–99 had oversight of 3,840 allegations against police, entailing approximately one allegation for every two police officers (CJC, 1999, p. 85). The majority of these complaints will be unproductive from the point of view of prosecution, because of lack of corroborating evidence. Some complaints will be malicious. The large majority of complaints will either be dismissed outright or determined as not substantiated after a very limited investigation. Some will be referred for mediation, often with positive results (CJC, 1994). While it is likely that less than ten per cent of all complaints will be "substantiated", the majority in this category will result in light sanctions such as an admonishment or small fine. At the same time, despite the issues of vexatious complaints and low substantiation rates, agencies are inclined to the view that complaints are representative of a higher level of misconduct than can be determined by substantiations (CJC, 1997a; Goldsmith, 1996).

Complaints are also indicative of undesirable conflict between police and citizens. While conflict is inevitable if police are doing their job properly, it is desirable to try to minimise antagonisms wherever possible. Complaints are one indicator of conflict, and reducing complaints — without dissuading genuine complainants — will be a legitimate goal of any police integrity agency — internal or external. With these goals in mind, complaints are a potentially rich source of information about corruption or inappropriate police practices from a preventive and diagnostic perspective. For example, analysis of allegations of assaults by police might show the need for better training in communication and physical restraint techniques (CJC, 1997b). While countries like Australia are witnessing an increasing amount of

discussion about more pro-active measures for maximising ethical compliance, including better use of complaints data, there is as yet very little empirical research on the subject. However, two conceptual frameworks that may assist in advancing research are those of “organisational climate” and “crime mapping”.

The idea of a police sub-culture relates closely to Hollinger and Clark’s (1983) study of occupational deviance in terms of organisational climate. In surveys and interviews with retail, hospital and manufacturing staff, Hollinger and Clark found that diverse “corrupt” practices — such as employee theft, tardiness, drug and alcohol abuse on-the-job, and sick-leave abuse — were primarily influenced by factors within workplace cultures. Workers who felt exploited and dissatisfied were more likely to engage in deviance. Additionally, companies experiencing the least misconduct were those communicating a clear and consistent message of intolerance of misconduct. Consistent application of formal sanctions was important in shaping the more effective peer-based informal social controls of gossip and shame.

A second area of research that may have application in preventing police deviance is that of crime mapping. Researchers have found that crimes are often concentrated in relatively small areas, often called “hot spots” (Maltz, Gordon & Friedman, 1991; Weisburd, Maher & Sherman, 1992). The physical and social characteristics of hot spots can be examined with a view to modifying criminogenic factors. The complementary perspectives of rational choice theory and situational crime prevention underpin this approach (Clarke, 1997). Where opportunities for crime or other causal factors are specified, preventive interventions can be tailor-made, applied and tested for their impact. The obvious application for police conduct lies in identifying areas where there are larger numbers of confirmed instances of misconduct or where complaints indicate a problem that might be capable of correction. This may not allow for a “pure” form of crime mapping in a strictly geographic sense, with analysis of the physical environment of the crime event as the central focus. It does, however, allow for application of the basic principle of identifying areas where problems are concentrated and for analysis of the specific elements of the “location” that may be causally related.

Method

The study presented here is an experiment in the application of crime mapping principles to police complaints at a diagnostic level. Complaints against members of the Queensland Police Service (QPS) were examined from a previously untried vantage point: an organisational sub-unit level, analysing where officers were stationed when they were the subject of complaints. It is clearly useful to know which stations are attracting a greater share of complaints and which stations are attracting fewer complaints. At the same time, it is necessary to control for possible confounding variables when probing for situational factors that could be addressed in an effort to reduce complaints. Consequently, the study was focused on three critical factors derived from the preceding discussion: the task environment, the individual officer with a high complaints profile, and the idea of a negative workplace culture.

