#17 (LAWRENCE SHERMAN)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Jerry Ratcliffe again with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Lawrence Sherman is director of the Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing at the University of Cambridge. We discuss executive police education, harm-focused victimization, and the first rule of algorithms. Find out more in this episode at reducingcrime.com and on Twitter at @_reducingcrime.

My chat with one of the most influential criminologists of our generation is coming up in a moment. But first, a quick update about new police commander's crime reduction courses. These three-day programs that are ideally suited to mid- and senior-level police command staff and senior analysts. And the course is the only authorized training program accompanying the book Reducing Crime: a Companion for Police Leaders. In January. I'll be running courses in Salem, Oregon, and Paramus, New Jersey, and in February, come join me in St. Petersburg, Florida. What better way to beat the winter? The Salem course only has a few seats available to folk from outside of Oregon, so if you're on the West coast, sign up soon. Details are at reducingcrime.com/events.

Professor Lawrence Sherman is director of the Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing at the University of Cambridge and director of the Jerry Lee Centre of Experimental Criminology. He directs the Cambridge police executive program, which offers postgraduate degree and non-degree courses on evidence-based policing to police leaders from around the world. Professor Sherman has served as president of the American Society of Criminology, the International Society of Criminology, the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and the Academy of Experimental Criminology.

He's published numerous books and over a hundred book chapters and journal articles and received a plethora of awards, including the American Society of Criminology's Edwin Sutherland Award, the Academy of Experimental Criminology's Joan McCord Award, and the American Sociological Association's Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Crime, Law, and Deviance. He is the founding co-chair at the international jury for the Stockholm Prize in Criminology.

Larry and I chatted at Cambridge's Institute of Criminology, a building that is apparently designed like a Faraday cage. He talks about the police constable degree apprenticeship program, police and crime commissioners, the Crime Harm Index in victimization, and the first rule of algorithms. You know, don't talk about algorithms. For my part, I reminisce about the first police car I ever drove, a British Leyland Mini Metro ... happy days ... enthusiastically agree why drinking in the pub is essential to the police learning environment ... and why would I not ... and learn the second most delightful thing that Larry Sherman does. It's not as bad as it sounds.

This must be chaotic, isn't it?

Lawrence Sherman:

Organizing this conference is the second most delightful thing that I do, but I won't comment on the first. Too much information.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What is it with cell phone signals here?

Lawrence Sherman:

It's blocked out. Michael Tonry designed the building that way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm thinking that you must be joking.

Lawrence Sherman:

Nope.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why?

Lawrence Sherman:

And it works, works really well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But yeah, I can't get a signal in here at all.

Lawrence Sherman:

Do you need it to do this?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. I was going to look at a couple of notes of some of the bits and pieces that you'd said and stuff like that.

Lawrence Sherman:

If you go out in the conference room, there's a signal.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But this building was ... Are you actually serious? This building was ...

Lawrence Sherman:

I don't have any evidence for that, but it works so well. How can it not be intentional?

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not exactly the oldest building in Cambridge. So what did they just ... I mean, they just put lead in all the walls? I don't know. For the first time in years, the voices are stopped in my head, so that's a good thing.

Lawrence Sherman:

Yes. Did you get checked for weapons before you came in?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Okay. So when you wrote that piece for the Police Foundation, just over 20 years ago, did you think we'd end up here?

Lawrence Sherman:

No. The last place I imagined that evidence-based policing would take off was Britain. And I think that was shortsighted because Tony Blair had just been elected, talking about evidence-based policy. But I assumed that UK would be much like the US in which the police would just shrug their shoulders and say, "Ah, research, who needs that?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which, to some degree, is still the case in the US.

