

#13 (RENÉE MITCHELL)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Jerry Ratcliffe here with Reducing Crime, a podcast featuring influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers. Dr. Renée Mitchell is a Sergeant in the Sacramento Police Department in California, and the co-founder and current president of the American Society of Evidence Based Policing. In our wide-ranging chat, we explore the myriad ways research can help 21st century policing. Find out more in this episode at reducingcrime.com, and on Twitter @_reducingcrime.

Hi. Before I get to this episode, I'd like to quickly tell you about a three day training program I'm facilitating in September, 2019. From the 24th to the 26th, I'll be running a police commanders' crime reduction course in beautiful downtown Philadelphia. This course is ideally suited to mid-level police command staff, and it's the only authorized training program accompanying the book, *Reducing Crime: A Companion for Police Leaders*. Details can be found on the web at reducingcrime.com/events.

If you have had any involvement in evidence based policing in the US, you will know of Renée Mitchell, Sergeant Doctor Mitchell, I think I have that in the right order, has served in the Sacramento Police Department for 21 years. Dr. Mitchell has been a Fulbright police research fellow, is a co-founder of the American Society of Evidence Based Policing, a National Police Foundation fellow, a Better Gov fellow, a member of the George Mason Evidence Based Policing Hall of Fame, and a visiting scholar at the University of Cambridge. Sergeant Mitchell holds multiple academic qualifications, culminating in a PhD in Criminology from the University of Cambridge. She recently co-edited a book with Dr. Laura Huey, *Evidence Based Policing: An Introduction*. Active in knowledge transfer, Renée has two popular TEDx talks advocating for Evidence Based policing.

I caught up with her at the 2019 American Society of Evidence Based Policing conference in Cincinnati. I managed to pry the society's president away for a few moments to talk about medicine, aviation, Evidence Based policing, police involved shootings, field training officers, and who was the first paid-up member of the American Society of Evidence Based Policing. I'll give you a clue: it's a bloke with a perfect face for podcasts.

Renée Mitchell:

You want me to say more stuff?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Say more stuff.

Renée Mitchell:

Say more stuff, I'll say more stuff.

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

What it's like to run a conference.

Renée Mitchell:

Jesus Christ. Why did I get... My life, without Jim Bueermann, I would have just been a fat, dumb, happy cop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We all say the same thing about what would I like being without Jim Bueermann, but he started something, didn't he?

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah. Him and Larry Sherman, and David Weisburd and all those guys. I kind of group you guys all together, but-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then he suckered you into...

Renée Mitchell:

Running a conference.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Running a conference. And now here we are in Cincinnati with, how many people do we have here?

Renée Mitchell:

About 250.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

250, 3rd year of the American Society of Evidence Based Policing conference.

Renée Mitchell:

That's right. Are we beginning?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, good a time as any.

Renée Mitchell:

Okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, I don't do like a formal open thing anyway, because it always feels weird. Bill has got a lot to answer for, hasn't he?

Renée Mitchell:

He does actually. I gave him a present once-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And just when this is picking up, he goes and retires.

Renée Mitchell:

I know. So, you know I always give books as gifts. So I gave him a book, I don't remember what book it was, but my card inside just basically said, "It's all your fault."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That seems entirely appropriate.

Renée Mitchell:

That's all it said I said, "Dear Jim, it's all your fault. Renée." And he knew exactly, I didn't even need to explain. He knew exactly what I was talking about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's been a trip.

Renée Mitchell:

It has, a long road.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Where did it start for you?

Renée Mitchell:

Well, it started with Jim Bueermann. I was sent to a conference on the recruiting pipeline. So at the time I was a Sergeant over school resource officers and the magnet school officers. And I was on maternity leave, and I had a new Lieutenant and a new captain. And they said, "Well, we don't know anything about this stuff, and there's this conference about recruitment, getting kids in early to become police officers." And while I was there, everybody made plans to go to dinner, but I was going to be late to dinner. So I actually asked a group of the people, I'm like, "Hey," because you know how you make new friends at a conference?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, nobody makes friends at a conference like you do.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, that's true.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You kind of bounce around absolutely everybody, it's impressive.

