

## #32 (JENNIFER WOOD)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is Jerry Ratcliffe with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. Commander Alex Murray is the lead officer tackling specialist crime for London's Metropolitan Police. We chat about offender management opportunities during COVID-19 and the important evidence-based policing lessons for police leadership.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Jerry Ratcliffe again with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. Professor Jennifer Wood is a criminologist with expertise in policing, regulation and public health. Our discussion covers the role law enforcement play in the policing of mental health, addiction and vulnerability, and the need to provide police with better tools and options to tackle these challenges.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Welcome, the guest theme tune for the previous episode was a British television police drama from the mid 1970s called The Sweeney, cockney rhyming slang for the flying squad. As in, Sweeney Todd, flying squad. The flying squad were formed in 1919 by chief inspector, Frederick Wensley, and remain to this day, the central robbery unit for London's Metropolitan Police, mainly focusing on bank robberies. Because as bank robber Willie Sutton said in the 1930s, "That's where the money is." For this episode I picked a theme tune from a pioneering 1980s buddy cop show that had 125 episodes across seven seasons and even spawned four movies. Did you guess the show? It was considered fairly progressive and groundbreaking for the time.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay, I have a quick announcement related to this month's episode. From March 22nd to the 26th, a collection of universities from the Philadelphia region will host the sixth international conference on law enforcement and public health. It's a virtual conference online with a variety of different presentations and opportunities to access the latest knowledge around policing and public health. For example, I'll be showing a documentary film based on the evaluation work we've been doing in Kensington, Philadelphia, working with the transit police to address overdoses in and around the public transport system. You can learn more and register for this exceptionally good online conference at [leph2021philadelphia.com](http://leph2021philadelphia.com). That is, [leph2021philadelphia.com](http://leph2021philadelphia.com).

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

As the conference is less than a month away, it seemed appropriate to speak to the conference director, my colleague, professor Jennifer Wood. Dr. Wood is a professor in the department of criminal justice at Temple University. She's a Canadian, but like me came to the US via Australia. Her research focuses on the many intersections between policing, public health and vulnerability. Her work describes and explains the ways in which police function as help interventionists, particularly during mental health related events. She traces developments in innovative police intervention models and examines global debates about how best to align public health and public safety goals. She's an associate editor for Policing and Society, an international journal of research and policy.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

For COVID reasons we chatted in Jen's garden, which seemed a good idea when we planned my visit. Of course, it turned out to be the first time that winter really kicked in. It was blisteringly cold. And even though her neighbor kindly volunteered space heaters, I was already feeling like Jack Nicholson's character at the end of The Shining.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know, I think in hindsight, had I known I'd been doing podcast interviews outside more, I wouldn't be recording one in January. We should have recorded this six months ago. That would definitely have been the smart play. What was I thinking?

## Jennifer Wood:

Thankfully, we have wonderful neighbors with outdoor heaters.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

Very civilized. Honestly, if they could just provide an adult beverage it would be perfect. We're not condoning early afternoon drinking people. You've been working in the policing and public health area for a while now, haven't you?

## Jennifer Wood:

Since I came to Temple University in 2007, really. I developed a really keen interest in public health once I moved to the United States from Australia. So yes, it's been part of my agenda for close to 15 years now.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

What were you doing before then?

## Jennifer Wood:

Before that I was in Australia at the Regulatory Institutions Network. And I think it set me up to have a much broader interest beyond criminology, beyond regulation, to think about health, to think about the range of social problems that different sectors are addressing in today's society. And recognizing that if we just focus narrowly on crime, we are missing opportunities to think innovatively about how different sectors can come together to address social problems. And so health is one of those social problems.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a little fascinating how, as a society, we're late to figuring out that all these things are interconnected, but it's almost too late now, that we've built agencies that are all individually and specifically look at their small particular piece. I mean, you can even see that within the criminal justice system. You get a large meeting of people gathered around the criminal justice field together and they just spend the whole meeting trying to articulate what their agency is doing and fighting for their piece of the pie.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. We've done ourselves a disservice in terms of how we've structured our disciplines. We've taken the disciplines of the social sciences and we've carved them up into these tiny pieces. So, you and I work in a department of criminal justice, and so-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, you work, I drift in there every now and again and record podcasts, but you actually work for a living. But yeah, I know what you mean.

**Jennifer Wood:**

[laughing] And, true. And we both call that home and I think it's been sort of an open secret with me, I guess I'm saying this publicly now to more than you, that-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm worried about where this is going. I mean, I know a great deal about your background, but how much do you want to reveal at this point?