Lawrence Sherman:

Still the case in the US, in Australia, and across the UK. But I think the place that has turned out to be the most fertile soil for evidence-based policing is the place that's had the biggest budget cut for police in the modern world in the last decade. And that's Britain.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Your personal energy levels have got to have some hand in pushing that forward. I don't know how the hell you do it.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, look, my energy levels have always been high, but I've wasted a lot of energy battering against brick walls in the United States. And here, I'm scattering seeds on moist soil that's getting a lot of sunshine, and that sunshine is the problem created by the budget cuts. So they have to do more with less, and there's nothing in police experience in Britain that shows them how to do that because their whole experience had been increasing budgets going back to Thatcher. So a whole generation of police never had to worry about being cost effective until 2010.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So do you think this is the only way to move forward into the countries, have drastic budget cuts to make any kind of progress for evidence-based policing? Because you get these tiny isolated pockets in the US, but with 18,000-plus police departments, it's minuscule after 20 years. Or it feels like it, anyway.

Lawrence Sherman:

What I said to the Obama task force on 21st century policing was exactly that, that the 18,000 structure of us police agencies stood in the way of making major transformations, even around technological advances, let alone knowledge advances, whereas this country, always trying to be perfect, is continuing to bemoan the fact that it has so many police forces for 60 million people, 43 police forces, none of which [crosstalk 00:06:09]-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you just say "this country always trying to be perfect"? Have you seen Brexit?

Lawrence Sherman:

This country is endlessly beating itself up over ideas for how to be perfect, and Brexit is certainly one such idea. The people who advocated Brexit said, "Everything's a mess. The country's going to the dogs. And the only solution is Brexit."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's certainly going to be interesting.

Lawrence Sherman:

It's this self critical ... If I may say, as an American in Britain speaking to a Britain and America, Jerry, you are, I'm sure, remembering the idea that if it's made in Britain, it can't be any good. And Britain is the only country that I know of where they have a low murder rate in the capital, and they assume that the murder rate's lower in New York. And they even say that when it turns out New York still has a higher murder rate than London, always has. As Monken tells us, for 200 years, it's had twice the average homicide rate in New York per capita than in London, for reasons having to do with unattached young men in New York compared to London. All very interesting. The fact is, why do British people assume that Britain is the worst or not very good when, by any objective standard, certainly with British policing, it's among the best in the world, if not the best?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

First police car I ever drove was a British Leyland Mini. It went to naught to 60 if you were going downhill with a following wind. But I think that kind of proved the point that Britain needed to improve.

Lawrence Sherman:

Britain needed to improve, and I arrived just at the time that all of that was going to happen. I had no idea. That's not why I came here. I didn't come here to work on evidence-based policing in particular. I had very specific interests like restorative justice. And then the not-well-known event is that the director of the master's of studies part-time police management program quit and went back to the United States and actually went to the United States because she was a Brit. And so Friedrich Lösel, the director of the institute at that time, said, "Would you mind taking over this part-time program? You won't have to do much. The administrators will ... and just keep it ..."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Would you mind grabbing this poison chalice?

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, at the time he asked me to do that, I think there were 12 students.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, that's not so bad then.

Lawrence Sherman:

And today, we have 140.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

From how many countries?

Lawrence Sherman:

Yeah, well, the number of countries at the moment is probably around seven. And I've just found it so rewarding because every year, the students get better. Most years, they get more numerous. And we're now up to over 10% of the assistant chief constables and above in England and Wales hold the master's degree from the evidence-based policing curriculum that we launched in 2008.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's quite incredible, really.

Lawrence Sherman:

And we should double that in the next five years, I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because there's been a big shift in education and recently with the apprenticeships and British policing as well.

Lawrence Sherman:

We launched the first policing apprenticeship at the management level on April 1st of this year with 60 people who came in for what's called the senior leaders master's degree apprenticeship. And it's the salvation of the course because with all the budget cuts, the thing we were running out of was any way to fund British students. So the course was going to become mostly overseas. And we could keep the course alive, but we literally had to give out 10 scholarships last year to get British students on the course. And then the apprenticeships came, so we go from 10 British students to 60. And we hope to push the apprenticeship numbers up and to rebuild that sense of urgency. So the [inaudible 00:09:28] now has 20 students on the course compared to the two scholarships we gave them the year before.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's great. How do we get this change to take place in the US?