The Database

In Queensland, records of complaints against police are contained in two databases, one maintained by the Criminal Justice Commission — the independent public sector oversight agency — and the other by the Queensland Police Service. The QPS database was the most suitable for this study because it includes the location of the officer who was the subject of the complaint, and includes complaints in all three categories of “official misconduct”, “misconduct” and “breach of discipline”. Breaches of discipline are generally dealt with by the QPS, while the CJC investigates the more serious categories. Nonetheless, the QPS must record all complaints it receives and inform the CJC. The three categories are encompassed generically by the term “misconduct” in the title of the present study. One limitation with the database is that not all misconduct complaints received by the CJC come to the attention of the QPS. In cases where no action is taken by the CJC (for example, the matter may be withdrawn or may be outside the Commission’s jurisdiction) the complaint is not usually passed on to the QPS. Several hundred complaints a year fall into this category, but it is unlikely that their inclusion in the current demonstration study would have added anything of significance. An additional complication should be noted in regard to working with the available data set. Policing in Queensland is divided into eight geographical regions. Each region consists of a number of districts, which are divided into 279 divisions (one region has divisions but no districts). Usually, each division equates to a police station. There are also several State-wide organisational components such as State Crime Operations Command, Operations Support Command, Ethical Standards Command and Corporate Services. Each of these has component branches or divisions (for example, Forensic Services Branch or Human Resources Division). The lowest level is the unit or squad, but these vary in their level of geographical responsibility. For example, the Child Exploitation Unit has state-wide responsibilities and the Northern Region Stock Squad has regional responsibilities. Because many units or squads are too small for meaningful statistical analysis it was necessary to place the unit codes back up into their appropriate “divisional unit” codes (see below). These codes are not static, as units can be created, disbanded or moved. In addition, changes are made to divisional, district or regional boundaries, or other organisational re-structuring can occur. This process involved adding a “third dimension” to the crime mapping concept. Nonetheless, the focus remained on geographical sites.

After resolving these coding issues, complaints figures were standardised by the number of officers, so that divisions with differing numbers of officers could be compared. Divisions were then ranked on number of complaints per officer. For the purposes of this demonstration study, complaints data were used from the entire QPS Complaints Management System database from its inception in January 1992 until the time of the last download on 4 November 1997 before analysis commenced. This provided almost six complete years of complaints: a total of 11,939 complaints. Police strength (also called “establishment”) was taken at May 1997 as this was the only year in which police numbers were available in electronic form. Establishment was calculated as the authorised size of a unit, not the number of actual officers stationed at the unit over the six year analysis period. The number of individual officers who were the subject of complaints while stationed at a

particular unit might be larger than the unit's establishment. Consequently, using the unit's establishment eliminated any staff turnover effects.

Controlling for Task Environment

The preceding brief discussion of theories of police misconduct emphasised that task environment is considered to be a significant influence. It is important then that complaints against police operating in an adverse environment should not be compared with those in a low risk environment. For example, police in general duties are far more likely to be subject to temptations and provocations inducing misconduct than police in administrative positions. Two processes were utilised in attempting to control for this. First, units were not re-coded up to a divisional level, but instead were re-coded into four subtypes for each division. These subtypes were:

1. General Station
2. Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB)
3. Traffic
4. Other Duties.

The use of these subtypes resulted in what might be best conceptualised as 436 "divisional units". "Other Duties" were most often either of an administrative or specialist nature (for example, Divisional Inquiry Offices and Water Police). It should be noted that State, regional or district "function personnel" were also included in separate "divisional units" and coded in the "Other Duties" category. These units are involved in a large range of activities including task forces, administration, intelligence, education and training, scenes of crime, and specialist squads. For ease of usage, the terms "divisional units" and "units" will be used interchangeably for the remainder of the paper. Another factor to consider in regard to task environment was that larger busier stations might have significantly different tasks to smaller quieter stations. An attempt was made to accommodate this by the inclusion of a station establishment size variable.

Controlling for task environment may appear to contradict the concept of crime mapping by eliminating "environment" from the equation. However, as noted, "task environment" refers here to the functions of a police unit. A separate analysis focused on a broader concept of environment could be undertaken to identify types of police work more vulnerable to complaints and possibly amenable to situational interventions to reduce complaints. However, this study is focused on differences between work sites in terms of "concentration" and "prevalence". The core idea of crime mapping is retained in locating places where complaints are concentrated in order to search for possible causal factors at that location. Various factors could affect differences in complaint numbers, including crime volumes and socio-demographic characteristics of residents. It would also be important in any diagnostic process to differentiate between types of complaints. Including such variables was not possible in this first-round exercise in analysing complaints.