**Jennifer Wood:**

You know what? I'm at a point maybe in my life where let's just throw it out there, but I've never been terribly interested in crime. I've been interested in how we think more broadly about social problems, how we shape the flow of events and society to promote common goods like health, like safety. What kinds of institutional arrangements do we need to get those outcomes? And so if we just have a narrow crime lens, it really limits our thinking. And as you say, we've created these institutions that play one piece in a much sort of larger puzzle. We're now sort of reckoning with the fact that this has not been constructive.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But in terms of the police, even if it's not been articulated, we've known this about policing since the first modern police officers walked out of the old Scotland Yard in 1829, right? As soon as they walked to the end of the street, they were probably dealing with people that were what we would now call a part of a vulnerable population, right?

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. And you know, I think part of why I've been so drawn to policing is because it's such a unique occupation in the sense that we ask police to do so much. We ask them to solve social problems. We ask them to address issues of

chronic vulnerability. They are a front-line sort of full service social agency. We place great demands on them, and we haven't supported them. We haven't given them the infrastructure to support them.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it hasn't part of the appeal of that is because they can be the kind of every man? As social agencies have less funding, or if their costs increase, we seem to have just defaulted putting all of their responsibilities that they couldn't field onto the police.

**Jennifer Wood:**

We have defaulted to the police. Many say that they are the only 24/7 social service, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I don't know. You can get cookies delivered at all hours of the night now.

**Jennifer Wood:**

That is true. That is true. Whether that's a valuable social service, well, I suppose that's arguable. But we place police in these roles in the face of these vacuums, in the face of these deficits of other resources. So as you're suggesting, we don't invest enough in the infrastructure needed to help set up people to have good lives, to have equitable opportunities, to have prosperity. We have created the conditions in which people are getting sick. People are becoming vulnerable. And then we send the police out to deal with these issues that we should have prevented.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

If we think about policing and public health or law enforcement and public health, if there's a goal for where we should be going to, where is that goal?

**Jennifer Wood:**

To me the goal is a long-term one, which is getting to a world where we are not calling on police as the primary first responder to situations where people are experiencing behavioral health crisis. And it may seem counter-intuitive because the conversation right now is how do we fight crime, but how do we also reduce drug overdose? How do we contribute to the prevention of addiction? How do we contribute to mental health in our communities? And we have to support the role of the police in addressing those issues because they play a role now, like it or not. We have to give them more tools. We have to give them more resources and training.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But what you're saying there runs counter to the prevailing argument that's taking place around defunding police and taking those funds and moving them into these kinds of social support mechanisms. So is there conflict in the academic field at least, or in the policy practitioner field about whether this should be a defunding argument or an increased funding argument on the policing side?

**Jennifer Wood:**

I think the defunding framing is problematic. It's suggesting, well, we should just pull resources out of the police, and we don't have a clear vision of what the replacement would look like. What types of first responders do we need to address the range of vulnerabilities that they are tasked with addressing? Should it be the police? Should it be people with clinical expertise? Should it be peers? What should that first responder look like?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right, because I'm doing fieldwork at the moment with the transit police in Philadelphia. And it's quite clear that there are no shortage of people in the area who have behavioral health issues, who are struggling with trauma and homelessness and drug addictions, and fighting with alcohol abuse and addictions and so forth. And the police officers get that. But there's also a subset of those people with all of those kinds of things who are also committing crime and disorder. And it just strikes me that the conversations feel a little naive around the idea that these things can be completely separated and desegregated.

**Jennifer Wood:**

This is an important point, Jerry. And again, it's getting back to what are the range of situations and demands in these situations? Sometimes there's violence. Sometimes there's clear threats to safety. Sometimes we need police to use force. But we need to figure out and from a sort of a scenario planning perspective, given the range of demands placed on police, who should be responding to these different issues?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It all sounds great, but also sounds a little bit idealistic.

**Jennifer Wood:**

What we need to do is reframe the conversation to move upstream. To understand the structural conditions, we need to look at our laws, our tax policies, our fiscal policies that are really vectors of inequality. So the criminal justice system and the health systems are really at the back end of these problems.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So cops are kind of dealing with the outcome of crappy policy decisions that were made a decade ago, a year ago, a week ago, and policy decisions that they really have no hand in crafting.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. We like to say that our policing systems are focused on preventing problems from happening. I mean, that's our Holy grail, right? We want to prevent problems, but we've set things up so that they're only ever responding to problems.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now that it's cool to call everything a public health crisis and violence has taken on that mantle as well. I see all these meetings and you'll see surgeons and you'll see people in the city and finance, and they don't even include the cops in this. How is it that policing has been seemingly excluded from so many of the discussions when they are arguably at

the front line? Paramedics will turn up, but if anybody's violent they'll take a step back and wait for the cops to deal with it. Am I misreading that?