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, luck, I have to believe, is important. The apprenticeships came out of nowhere. I had no awareness of it until the college of policing launched this framework that I did strongly support as a board member of requiring, after three years, every constable in British policing to have a bachelor's degree. And that really was only possible because of the apprenticeships, because it gave the police forces a way to pay for it. And that police constable degree apprenticeship program is partly what stands in the way of the next prime minister of adding 20,000 police just like that because it sends out to be more difficult to recruit and train that many police to get them on the streets within three years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, especially, as with changes in morale, you've got people leaving at an increased rate, as I understand it. The program has people from a whole range of places, including places like Hong Kong. That's going to raise some interesting issues around democratic policing.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, I think if we talk about the data democracy in relation to the rule of law right now, there are those who would say that the biggest challenge is in the United States. But it wouldn't be necessarily with the police. The challenge of the rule was in relation to things like whether the president will obey the Supreme Court about the census and one thing after another in which we see constitutional crises. In the US, they don't involve police chiefs. In Hong Kong, they involve police chiefs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, they have ramifications in terms of how people are feeling about how effectively or how enthusiastically to police some of the areas around immigration and collaboration with it.

Lawrence Sherman:

In the US, the federal role in immigration is hugely relevant. And I see lots of indications that the procedural justice policies and practices of the federal agencies have been adversely affected by, shall we say, an excess of democracy. And the balance between how much democracy you can have and how much rule of law you can have, I think, is a major issue for the police all over the world. So it's very interesting for us to have people from these countries, except the United States, which now for some years has sent us absolutely nobody.

And I think that reflects part of the political culture that they're from, the increasing suspicion of what's the value of going out of the country for anything as part of the cultural shift. Again, you're talking about 18,000 police departments, but we did have a number of police officers from departments with fewer than a hundred officers, thanks to Jim Bueermann sending us police from departments in California, even New Jersey. They're very sharp, very interesting, very innovative.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Many of them are still involved with the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing. I was just at their conference in Cincinnati.

Lawrence Sherman:

I'm very pleased that the American Society of Evidence-Based Policing has been so well supported by Cambridge graduates. And I can say the same thing about the Australia & New Zealand Society of Evidence Based Policing, which, depending on how you count them, they may have another 2000 members. New Zealand has a unit of 40 officers that

is led in part by one of our graduates that Cambridge from West Midlands Police who's a sergeant, but who has just been elected fellow of the Academy of Experimental Criminology. And he's got two outstanding experiments to his credit.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's incredible. It's fascinating to see how evidence-based policing over the course of the last 20 years has just grown to be this really quite marvelous thing. But I don't feel that we have reached a tipping point yet.

Lawrence Sherman:

I think we are going to reach a tipping point because of the enthusiasm of people who want to find more meaning in their work. And what I never anticipated, in sketching out the way in which knowledge could be applied to policing, was the emotional force of wanting to do that, that we could cultivate in these officers who passionately care about helping people. And they're in large supply by the time they get to Cambridge. There's a biased sample of British policing here, so I always have to be careful not to generalize from our students to the 120,000 British police officers. But in general, the whole culture going back to Charles Dickens supports an empathetic view of suffering, and there's not this indifference to suffering that I pick up in other countries we work in.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I seem to feel there's like two different types of folk. You get the people who are out there doing the job, and they just inherently feel that what they're doing is right. So they don't really question. But then you get those other people who really want to go home at the end of the day, knowing they've done a good job, and they're not sure whether they have. And they're the type of people that then seek to find something like evidence-based policing, something, further education to get some reinforcement, to get that knowledge into them.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, at a very deep psychological level, we have a conflict between self confidence and doubt. And policing succeeds from the supreme self confidence of the personalities generally selected to do police work. They need to be very clear about their authority or else they can't survive long in policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, especially as country to the military, you end up having to exercise it so young in your service on your own, which is something that pretty much no other organization would do. We'd never leave people with a few weeks training, say, "Go and make these life-changing decisions. And here's a few weeks' training. Good luck. See you later."