Renée Mitchell:

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Yes. So I do, but I'd already kind of gotten a group. So I'm like, "Hey, save me a space at dinner because I'm going to come late." Well, I ended up sitting next to Jim Bueermann. So he had noticed that I was going to do a Fulbright over in the UK with the London Metropolitan Police Service. And this is why I do believe in fate and the universe, because-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Very Zen.

Renée Mitchell:

Yes. When I had applied for the Fulbright, I was not pregnant. But when I was accepted into the program, when I opened the letter to say that I was accepted into the program, it was a Friday. And I was basically going to be induced for labor on that very Monday.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I thought we were heading for an immaculate conception kind of story at this point, and I think, I've met your kids.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, they'd say maybe they were born by the devil's spawn, but... No, I'm kidding. I love my children.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But I totally leaving that in in the edit.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, do it. I love my kids. So I had to call the Fulbright commission and say, "Hey, I didn't have a baby when I applied, and now I do. Do you mind if I go in January?" So had I not been pregnant with a baby and gotten this Fulbright, I would have never met Jim. I would have actually been working with the London metropolitan police service. So he found out I was doing the Fulbright and he said, "Hey, I have this friend named Larry Sherman who runs this program in Cambridge. How would you like Cambridge to be your host institution?" And I was like, "Hell yeah." Who wouldn't want Cambridge attached to them?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think one or two people have heard of that university.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, one or two. So he just met me that night, and we talked and by the end of the night, he's like, "Yeah, I'll write a letter to my friend Larry, and I'll get you over there." So while I did my Fulbright with the London Met, I took off two weeks in there and I attended Larry Sherman's master's program at Cambridge, that he's been running for a long time now, as you know because you go over there and speak, and teach, and mentor the students.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I wander around, it's mainly to go and have a drink in the Eagle.

Renée Mitchell:

Right, or the Granta. So I went over for the two weeks and just sat in on the courses. And I actually didn't really have a full understanding of what the program was because I didn't go to the dinners and I didn't wear the Harry Potter gown,

but I met Larry and I got a good understanding of evidence based policing, and what it was. So I started reading everything on evidence based policing, and went back to work advocating for research, trying to find research partners. So this is a very long story, but Larry brought me down to ASC in 2010. So I spoke there and then they were like, "Yeah, there's all these other presentations." And I knew David Weisburd from talking to Jim. So I went to his session, and at the end of it, I approached David, and I was like, "Hi, I'm Renée Mitchell." And he's like, "I know who you are." And I'm like, "How do you..." He's like, "I saw you present for Larry."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There you go. See, that's the problem. Once you meet Larry, very few people can contract the exact moment they had committed career suicide. When you met Larry Sherman you got sucked into the dark side, you should have taken the blue pill and stayed in the Matrix.

Renée Mitchell:

I know, ignorance is bliss. However many months later I became the Sergeant of crime analysis. And so once I became the crime analysis Sergeant, so I called David and I say, "Hey, I'm the crime analysis Sergeant, what should I do?" And so he says, "What about doing a hotspot study?" I said, "Well, that sounds like fun." So from my two weeks in Cambridge and kind of having a basic understanding, and I read a lot, of research and randomized controlled trials, I ran my own study with the mentorship of David and Cynthia Lum and Chris Koper.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which became the Sacramento hotspots experiment.

Renée Mitchell:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It seems as if to make that happen, a lot of stars had to get in alignment. We're never going to sustain the American Society of Evidence Based Policing or evidence based policing generally, if the requirements to get there are you have to meet Larry Sherman, you have to know David Weisburd. Let's take the two biggest names in the field, on the planet, and yeah, you have to be on first name terms with those guys, otherwise we can't get things going. We have to be able to move beyond that, but it's fascinating that that's what got you involved. But how do we go from there to a couple of years down the line, where now there's hundreds of people here in Cincinnati of all places, for the American Society of Evidence Based Policing?