Operationalising Measures of Concentration and Prevalence

With the above controls in place, consideration was given to conceptualising the number of complaints per divisional unit as the product of the concentration of complaints by the prevalence of complaints. Concentration was calculated by dividing the total number of complaints per unit by the number of officers stationed at that unit who were the subject of complaints. Prevalence was the number of officers who were the subject of complaints divided by the unit's establishment. This equation is illustrated below:

$$\text{Complaints per officer} = \frac{\text{No. of complaints}}{\text{No. of subject officers}} \times \frac{\text{No. of subject officers}}{\text{Unit establishment}}$$

To give a hypothetical illustrative example, if the "Sandy Desert Water Police", with an establishment of 12 officers, had received 19 complaints against seven officers then:

$$\text{Complaints per officer} = \frac{19}{7} \times \frac{7}{12}$$

This would mean that the "Sandy Desert Water Police" had 1.6 complaints per officer, with a concentration of 2.7 and a prevalence of 0.6.

Caution should be taken in assuming that concentration cannot fall below the value of 1.0 (based on the notion that each subject officer has at least one complaint against them by definition) or that prevalence can never be greater than 1.0 (based upon the notion that no unit can have more officers subject to complaints than the unit's establishment strength). For both concentration and prevalence the theoretical lower bound is close to zero and there is no theoretical upper bound. For example, a single complaint against four officers would result in a concentration of 0.25. For prevalence, the analysis is conducted on six years of complaints data but establishment is the authorised size of the unit, not the number of actual officers stationed at the unit over the six year analysis period (as stated above). Consequently, a unit with an establishment of 12 officers could have had 50 officers stationed there over the six years period. If 31 of these officers were the subject of complaints then the prevalence would be 2.58.

Findings

The Effects of Controlling for Task Environment and Unit Size

As noted, "task environment" was operationalised — or controlled — in two ways: by type of duties and unit size. Small CIB units were only compared to other small CIB units as the task environment was assumed to be similar. Likewise, large General stations were compared to other large General stations and not, for example, to medium sized Traffic units. However, it was first necessary to test that both the environmental factors of size and duties were important. It could be that the type of duties was not important. For example, all small units may have a similar "task environment" no matter whether they be General, CIB, Traffic or

Other Duties units. Another example would be that all Traffic units may have a similar task environment no matter what their size. It was therefore necessary to determine if the unit type distinction was important. In other words, were concentration and prevalence different between the four types (General, CIB, Traffic and Other Duties)? Table 1 illustrates the differences in the mean concentration and prevalence for each of the four duty types. The table shows that Traffic units had the greatest concentration of complaints amongst the fewest officers whereas Other Duties units had the greatest prevalence of complaints (that is, the greatest spread of complaints amongst its officers). It was then necessary to test these differences for significance. After transformations $\{\log(x+1)\}$ of both measures, necessary to provide normally distributed populations, ANOVAs revealed group differences for concentration, $F(3, 432) = 13.3389, p < .001$ (see Table 2) and prevalence, $F(3, 429) = 4.6932, p < .01$ — see Table 3.

Post-hoc comparisons revealed that all groups were different from each other on concentration, and that General and Other Duties were significantly different from CIB and Traffic for prevalence (but General did not differ from Other Duties, and CIB did not differ from Traffic). It should be noted that Levene's test indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption had been violated with both measures, so

TABLE 1
Mean Concentration and Prevalence for the Four Duty Types

	Mean concentration	Mean prevalence
General	1.319	1.613
CIB	1.000	1.249
Traffic	1.659	1.114
Other Duties	0.703	2.217

TABLE 2
Concentration ANOVA $\{\log(x+1)$ transformation}

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.822	3	0.274	13.339	0.000
Within Groups	8.873	432	0.02054	—	—
Total	9.695	435	—	—	—

TABLE 3
Prevalence ANOVA $\{\log(x+1)$ transformation}

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.494	3	0.165	4.693	0.003
Within Groups	15.044	429	0.03507	—	—
Total	15.538	432	—	—	—

a series of *t* tests (which provide options for both equal and unequal variances) were conducted. These confirmed the findings described above.