Lawrence Sherman:

So that is the argument for self confidence. But I think with self confidence, there's a strong tendency not to allow doubt to enter into your thinking. And it may still be the unusual person who is willing to let doubt enter in and to open up the possibility of, well, maybe we're not doing it the best way we could. Maybe there's another way to do it even better. Lord knows there's enough things that go wrong in policing that you can find an empirical basis to say, "Is there a better way to do this?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've no idea what you're talking about.

Lawrence Sherman:

So some people would say, "No, there isn't. We know what we're doing." And other people would say, "Well, let me look into this and see what I can find." And now the internet, I think, is cultivating curiosity in a way that books never did, because again, the kind of police who were recruited were not necessarily book people in school. And a lot of the people who come here are not necessarily book people, but they've got their phones. And they're swiping away, and they're coming up with new information. And I think cultivating curiosity and being passionate about using what you learn to do a better job, that's what's driving evidence-based policing forward, at least in Britain.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Unless they're on Twitter, which seems to be just full of people have zero doubt whatsoever, and everybody's an expert. Yeah. Does that change take a long time to filter through, though? Because it seems like there is a groundswell of people who are essentially spreading, like Jim Bueermann, like some other folk in Australia and New Zealand, spreading some of these ideas, almost like a network that seems to take a long time.

Lawrence Sherman:

It's interesting to see how the rates of succession in senior police leadership have changed so much just in the last 12 years. When the contracts were fairly standard, people would serve as a chief constable for five years and then often get renewed. So you had these longterm chief constables, and you've got to know the chief constable population. Then along comes police and crime commissioners who are given total power to hire and fire chief constables. And from 2012, when they were first elected, they adopted a very short-term contract perspective, and that led to much higher rates of turnover in chief constables as well as–

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's something a little bit more mimicking, the high rates of turnover we see in the US.

Lawrence Sherman:

Look, they're getting much closer. And even though the courts in Britain have said that a commissioner cannot fire chief Constable, just because he doesn't like the color of the socks ... and we had a case that essentially involved the disagreement over policy involving another police force. And the chief constable said, "I have a right to have an opinion about and even act in relation to one of my colleagues in another police force." And the police and crime commissioner said, "No, you don't. You're fired." And the court said, "You can't fire somebody for that reason. You can fire them for misfeasance." And so that actually strengthened the position of the chief constable.

But if you only have one boss as opposed to an 18-member police authority, which is the change that happened in Britain in 2012, I think it becomes pretty unpleasant to stay around with somebody who is demeaning and disrespectful to you every day. So that's pushing the turnover.

And then at the assistant chief constable level, we are now seeing people skipping the deputy chief Constable, which is the one person who was under the chief constable. And historically, you always served in that kind of job for three to five years before you became the chief constable, gradually learning the skills that you needed at the very top. People have walked from assistant chiefs to being chief constables and been totally overwhelmed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay, but then surely, isn't it a way forward then if we educate the police and crime commissioners about evidence-based policing about modern practice? They can start to select and hire those people who demonstrate their skill sets. And so what I see in the flaw in the US system is the people who are doing the hiring are mayors and city managers who were realtors one day or a plumber. And those are the people who are ... It's elected if you're a sheriff. Those are the people who are hiring the police. So what you've got is the mechanism for hiring police is different in the UK than it is in the US, and that seems to be a flaw in the US system.

Lawrence Sherman:

I'm so glad you asked the question about why don't we educate the police and crime commissioners so they can do a better job of picking chief constables and managing them well. And the answer is, right now, we have one elected police and crime commissioner in our master's degree program as a student. And he's got the chief of staff of the chief constable's office sitting two rows away from him in the class I just finished teaching.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just one.

Lawrence Sherman:

One this year out of 43. Next year, we could have two more because this fellow is recruiting others, and he's also affiliated with the party in power at the moment. That may not last very long, but I think it's important that you have a highly educated person from a finance background who sees evidence-based policing as something he needs to know to do a better job as a police and crime commissioner.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a good start.