Renée Mitchell:

Well, that had to do Jim Bueermann also. So really ultimately, like I said...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

He's to blame.

Renée Mitchell:

He's to blame. So I was talking to two separate friends that were involved, getting involved in learning about police research, and they would use me as their person to talk to. And they wanted to set up an appointment so we could talk once a month or every couple of weeks, because they didn't have anybody else in their agency to really talk to about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which is a bitter indictment of 21st century policing, if you think about it.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, because we should know what the research says.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or we should at least be able to discuss it, and figure there's a few other folk around in our agency who want to talk about research, and science, and learning and moving the profession forward.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, and I didn't even know it existed, and I prided myself on being a well-educated police officer. So I was surprised, and this is going to sound maybe arrogant, but I was surprised that I didn't know any of this stuff. And that was 12 years into my career when I met Jim. So for me, I think there's lots of cops out there that have no idea that police research exists.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, so you have more than a decade in the job, you figure you're experienced, you know what you're doing. And then suddenly there's this whole world of research, and evidence, and knowledge that say, "No, we know whether that stuff works or not." And why have I not been told that? And that's either an indictment of police training education, or it's probably equally or worse, an indictment of academia and our inability to reach out to practitioners.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. Which is what ASEBP is all about, is trying to bridge the gap between the two. It was my two friends that I kind of got the sense of, if you're on the East coast telling me that you don't have anybody to talk to, and you're on the West coast telling me you don't have anybody to talk to about research and policing, and now you both want to use me as your intellectual fulfillment once a month or whatever, then we should get together. I'm like, there's got to be more people. My one friend said, "Well, why don't you call Jim Beermann?" Because Jim was now no longer the chief of Redlands, he'd become the president of the now, National Police Foundation. And Jim said, "Well, what about if you just start the American Society of Evidence Based Policing?" So I said, "Okay, I'll do that."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There you go, that was your mistake, volunteering. You weren't even voluntold. But volunteering to get involved in things is hugely important, because you can sit in the periphery or might come to the conference, but once you actually get deep into the weeds of this stuff, it opens a door and you just step into one of those Men in Black whole universes that opens up.

Renée Mitchell:

My analogy I use, is it's like Alice in Wonderland. You just go follow the white rabbit, and that hole, just further and further that you just spiral down into evidence based policing. And to me the more you learn, the more you realize that you don't know. And I think that's what the policing research, the more and more I learn about everything to do with what I see as police research, not just crime prevention research, but things like the critical incident stress debriefing research, research centering on leadership stuff. The more I read, the more I realize there's a boatload of information that I don't know.

And I'm always surprised, because I think to myself, why isn't policing using any of it? There's so much research out there on so many different topics that we could pull into policing when it comes to mental health and wellness for police officers, about mental illness in the field, about homelessness. It's not just police research, there's other areas of research, psychology and sociology, even the medical field, that have done research that we should be applying.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think it's also important to point out that it's not just about crime prevention either.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. Well, even there's the critical incident stress debriefing, which most agencies use after an officer's experienced a critical incident. There's a lot of research that shows that that's not the most effective tool, but we continue to use it. But I don't know that they know that information. So when I go teach about evidence based policing and I bring up the research surrounding critical incident stress debriefing, most executive managers are really surprised. And then there's some difficulty, because you have to let go of a long standing tradition and practice in policing. And then what do you do with your cops?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, and it also I think, has additional concerns that probably make it even harder to adopt that, which is as I understand some of the approaches, not just don't work, but can actually be detrimental. And that's incredibly difficult, because we all like to think in policing that we're well meaning. I can live with the fact that I may not be as effective as I hope I am, but at least I'm not doing any harm. And now here's evidence that when an officer is at their most stressed, and needs the most effective help and care, the critical incident stress debriefing literature is suggesting that some of this is actually harmful, isn't it?