**Jennifer Wood:**

No, you're not misreading that. And it's a worry and it's hugely problematic. If you look back 20 years ago and even longer, scholars in the public health area were highlighting the various harmful effects of policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I don't think in the 21st century that's a-

**Jennifer Wood:**

That's not a new insight. Police are a harm generating institution. That's the-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

At times. I mean, I think police officers would try and argue that there is a net benefit. Yes, there are some negative outcomes for the people get involved in the criminal justice system through policing. I don't think that would be considered a controversial statement.

But I think people in policing, they're not going to come to work and think, "Who can I fuck up today?" I think they come to the discussion that, yeah, it can be harmful to some people, but there is a net benefit to society for having police.

**Jennifer Wood:**

You're right. We all recognize that there can be harmful effects from policing. As gatekeepers to the criminal justice system, officers play a consequential role in people's lives. They can decide whether somebody travels through the justice system or stays out of it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And prosecutors and judges and the whole range of other people play their role in that as well. It's not just on the police.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Of course. It's a whole system and it's quite a loosely coupled set of institutions working as a quote-unquote, system.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. I think call me the whole thing a system is a tad generous. Collection of feuding fiefdoms.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So much of the defunding discussion worries me that we'll defund a chunk of policing, but not sufficiently resource the other areas that are required. You can put as many frontline workers on the ground as you like, and you can send

more of them to calls and hope they're safe. But the bottom line is I worry that those people will run into the same issues that the police have. There are no mental health facilities. There are no secure facilities. There are no bed spaces in shelters. There are no resources to actually support the type of public health work that the police are possibly capable of doing.

**Jennifer Wood:**

This is why it's so important to move upstream. We need to really enhance that infrastructure. We need the system to do its job. We need this wider system to do its job.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We need people to pay more taxes.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Well, I suppose that-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I just said what can't be said.

**Jennifer Wood:**

That's a valid critique, but I think it's how we spend our money. Do we need clinicians all of the time to respond to behavioral health crises? Maybe there's peer support mechanisms in place. Maybe there's community resources that we can enhance that are actually cheaper. Do we need professionals?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. Now this is the part that I think is interesting because if we're going to have professionals, they're going to want to be paid appropriately. And if this is where society wants to go, and I get it and it would be great, but I can't see it being as cost-effective as enhancing the skillset of people who are already out there.

**Jennifer Wood:**

I think the danger, maybe that's too strong a word, is if police get really good at responding to behavioral health crises, then we're going to let other institutions in the system off the hook. We might end up disinvesting in these other health and human services that we need to help families and communities thrive. To me, there's a really important question ahead of us. Do we want a minimalist role for the police into the future where we say, one day we want to get to a point where they exercise force, they enforce the law, that sort of narrower view that's always been in our mythology, but they've never done because [inaudible 00:17:04].

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It sounded good.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yeah, it sounded good. Or a maximalist view where they become jack of all sort of roles. And that's problematic too.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What you're striking out here is there is a fundamental tension in how we think about the role of police. Because if we want the police just to respond and mitigate the effects of crime after it's happened, that is a very minimalist role. But that fundamental tension kicks in with this different perspective of what the potential role of policing is to provide. And this is something I know you've talked about for some years, a broader sense of community safety and security. That seems to be like a real tension. It certainly feels at the moment that society hasn't got this right.

**Jennifer Wood:**

No.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what are the kind of key questions that as a society we have to be thinking about to get to a better place?

**Jennifer Wood:**

You know, we don't have it right yet, but I should say that there's much going on in this country. Experimenting with new ideas in terms of thinking about what should that first response piece look like, for example.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you've got some police departments like the transit police in Philadelphia who now have some social workers on staff, or I think on contract, who are available to respond, but they're responding with police officers.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. There's a wide range of different models now that are being tried. And in that way, it's an exciting time in the country. There's different types of co-response models that are being tried and tested.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So when you say co-response, you mean a social worker and a police officer, so they're both responding at the same time?