Lawrence Sherman:

And he, I think, will want to be a police and crime commissioner and get reelected for several more terms. And for him to be campaigning in the association of police and crime commissioners, which again is only 43 people, having them be told by him that they should come and study this course makes me optimistic that we're going to get more of these folks.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's good for Britain. So you've got that, and you've got that kind of network hopefully starting to spread. How do we get more US departments then to be doing the same kind of thing? Because it comes back to what you were saying earlier. Nobody wants to go outside of pretty much their local region. I mean, a lot of us police departments, if they want to do a fact-finding tour, they'll ring around the surrounding police departments and go do a visit. And that counts as them trying to figure out what best practice is in many places. And that's not a slur just on US departments because that happens here as well and happens in lots and lots of places. How do we spread the network of what is good practice across policing generally? Is it education? Is it the internet? Is it all of these things? Is there a piece that we're missing?

Lawrence Sherman:

I think education in classes where people are co-present physically and not online, that kind of education, including the drinking sessions and the friendships-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm glad you kept them in.

Lawrence Sherman:

They're essential. I often wonder whether they're learning more in the pub at night than they are in the classrooms during the day. Certainly, I know that some of those concepts are getting reinforced with hashing it out over drinks. And the friendships, the longterm communication networks among our students from 5, 10 years ago, are also very impressive. So I think to build a kind of cadre of people who speak the same language about how do we know this works, how do we know this is the best way to target our resources, and to keep refreshing each other with innovations ... Do you hear what we're doing? That's cool. Let's see if we can do that. So it becomes a diffusion of innovation network as well as a reinforcement of the spread of new knowledge. That could happen in the US. I don't think it's happened in relation to the senior management program or other things that have been offered in the US.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, they've got the drinking side, but I'm not sure they've got the innovative ideas side.

Lawrence Sherman:

Yeah, I think it's important to do more than drink, important is drinking is. But I still am delighted that we have people who are reading. And we can tell from reading their essays and reading their thesis work, they're learning an enormous amount. And that learning is something that, by and large, I think they're taking back to their colleagues and putting to work substantively rather than flaunting, "I know more than you do," or, "I went to Cambridge, ha ha. And you only dropped out of school at 15." Well, I dropped out of school at 15, too, but then first time I went back to university, I went to Cambridge for a master's degree. That's what we can do that American higher educational institutions are generally not willing to do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What do you mean? Specific [crosstalk 00:22:32]?

Lawrence Sherman:

We have the power at Cambridge University to admit people to a master's degree program without a bachelor's degree. They're called nonstandard students. And if they have lifetime achievements that are the equivalent of getting a bachelor's degree, in our opinion, like being promoted to superintendent or even inspector in a British police force, we can admit them with all other indications, letters of reference, et cetera, sometimes that they've done innovative projects. We give them the chance to become master's degree graduate of a leading research university as their first contact with university or even A levels, in some cases.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you find it easy to maintain standards under those circumstances? Because there's often a conundrum, which is the ... It's been claimed, and I'm not sure it exists. But it's certainly been claimed it's a dumbing down of education, which means that you can create a very challenging, which is often read to be difficult course, which people say they

want. But in actual fact, they often vote for the easiest course that their peers go, and they say, "It was really easy, and I didn't do very much." And they think, "Well, that's exactly what I need. I'm doing a full-time job." The reality is they often go for the easier option rather than the harder, challenging option.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, a lot of people refuse to accept nomination of this course because they know it's so much work. Some people come really wanting to do it. They see how much work it is. They'll drop out. We'd have a wastage rate of maybe 2% to 5%, and it's almost entirely self driven. So if people stay and do the work, they turn in their essays, they do the thesis project, I think the achievement levels are much higher than they are, say, in the Ivy League for undergraduates who manage to graduate. But a lot of them have really blown off a lot of their coursework.