After determining that the unit type distinction was necessary, the next step was to investigate whether the size of units was important to concentration and prevalence. For each unit type the correlations between concentration and prevalence and the size of the unit—transformed $\{\log(x+1)\}$ to achieve normality—were examined. Concentration was significantly correlated to unit size for CIB ($r = .37, p < .01$) and Other Duties ($r = .38, p < .01$), and prevalence was significantly correlated to unit size for General ($r = .31, p < .001$), Traffic ($r = .69, p < .001$) and Other Duties ($r = -.37, p < .05$). Figure 1 shows the relationship between predicted concentration and unit size for CIB and Other Duties Figure 2 shows the relationship between predicted prevalence and unit size for General, Traffic and Other Duties¹. Figure 1 demonstrates that as a CIB unit's establishment increases so does its predicted concentration of complaints. A similarly shaped, but less steep curve, is also illustrated for Other Duties units. Figure 2 demonstrates that as the establishment of a General Duties unit increases so does the predicted prevalence of complaints. A similarly shaped, but far steeper curve, is also apparent for Traffic units. (The line is not extended to the right hand side of the graph as there were no Traffic units of this size.) However, for Other Duties units an inverse relationship was found with a decreasing predicted prevalence as size increases.

Finally, having ascertained that unit size was important for all types of units on at least one measure of concentration or prevalence (or on both in the case of

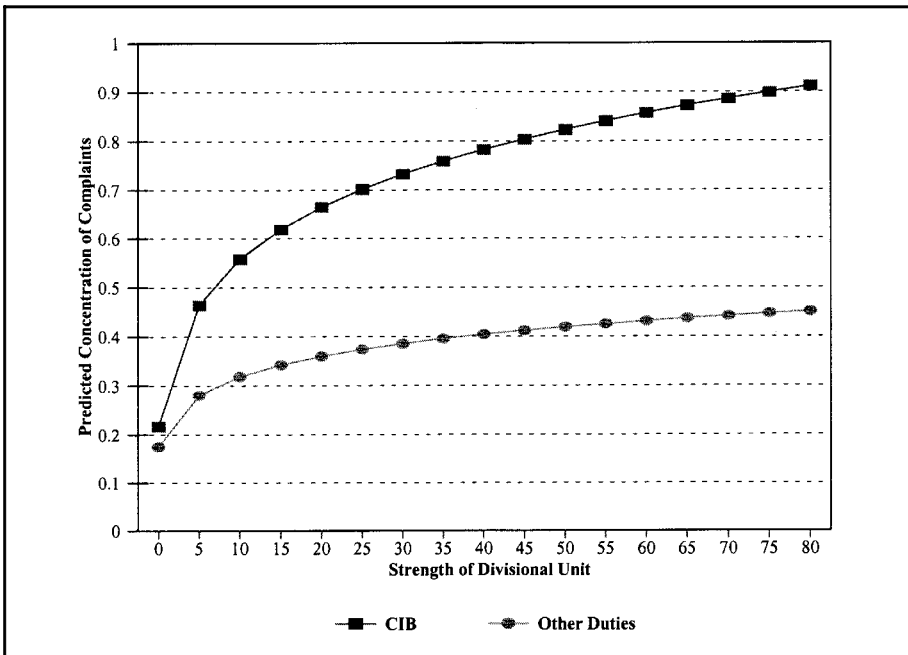


FIGURE 1
Predicted concentration of complaints as a function of unit strength.