**Jennifer Wood:**

It could be a social worker, but it could also be a psychiatric nurse. There's variations on a theme. But the idea is that when an officer co-responds in that way, they go to a scene with that person who brings different expertise to bear. They can then triage that situation and decide, can the officer step back and then provide that safety and allow that individual to assess the health situation of that person.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are there other options?



**Jennifer Wood:**

There's other options like having a telephone triage where an officer may be able to phone a qualified person at a triage desk. And of course there's the crisis intervention team (CIT) officers. And this is a model that's been around for several decades.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Have they been successful?

**Jennifer Wood:**

There's been success with CIT in a wide variety of areas. The research has shown that they feel more comfortable and competent in terms of understanding what's going on. That their attitudes have improved. That there's less stigma when officers encounter individuals. That there's more transports to hospitals and fewer arrests when it's CIT officers. So those are all great outcomes. It's harder to figure out long-term what ends up being the trajectories of those people that they've intervened with because we don't have good data infrastructures to see whether that response by that officer ultimately led to that person getting better.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. So once they move out of the criminal justice sphere and into the public health and the hospital system, they enter a whole new data world where the systems just don't speak to each other at all.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Exactly. And this is a consequence of how we've built our quote-unquote, system.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And have different goals and have different aspirations, have different measures of success and compete for the same tax dollar.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Exactly.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Say I become a police leader, a police chief in a new town or a new district in different city. What are some of the things I really need to be thinking about, and what are some of the challenges that I'm going to be facing?

**Jennifer Wood:**

For starters, historically, it's been challenging bringing different sectors together to have shared conversations about the same problems that they face. And part of this is cultural. You know this is a former police officer. There's a certain culture and orientation to policing. And similarly in the health sector, there can be hesitation in working with the police because they tend to see problems through a different lens. And now we're in a time where police are being highly scrutinized.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How does the chief address the cultural sides, at least internally within her own organization, for example?

**Jennifer Wood:**

Well, the chief plays a critical role in setting the tone, that look, we need to be open to having a listening stance, listening to what our community members need, what they're asking of police, what their challenges are, and also to have a listening stance with other sectors. To open themselves up to being vulnerable.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are you sure we're talking about the same police service? The standard police chief position is to know everything and then ask questions quietly afterwards, right?

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. And I think more and more, this idea of a listening stance is really important.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What does a listening stance, you've used that phrase a couple of times, really look like to you?

**Jennifer Wood:**

A listening stance is sitting back-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think I said stance, listening stance.

**Jennifer Wood:**

[laughing] A listening stance. A listening stance to me is starting from the beginning, being open to understanding what are the problems that our communities are experiencing? What do they need? What do they want? What do they want in our first responders? What do they need to support them in efforts to thrive and to be well, and to be healthy and to be safe? And then figure out based on those needs, what are the best institutional responses that we can develop to meet those needs? So, a listening stance to me is not coming in with a preset idea of what our most vulnerable populations need.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's going to work well at the chief level, which is on a previous podcast episode, Alex Murray said that, "Once you reach a certain level in policing, you spend 90% of your time in meetings." But then how do you bring the locker room? How do you bring the frontline officers to that sense when many of them still have a position that crime has taken place and there should be a justice system that deals with somebody for that crime. I know in some of my interactions with police officers, in a variety of departments, they have concerns that it's letting them off and it's allowing people to commit crime if they have these other related issues.

**Jennifer Wood:**

I think it's important to point out that when we're talking about bringing a public health lens to policing and also bringing a policing lens to public health as well, that this isn't an anti-crime focus or a move away from having crime as our biggest concern, it's about opening up the ways in which we can better understand the problems that police face. And you're right, that this is a problem that is larger than what you just posed. We don't spend nearly enough time as we should listening to line officers in terms of the demands placed on them, the pressures, the lack of tools, the lack of resources, what they need to do their job better. What they see are the most pressing issues.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

The piece that I often see that is missing. And I'm kind of lucky because I get to spend time in the boardrooms in those highfalutin meetings. And I also try and spend a chunk of my time on ride alongs and walk alongs, and spend time on the streets. And the piece that the officers see a lot of that rarely gets represented in the board meetings is the victim side.