Renée Mitchell:

Right. And those are the things to me, that why I'm such an advocate for evidence based policing is because when I started to reach out to academics in the psychology field about CISD, there was quite a few of them that were like, "You're still doing what?" In one email, I got-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've seen police stations that are still using carbon paper.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. So the feel was, we debunked this in psychology like 10 years ago. And I know I'm also discussing something that research on the other side, they'll say, "Look, here's all these research articles that have been written that support CISD." So there's a little bit of, I don't like the word controversy, but the way you view the research. So I don't think it's solid on either side. So you need to have more research around policing, because a lot of the proponents will argue that some of this research has not been done with policing groups, so it doesn't count. Because it's been done with other civilians or people, and shown to be ineffective or have a backfire effect.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But those are humans.

Renée Mitchell:

Correct.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's good evidence to justify doing more experiments and studies on policing, rather than just discount it because you don't like the research by easily saying, "Well, it's just not been done on police, therefore we can just carry on as we've been doing anyway." How does that happen? How is it that we can still be using something 10 years after it's pretty much been proven to be ineffective and possibly harmful?

Renée Mitchell:

Well, I think there's two reasons. One, it's the piece that you talked about before, it's the whole reason our society exists, is try to bridge that gap between academics and the practitioners. I think there's difficulty getting research to the actual cops because they don't have time. I've talked to my friends who are chiefs, and I'm like, "What do you all day? And how much time do you put in..." We even started like, "How much time do you put in to crime prevention?" And they just giggle because they're like, "Well, none, Renée. I'm busy running a business." So if you think about the way policing's structured, you get to certain tiers or ranks where they're running a business, they're really not into the day to day.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

With hundreds of employees and dynamic problems.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. So they're working on those problems on a day to day basis. So if you come down the ranks where your people should be thinking or more proactively working on those problems, well, they're putting out fires. Because most policing centers around, okay, what emergency just happened? What big, huge thing just hit our agency? I have a friend of mine that calls it the make it stop policing. Just make it stop, whatever that thing is that's happening into our police agency, just make it stop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Make it go away, so I can deal with the next drama.

Renée Mitchell:

Right, and then they go on to the next thing. So as an industry, we're not really good at long term planning. And we also have this belief system that to have good managers, we need to move them every two years. So we think that everybody needs to learn how to do a little bit of the whole entire police department, to be an effective supervisor manager, leader, whatever you want to call it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In Britain, they used to call those butterfly men, because like a butterfly they just flip from one thing to another, without ever landing for too long.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, we do this as part of our culture. It's not even the person's fault, we move them, and then they start relearning a new job, in a new place with new people under them. So you never build an expertise, or the ability to know your job extremely well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or we send them on a course, and I worry sometimes when people go on a course and they come back, and they were trained by somebody who used to be in the job, and then this is now their retirement gig. But the last time they really read the literature was 20 years ago, and they're just training on what they were trained on 20 years ago and decided to do that. And so there's no incentive because people are still hiring them, to demonstrate that they're up to date with the literature, and up to date with the latest information.

And also if they're not actually within the academic environment, how the hell do you access this stuff? Because it's all behind paywalls, and it's journal articles and you need library access through a university, and the universities are spending less money on library access now, and they're not buying as many of the journals as they used to. So this gap between the science and the practitioners, I don't know. I mean, things like ASEBP are great for shrinking it, but they're pushing against a universe that keeps expanding and pushing them further apart.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, that's why one of the things we do is we write a research brief every two weeks. So we take an article, we try to find articles that we think will be important to policing. And then we have a couple of writers that write a two page brief from that article. And then we, we try to send it to at least one author that was on the original article, for accuracy. Because we know that we're translating the research, so sometimes we might something a little too broad or a little too narrow. So the academics have been so far very generous. They'll just do a track change for me, because I'm like, "Please don't explain to me what you want, just track change it."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you just do the initial translation into what you think is appropriate, and then you get a bit of fine tuning from the academic that was part of the original study?