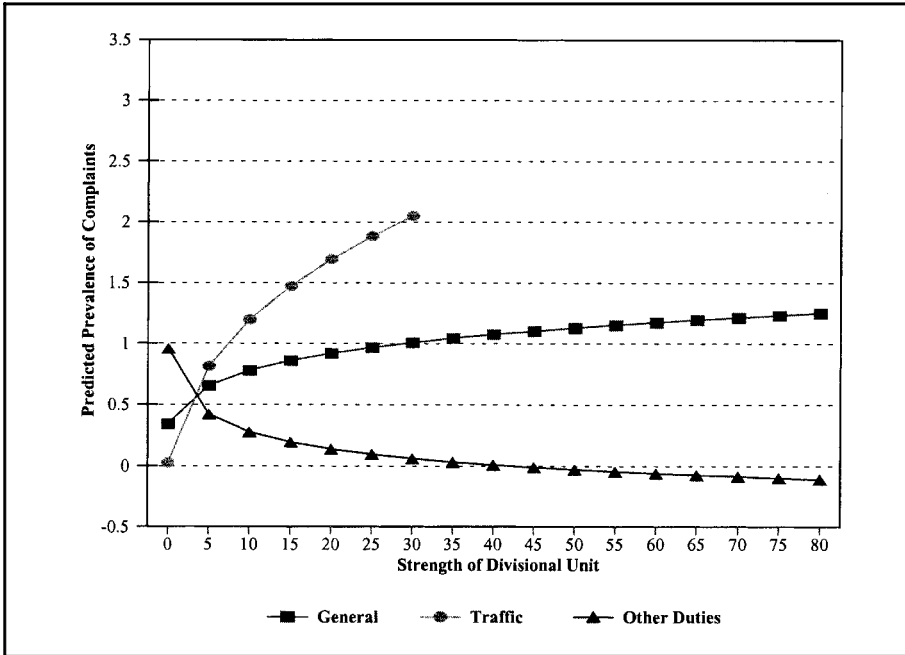


FIGURE 2
 Predicted prevalence as a function of unit strength.

Other Duties), it was necessary to classify the units on the basis of size. This meant that units would have to be divided into several size categories within each unit type. The optimal size classification would be for the maximum number of size groups whose means were significantly different from each of the other groups (using *t* tests) for that unit type on the measure or measures with which they were correlated. A large number of size variations were tested for each unit type and the final size categories decided upon are presented in Table 4. The result was 11 task environment categories, each to be analysed separately, ranging in size from nine units for the large Traffic category to 156 units for small General station duties category. Mean concentration and prevalence scores are also presented in Table 4. The trends in these mean scores reflect those trends illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 and described in the previous paragraph. (For confidentiality reasons the stations and other “units” cannot be identified other than by code.)

The Concentration/Prevalence Interaction

Dividing concentration and prevalence into four categories (zero, low, medium and high) results in 10 combinations of concentration and prevalence (if either concentration or prevalence is zero then the other must also be zero). Units with zero complaints were excluded. Thirty-eight units comprising 8.7% of the total had zero complaints. It was decided that for each of the 11 task environment categories, the top and bottom 10% (being approximately 1.3 standard deviations away from

TABLE 4

Number, Concentration and Prevalence of Units by Size and Type

Unit size and type	Number of units	Mean concentration	Mean prevalence
General Station Duties			
Small (1–2 officers)	156	1.373	1.446
Medium (3–11 officers)	68	1.345	1.593
Large (12–39 officers)	54	1.168	1.899
Very Large (40+ officers)	20	1.225	2.211
CIB			
Small (1–3 officers)	29	0.796	1.253
Large (4+ officers)	30	1.198	1.245
Traffic			
Small (1–5 officers)	12	1.454	0.658
Medium (6–10 officers)	12	1.854	1.168
Large (11+ officers)	9	1.672	1.648
Other Duties			
Small (1–20 officers)	23	0.622	2.841
Large (21+ officers)	23	0.785	1.594
Total	436	—	—

the mean on a normal distribution) would be classified as “high” and “low” for concentration and prevalence respectively. The remaining 80% were classified as “medium” for both. (Note that as some units scored the same values on these variables the numbers assigned to high and low groups was not exact but as close to 10% as possible.) For samples containing small numbers of divisional units there would be a minimum of two units in each of the high and low categories. Table 5 shows how the 433 units (3 units had missing data) are classified according to unit size, type, and concentration-prevalence combination.