The victim is somebody who owns a shop and he has people coming in with comorbidity issues. They've got a range of these problems, they're a vulnerable population, but they're still stealing his shit from the shop on a regular basis. And they're still hanging out around outside, driving away his customers and he's losing income. And he's just about making the rent. That's the people that the police see a great deal. And then they see this decriminalization of this whole area, and they're still seeing victims of crime.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. And this is why the voice of the line officer is so important, because look at the demands being placed on officers. They have victims, sometimes victims of violent crime. They have vulnerable populations who have committed crime. And so there's the needs of victims. There's the needs of the people that they encounter sometimes regularly, who commit those crimes. Then there's the needs of other constituents and they have to juggle those needs.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I do like the idea that at least this seems to be one of the few areas where we're trying to at least give officers more tools, because there seems to be a general sense of taking tools away at a rapid rate of knots at the moment. Are there any other tools that could be online for officers in the future?

**Jennifer Wood:**

I think one area that we should keep an eye on is the work being done to rethink our 911 response systems. And again, that's looking upstream to see, what types of response systems do we need and what should they look like?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

911 doesn't actually feel like it's that far upstream. I mean, we're getting close to the front line at that point.

**Jennifer Wood:**

We're getting very close to the frontline. An upstream approach would be to again, understand what do people want when they phone the police? What other mechanisms could we put in place to address those needs? That would be more upstream. We've given communities really only one or two options in terms of who to call to come and help them with their problems and their challenges. We've trained people to call 911.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. You don't have to sit in a dispatch office for 20 minutes to see that people use 911 for absolutely everything. Most of it completely unrelated to what the 911 system is set up for.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Exactly. And so now we have to figure out how to fix this.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it's also being heavily scrutinized. And it seems to struggle with that balance of getting enough information to send the appropriate response, which is a trade-off, as opposed to getting a quick response that might save lives.

**Jennifer Wood:**

And part of that is giving call-takers tools and resources and training that they need. When you call 911 there's somebody who picks up the phone and they have codes to choose from to figure out what bucket to put your problem in. And that's consequential for how that call is handled. That's a huge burden. That's a stressful burden. And we need as part of this conversation to think about how we might reinvent the call taking piece as well.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've been spending a lot of time in police vehicles recently. And one of the things that doesn't seem to have changed in the 20 years since I left policing is the sheer absence of that useful information that seems to come out. Officers are still turning up to incidents, largely blind as to what's really going on.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. That's why it's so important to listen to officers and understand the challenges they face when they are coming to scenes that they don't fully understand.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's a piece here that I know that you've worked on around the area of the health and wellbeing, not just of the community, but also the police officers. If there a link here between officer wellness and community public health.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. The link is that we're sending officers out into the world to handle these complicated chronic social problems. In the course of doing so, we are placing demands on officers that are making them sick.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, I did 11 years and I can still recall some horrific stuff I've seen at traffic accidents, dead bodies. People who had deceased weeks previously over a hot summer. And I can still vividly remember all of these things now, and this is 30 years down the line. But I'm perfectly fine.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Well, you and I have had these conversations-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

About my mental health. Yeah, I get it. Thanks.

**Jennifer Wood:**

But I've teased you Jerry, in the course of our personal conversations where I've said to you, you like to think you're a fixer and part of that's your personality. But part of that is probably your training and socialization as a police officer. We send officers out and we say, fix this. This is what we're asking. Fix this complicated problem.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I was 19. I was so incredibly unqualified to fix anything.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. Go out, we're going to give you a couple of tools in your tool box. We'll give you little support by other systems and just fix it and move on to the next problem and fix that one. And you may have to go back and fix the one that you just fixed the day before with no attention to how that might be affecting you mentally, physically. So we're making you sick, and then we're asking you to go out and interact appropriately with vulnerable populations. It's all connected.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what you're saying is, coffee, donuts and whiskey doesn't fix everything?

**Jennifer Wood:**

Oh yeah. That's the add on, right? So then we'll structure your jobs so that you don't get sleep, that you eat terrible food.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And then you have a drinking culture at the end of it.

**Jennifer Wood:**

And then you have a drinking culture to deal with the stress. So it's all connected. If we think about public health as population health, well, our first responders are a sub-population. A critically important sub-population.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I will throw in a quick plug because this is not the first time we talked about it, but I'm glad to come back to it because it's hugely important. A previous podcast episode with Bill Walsh talked about officer health and safety and wellness

and from a British perspective, Ian Hesketh some months ago as well. But I think what's important is the realization here that what you're saying is it's not a standalone issue, let's just deal with officer health, but let's actually integrate that with thinking about how they deal with some of these social issues that they're dealing with. It's more of an integration to the calls they're dealing with and how that's affecting the officer as well.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. It's a general shift in mindset. If we think about wellness for all of us, what does that look like?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It seems a distant goal for me, but anyway.