They can't do that here. They've got too much peer pressure. Their employers are paying their way, and they can't not do something important. And because the degree is so focused on a research project and discovering something really important by doing systematic research in their own police agencies with their own agency data, they've got the chance to get published, to get in the newspapers for having discovered something important that can make the public safer or improve justice and effectiveness by the police department.

It is so tied to their sense of purpose, their sense of meaning of their lives. Because they're mid career, I found it very hard to go back to teaching even PhD students in their early 20s because they don't have a clue. These folks are all so, shall we say, resilient from the shocks of life in policing to get to the point where they still want to come and read and study and do research. That's what keeps them from being a quality problem, even though they haven't been in a classroom for 20 years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It sounds like the support from their agency is essential in making that happen.

Lawrence Sherman:

I think they need to be encouraged. And certainly, being picked to be nominated for Cambridge is part of what British police agencies do well, as in picking people to be promoted. After the last test is done at sergeant's level, above that it's all professional judgment about who's a good leader and who isn't. And the system that gives us those students at inspector and above level, even without university degrees, is working really well. Some of those people wind up being top in the class, and they're well ahead of people who have a bachelor's degree. But they're just much harder workers and more passionate about what they're doing and self-taught.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And some of the smartest cops I knew were people who never went to college, never went to university.

Lawrence Sherman:

And those are the ones we want to come here.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think most of them I knew retired. Just to change the subject for a moment, this all takes place against the backdrop of austerity, which is changing the nature of policing in terms of social support and other areas. And that's driven and

pioneered by yourself and a couple of other people here, this move towards harm away from just thinking about crime. Does that filter in throughout the whole course now?

Lawrence Sherman:

I think the most popular thing we teach in this course is the Crime Harm Index. It's like a light bulb goes off. And it's not just here. It's also in India where there has been lots of political pressure to manipulate crime statistics. But to think about the question I start with is to push them right to the conclusion we want. The question is, "Do you think all crimes are created equal?" Well, nobody does. So then why are you counting them that way? Just because it's always been done that way.

Here's a way that you can make crimes vary in the importance you give to them by how much importance they have and that's in terms of their harm. So things go very rapidly into a, "Wow. I never thought about this before I came to this course." And it's like day one that we give this to them. And they're so impressed by the generality of that tool and how much change you can create just by using that tool that they then build up their enthusiasm for everything else we're talking about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What sort of change?

Lawrence Sherman:

Oh, for example, in Leicestershire ... The Economist even wrote about this. They changed all of their patrol beats by looking at harm levels rather than count levels.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It has the capacity if there are lower level types of crime then, though, but enough volume of them to change the nature of what police focus on.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, not only where they work, but with whom. And one of the big breakthroughs was with the Dorset Police tabulating the harm index value for each victim in one year and roughly 30,000 crimes, 25,000 victims, I think. Gavin Dudfield showed that the concentration of harm was far greater among victims than it's ever been among places. 3.75% of the victims had 85% of the crime harm [crosstalk 00:28:09].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, there's your frequent flyers.

Lawrence Sherman:

And you have 13-year-old girls getting raped three and four times, and nobody knew that because there are no systems set up to detect repeat victimization by harm levels. So you have repeat victims for all kinds of things, but if you're just counting burglaries, car thefts, whatever, it doesn't jump out at you the way it does with a crime harm index.

So just in terms of prioritizing the harm to victims, the next study that came out showed that people who were only offenders or only victims had much lower total harm levels in Leicestershire than the people who were both victims and offenders. And their total harm levels, combining harm that they commit and harm that they suffered,

were miles, like a factor five times above the offender only and the victim only. And to be able then to target the people who are both victims and offenders in relation to their trauma issues ... other ways of trying to prevent both victimization and crime simultaneously because you're dealing with the whole person. That's a very different way of thinking about policing that's only made possible by using a harm index.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I can see all the positives of that. And then I can also see the British media picking up on one piece of that and using it to beat the police, which is 13-year-old rape victims ignored.

Lawrence Sherman:

Hasn't happened in three years since published the study ... two years since we published the study.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Probably be best if I cut this piece out of the podcast so we don't alert them to this.