The concentration-prevalence combinations are indicative of a number of lines of inquiry that might prove useful in identifying factors amenable to intervention. The bulk of the units (the 234 with a medium-medium combination) could be considered as average units. Units with low-medium or medium-low combinations (71 units) could be viewed positively as below average. Units with zero or a low-low combination (44 units) should not be assumed to be free of corruption or misconduct, but would give little cause for concern. The seven units with a low concentration but a high prevalence are units with a spread of complaints that might indicate generalised problems in the workplace culture. The majority of units in this category are small and they may have close-knit subcultures. Problems in the workplace culture might be transferred to newly appointed staff as part of a new officer’s introduction to the “way we do things around here”.

In the eight units with a high concentration but a low prevalence, the large majority of officers could be considered to be unproblematic. However, attention would need to focus on the small number of officers who attract a large number of complaints. The 31 units with a high concentration and a medium prevalence have a potential problem with a small number of officers with a high complaints profile

TABLE 5

Number of Units by Size and Type Classified by Concentration/Prevalence
Combination of Complaints

Unit Size and Type	Concentration level (on top) x Prevalence level (below)									
	zero —	low low	low med	med low	med med	low high	high low	high med	med high	high high
General Station Duties										
Small (1–2 officers)	27	—	9	16	77	5	2	11	6	—
Medium (3–11 officers)	—	—	6	7	39	1	2	5	7	1
Large (12–39 officers)	—	1	4	3	36	—	1	4	5	—
Very Large (40+ officers)	—	1	1	—	14	—	1	1	2	—
CIB										
Small (1–3 officers)	8	—	2	3	12	—	—	2	2	—
Large (4+ officers)	—	—	3	3	18	—	—	3	3	—
Traffic										
Small (1–5 officers)	1	2	1	—	3	—	—	1	3	1
Medium (6–10 officers)	—	1	1	3	3	—	1	—	2	1
Large (11+ officers)	—	—	2	3	1	—	—	1	1	1
Other Duties										
Small (1–20 officers)	2	—	2	1	13	—	1	2	2	
Large (21+ officers)	—	1	—	1	18	1	—	1	—	1
Total	38	6	31	40	234	7	8	31	33	5

who may be having negative effects on the culture of the work unit. The 33 units with a medium concentration and a high prevalence may have a negative culture that contributes to a smaller number of officers developing a high complaints profile. Finally, the five units with both high concentration and prevalence can be viewed as having serious problems with a large volume of complaints both across the units and concentrated on particular individuals.

Discussion

The findings from this study support the hypothesis that analysis of complaints at a “unit” level can provide information that is potentially valuable in addressing the circumstances giving rise to complaints against police. This “mapping” exercise found that concentration and prevalence were productive as a first step in exploring possible situational causes of complaints. Once environmental elements related to unit task and size were controlled, attention could be focused on high volume complaints either centred on a few individuals or spread across specific units.

The study entailed modification of a two dimensional form of crime mapping. The inclusion of units that were state wide or regionally based added an overlying vertical dimension. This could be conceived of diagrammatically in a three dimensional form. However, the very large majority of units were geographically based police stations. Consequently, their scores could be represented on a map of the whole State using colour codes. Separate maps could be produced for concentration

and prevalence, and for combinations of concentration and prevalence on a third map. This was not done because of confidentiality requirements with the data.