**Jennifer Wood:**

As we are sitting out here freezing cold in January.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's a little character building isn't it?

**Jennifer Wood:**

And so if officers see themselves as vulnerable, I mean, what a crazy thought.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. Well, you're asking people who are the only people when they hear shooting to run towards it, to say, by the way, can you also think of yourself as a vulnerable person in terms of being open about the possible harms? And that's really challenging because those two things do not sit easily together, right?

**Jennifer Wood:**

Exactly. And we are so focused now on scrutinizing the harms of policing and the harms that officers do. But we are also harming officers, putting them out into the world with limited tools and limited support to handle the gamut of problems that we're asking them to handle.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And there are moves at the moment to take away more of those tools, which is really worrying.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes. And that further exacerbates concerns over mental health and wellness.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

For me, a chunk of these conversations is always about trying to channel the different perspectives of different officers that are likely to be listening. It's not just what Jerry thinks. Because it strikes me that it's really easy to watch some outlier event that's probably not indicative of the 75 million or so interactions that police officers have with the

public every year and be critical, without ever having actually come out to see how police officers deliver those services. And I'm open to the realization that some police officers are crap at it and don't care. And I get that and nobody in policing who's realistic would deny that. But a lot of officers are doing the best they can to try and deal with these issues empathetically and compassionately. And I think they feel that that's getting lost in the discussion

### Jennifer Wood:

It is getting lost in the discussion. And this is partly a product of the fact that we don't reward officers for all of the work that you've just described. Having these interactions with people that they know, the quote-unquote regulars, the people in the communities that they see every day on the beat and solving problems informally and negotiating order and all the things that we ask them to do, but never recognize, or hardly ever recognize or reward them for. And so there's the front line of medicine and there's the frontline of policing and a public health lens is really more at the population level. How do we address issues of mental illness, of drug addiction in an upstream way? We have two critical crisis response systems. We have the police and the criminal justice system, and we have emergency departments.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

All of which are failing in some capacity.

### Jennifer Wood:

All of which are failing. So, part of where the field is going is figuring out not only do we need to keep problems out of the criminal justice system as much as possible from a prevention standpoint, but we also want to prevent situations where we are flooding our emergency departments.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I worry that they see an incident that happens with policing in a city 1500 miles away, or a thousand miles away, or they see something or they remember something from eight years ago or 10 years ago, or maybe something they saw last week. And they decide that that is what policing is. And it affects their willingness to work with police on addressing public health issues. That's why I think there's a lot of enthusiasm for just taking everything away from the police without recognizing that a lot of police do a pretty good job at this side of the stuff. And until you've put the complete system, replacement system in place, whether you want to or not, the police are going to be fulfilling this role. And in the short term, you could actually help them do a better job rather than just critique from afar.

### Jennifer Wood:

You know, this ties back to a point that you made earlier about professionals and paying high price professionals. And I think that we tend to think that responses come in the form of assigning professionals to things.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think I've been disabused of that some years ago since I worked in academia.

### Jennifer Wood:

Right. And if we defunded the police, and I hope that that framing will start to fade away because it's not terribly constructive, but if we defund police, what do we put in its place?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's the fundamental question. And you fail the public if you don't put it in place before you defund the police. I worry about there being a vacuum that could last years or decades.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Not only could we create a vacuum, we could fill it with perhaps an arrangement that's worse in terms of, from an effectiveness standpoint, but issues of inequality, of structural racism, they may not get fixed by what we put in its place.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Implicit bias is a concept that affects every aspect of public service.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Not only implicit bias, but if you look at the housing policies, economic policies, you can argue that racism runs through the fabric of those laws and policies. And so I like to think of it as that deep tissue underneath the work that police do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well on that cheery note then, should we bring and end to what's clearly going to be a wonderful recruitment podcast for policing.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Jen, thank you so much.

**Jennifer Wood:**

Thank you.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 32 of Reducing Crime recorded in the Siberia that was New Jersey in January 2021. You can find a transcript of this and every episode at [reducingcrime.com/podcast](https://reducingcrime.com/podcast) and new episodes are announced on Twitter at [\\_reducingcrime](https://twitter.com/_reducingcrime). I also lurk on Twitter in a personal capacity at [Jerry\\_Ratcliffe](https://twitter.com/Jerry_Ratcliffe). If you're a college instructor and want multiple choice questions for this or any Reducing Crime episode, just DM me.

Be safe and best of luck.