Lawrence Sherman:

Okay. Well, but we don't mind, I think, that you're things like this disclosed all the time through other means. What we offer is a comprehensive systems approach to have your computers report to you whenever there's outliers of this kind and perhaps to every hour update the rankings of the most harmed victims, the most harmful offenders, and the most harmful places. So predicting knife crime in London, we're very close now to trying to get a 365-day rolling period update on stabbings because one in every 60 stabbings is a homicide. And the prediction of an algorithm you can explain ... and I think explainable algorithms are going to be becoming very important for the police. We have this simple algorithm. The more stabbings, the more likely a murder is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I'm glad you mentioned that because this has all taken place against the backdrops in a number of places where there's quite a clear pushback against algorithms and predictive policing and artificial intelligence generally.

Lawrence Sherman:

And facial recognition in particular, which is in the front page of the New York times today, about ICE. What I think about explainable algorithms is that, "Hey, you should try not to say 'algorithm.'"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a good start.

Lawrence Sherman:

And B, the explanation should begin with the phrase, "It's common sense. The more stabbings you have, the more likely somebody is to die." And what we know is the average likelihood of death in a place that hasn't had any stabbings out of the 4,800 local places in London, the average there of the risk of homicide is 1%. If they've had a prior stabbing, it doubles to 2%. And if they've had four prior stabbings, it goes up to 15%, if memory serves. So it's common sense. The more stabbings you've had, the better you can predict where the murders are going to happen. And so you can try to

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discourage people from illegally carrying knives in public places where the murders are most likely to occur or even the stabbings are most likely to occur. And I haven't said the word "algorithm."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The pushback seems to come from people who expect or demand that any algorithm or any kind of device in that nature [inaudible 00:31:47]. What other words are we going to use from "algorithm"? It just makes so much sense to use it.

Lawrence Sherman:

Predictor.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Predictor, okay. But the predictor has to be perfect.

Lawrence Sherman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In other words, if it incorrectly predicts something, at that point, we have to throw the baby, the bath water, and pretty much most of the bathroom out as well.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, my argument about that goes back to the basis of experimental science, which is that it's all about comparisons, counterfactuals. Suppose you don't have a quantitative predictor. What are people going to do? They're going to predict based on common sense without doing the counting. And what we talk about in relation to race is whether having quantitative prediction is going to be racist. My response is, "As compared to what?" If you're not using quantitative prediction, if you're using all of the biases, the implicit bias that's well-documented, why would you think implicit bias-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Throughout the whole of the criminal justice system.

Lawrence Sherman:

Why would you think implicit bias would do better than a transparent formula that's based on tens of thousands of cases of data where you have much greater likelihood of reducing racial disparity by using the numbers than you do by relying on people's implicit bias?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And we can have a conversation about the algorithms.

Lawrence Sherman:

And we've changed-

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

We can actually look at it and talk about it and change it as we as a society see fit.

Lawrence Sherman:

We can take out any factor that actually makes it more accurate, but offends people. And so fine. Legitimacy is more important than accuracy, is the mantra that I have been pushing here, because if we can't get the idea of using big data to make better decisions, then we're going to be much worse off. So we can be less accurate in order to have the public support for the legitimacy of this approach and to recognize that if we don't do it that way, we'll have even more bias. So the Arnold Foundation has just published a report, demonstrating at least a model that shows how you reduce racial disparity when you use big data compared to when you don't.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that, you think, the way forward for just improving the use of science generally in policing, to drive this notion of helping to explain it as stressing its legitimacy and stressing its value over the traditional ways of doing things?

Lawrence Sherman:

Yes. I don't think you sell the algorithm to police officers telling them that they're racist and they have implicit bias and we're going to control that with a computer. But obviously, there's another way to put it, which is that we trust the experience of police officers. When we look at the big data, what we have is the experience of hundreds of thousands of police officers or police encounters. No human being can remember all that stuff. If you like experience, then go for the maximum experience. That's what the computer can give you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a great way of putting it. It's not just your experience. You amalgamate or aggregate the experiences of tens of thousands of cops.