The next step concerns what to do once particular units are identified as having disproportionately high numbers of complaints. The presence of individuals with high complaints profiles is probably the easiest target for police management. Individual assessments need to be made of officers in this category. It is extremely important from both a staff morale perspective and a procedural justice perspective that profiling be done without prejudice and with a presumption of innocence. This will be a delicate area for professional judgement and communication. An officer's abnormal complaints record may be the product of chance or it may result from fearless and dedicated law enforcement provoking vexatious criminal complainants abusing the complaints system. The latter possibility should be explored with a view to possible prosecution of malicious complainants. However, a high complaints profile may also result from inappropriate behaviours by the police officer. Isolating these behaviours will require attention to specific elements of a complaints profile. For example, a male officer may show a pattern of complaints from female motorists stopped for traffic offences. The complaints may concern sexually suggestive remarks and be made by complainants who are unknown to each other. Specific findings such as these will guide the form of corrective action undertaken by police management and the oversight agency or both. Perhaps the officer does not have the appropriate level of ability in one or more areas of functioning, such as interpersonal skills, and requires some retraining. It may be that the officer is not suited to the area of police work they are assigned to and requires a transfer to a different task environment, or the officer may not be suited to policing and should be removed.

The issue of a possible negative workplace culture is more difficult to address. The first task would be to examine alternative explanations for the complaints profile of a unit. As noted earlier, a high crime area might produce more complaints or an educated population might be more likely to make complaints. Given that this study identified divisional units with low numbers of complaints, a further step in the diagnostic process could be to compare these with high complaints units. The aim of the exercise would be to identify features such as leadership styles and procedures that are beneficial to units in reducing a negative culture. A number of research techniques, such as staff surveys and management interviews, might reveal problems. For example, a permissive management style is likely to be a significant factor in misconduct. Further analysis at the unit level might reveal that those with high numbers of complaints, or intelligence indicative of corruption problems, are simply providing more opportunities for corruption to occur. The need to rotate officers out of corruption-prone tasks may have been neglected or there may be a failure to require that officers account for their movements. An overly-authoritarian style might also generate misconduct as an expression of staff dissatisfaction. Following the work of Hollinger and Clark (1983), the focus of attention should be on developing informal and formal social controls, and improving morale amongst staff. Some measures that could be explored include more consultative management, and "fringe benefits" such as more flexible work hours and enhanced career development opportunities.

The units with both a high concentration and high prevalence of complaints are the most problematic. A follow-up research question could ask: Are some individuals poisoning the culture or is a negative culture also producing individuals prone to a large number of complaints? Answering this question could prove an arduous and perhaps unnecessary task. Where indicators of both are present, each should be addressed simultaneously. Careful monitoring should follow any initiatives to ascertain if reductions in complaints have been achieved and sustained. Depending on the results, a further round of modifications to the workplace culture may be required.

A final question remains about the best agency to undertake this type of research. The introductory section of this paper referred to debate over the division of labour in misconduct prevention between police internal affairs departments and external civilian oversight bodies. Conceivably this type of exercise could be done by either, although a co-operative program might potentially be most productive. Individual police line managers could also do their own profiling within regions, districts or stations on a more frequent basis.

Conclusion

The nature of police work means it will always be highly vulnerable to misconduct. To avoid cycles of scandal and reform, innovative methods are required to develop, measure and maintain compliance with ethical standards. It is essential to maximise the benefits of screening mechanisms in recruitment and promotion, as well as giving ethics a prominent place in pre-service and in-service training. It is also essential to have a vigorous and independent system for investigating complaints and sanctioning offenders. However, there are limitations on the extent to which such measures can counteract the influence of the task environment and occupational socialisation. A complaints management system will attract a large number of complaints that hold little substance in an inquisitorial process. In this context, complaints data provide little more than a profile of inputs and outcomes. However, these data may be used more creatively and effectively for diagnostic and preventive purposes. This study has shown the potential utility of analysing complaints at the level of the police "station" or a similar basic organisational unit. Units that show a high concentration or prevalence of complaints may have a problem with specific individuals attracting large numbers of complaints or with an organisational culture generating diffuse complaints. These hypotheses should be tested. Appropriate interventions should then be developed and applied in an experimental form as part of a permanent process of research-driven reform.

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Endnote

- 1 The regression equation was as follows, with concentration replacing prevalence for Figure 1. Transformed prevalence = β *transformed strength + constant. This is equivalent to $\text{pre} = (\text{st}+1)^{\beta} * 10^{c} * (\text{st}+1)^{\beta} - 1$.

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