Lawrence Sherman:

When I've said it, I get a lot of "okay, that makes sense" nods in the room.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And the same thing to get the public on board?

Lawrence Sherman:

It's harder to read the public because when you're on the BBC, you don't know how people are responding and can't see them. But you get some feedback. You get comments on the stories in the Times and so on. And as you've said about Twitter, anybody who's commenting on a piece is apt to say and will say almost anything. But when I talk to people face to face ... and it's not just police. I can be in rooms with advocates or community groups. My sense is that if you are focusing on the principles of the explanation of simplicity, clarity, looking at them, and getting facial recognition of the idea, and when people are scowling about the idea, that you ought to pay attention to that and maybe try another way of explaining it

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Academics reading people's language. That will be a first. You have the skill set.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, obviously some people are better at it. I'm talking to one of the most well-received lecturers we've ever had in this Cambridge program. And whenever I say Jerry Ratcliffe, the second-year students who have heard you before have their eyes light up and say, "Oh good, we're definitely coming to that one."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

[crosstalk 00:35:56] same old [inaudible 00:35:57] jokes.

Lawrence Sherman:

No, it's really important ... and you've said this ... to put as much effort into how you explain something than what you're going to tell them. If it takes so long to figure out what the answer is and then you don't put any time into explaining or figuring out how to explain what the answer is, then you probably deserve what you get, which is people ignore all the work that you do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that's something academics are particularly bad at. They love to do the work, and they hate to have to explain it to people.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, what you've just said is why I think the future of policing can be driven by pracademics because they both want to know and they want to change. And it may be true that the only thing cops hate worse than change is the way things are, a famous Ratcliffe joke that's oft repeated here. But I think what you get with a pracademic is this passion to be sure we got a better answer and then to have every colleague in their police agency agree with them and not just to know what they're saying, but to think that it's right.

      And talk about relentless salesmanship. I mean, people like Renee Mitchell, for example, just don't quit, and they can get hundreds of people to do things that they would not do for anybody else, except somebody who's so committed and so articulate in ways that are very straightforward, not fancy big words. But I get the point. Okay, I'll do it. And when it's over, can I stop?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that relentlessness, that's part of the reason people do what Renee asks. It's partly out of, "Yeah. That makes sense," and otherwise, it's out of fear.

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, Alex Murray has done the same in this country. And I would say that his recent appointment as a chief officer was actually made less likely by his pushing all this evidence-based policing stuff than more likely, but that said, he is now chief officer in the metropolitan police and is continuing to promote the idea of pracademic policing and using evidence for better policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

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How do we get to the stage where people don't pay that career price for getting involved in evidence-based policing for doing the right thing, for pushing science into policing?

Lawrence Sherman:

Well, I think having examples of people at high ranks and the 10% we now have of chief officers who may or may not talk about evidence-based policing very much, that's a real icebreaker. If we have poster children, if you will, who grew up with evidence-based policing and who flourished, that will encourage others. That's my hypothesis. And we're going to have an annual dinner now with all of our who have completed the senior command course and are now licensed to be chief officers in England and Wales. Every year, we will congratulate them all for not only achieving that level, but staying in those ranks amidst all of the pressures and to encourage them to do what they can in ways that they think are right for the context to encourage others to apply evidence-based policing to the tasks that they have.

And that means that we've got more than just a set of ideas. We've got a group of people who share an answer to how could we do this better, at least the method of how we answer that question. And so I'm more optimistic now about the future of evidence and research in policing than I've ever been in my life.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What a great place to finish. Larry, thanks very much.

Lawrence Sherman:

Thank you, Jerry. Appreciate it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers, mate.

You've been listening to episode 17 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Cambridge in July, 2019. Other episodes lurk at reducingcrime.com or the usual podcasty places. New episodes are announced on Twitter at @_reducingcrime. Be safe and best of luck.

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