Renée Mitchell:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That sounds a great way to do things, because there's not a lot of incentive for academics to do that. And also there's not a lot of skills training for academics to understand how to do that. Academics on the whole are pretty awful at communicating with practitioners.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. And none of them have longer than two pages, and then we have takeaways at the bottom. And like I said, the academics have been great with going back through and track changing for us. And it's always those adjustments that I find, either we spoke too broadly or too narrowly, or we didn't quite get the gist of some little nuance in the research. But they'll go in and they'll add a sentence-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And just tweak it for you.

Renée Mitchell:

Yes. And so those come out every two weeks, but like I said, I go beyond just policing. So for example, when I said about the research and crime and everything else beyond policing, there's a doctor that I reach out to who I love. I'm probably

going to butcher his name, it's [Riedelmeyer 00:19:00], and he is a researcher that works in the ER. So he's actually done a lot of research about what he sees in the ER. So one of his studies that kind of turned me on to his work was, he did this concierge service for the homeless population. And he wanted to see if there was different treatment of the homeless population when they came in to visit the ER, if they would have different outcomes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So is this instead of just doing the absolute minimum, because you know that they can't afford the services, therefore the hospital, which is often paying for it directly, kind of says, "Give them the absolute minimum service," he's taking the opposite response, "No, let's actually treat this person with a more effective, fuller treatment, and see if that actually reduces their return time to the hospital"?

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah. So, and that was the idea. And I think this is a lot of times when people make assumptions about our practices, or our policies, they always think, well, this is best practice, which I did air quotes because I hate the term best practice. Because in policing, it means I just went to another police agency, I saw what they did, now we're doing it here. It's not founded on anything.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or I have an opinion and I have so much rank that nobody's going to call me on it.

Renée Mitchell:

That's eminence-based policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Eminence based policing, yes.

Renée Mitchell:

So, his was kind of the same idea, is here's our typical practice that we normally do. I wonder if there was a different way of treating them, if we'd get different outcomes. So he did a randomized controlled trial. So half of them got the regular, like how they typically treat their homeless population, and half got this concierge service where somebody was assigned to them, and walked them through the process, gave them something to eat, really listened to what was going on. The treatment group actually used less services over the next six months, I can't remember how long he ran the study, but they were less expensive.

Because the assumption like most people, if you give them better treatment, better service, then they'll come back more. But his study was really counterintuitive, because it was, he felt in the theory discussion section, was because we're meeting their needs and we're really listening and caring for them, they don't need to come back as often. So now, it's costing us less money.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it just goes to show with that homeless study, that there isn't as much moral consensus and received wisdom as we think there is. Everybody has an opinion of, "Oh, there's no way that'll work, because the homeless will just come in and abuse that service." And I think that's one of the problems that we run into in policing, which is, "There's no point doing that, because I just know that is not going to work. We've never done it before, there's nowhere that's done this

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new innovative idea, but I just know it's not going to work. So I would sooner be happy in my ignorance, and my absolute confidence that I know it's not going to work, than actually for us to test this and see if it might--"

Renée Mitchell:

Which is, I'm laughing because I actually got into a shouting match.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You?

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, with somebody of higher rank, and that's the exact conversation that we were having, is they were saying, "I know this isn't going to work," and I was like, "You don't know," I'm like, "You don't know that." And he's like, "Yes, I do. This is what I've seen, I know that won't work." And I was like, "All I'm asking is to test it." I'm like, "Because you don't know." I'm like, "I'm not saying I know," because then I'm in the middle of this shouting match. So I was trying to get across, "I'm not saying I know, I'm not saying I'm right. What I am saying is I want to test it." And I actually think my underlying drive for all of this is I love winning. So I want to do experiments because I want to be able to say, "Look, I am empirically correct." I mean, if you know me, then now you've given me a soap box, with data and research behind me to be like, "I am correct, sir."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A small Reducing Crime public service announcement for podcast listeners: getting into a shouting match with your supervisor is not necessarily a good career move.

Renée Mitchell:

No, it's not. But we had a really good relationship. So it was actually a fun shouting match, because they were--

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're the best ones.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, he wasn't mad at all. It was more like this, "I'm not listening," and I'm like, "You will listen to me." He's like, "I'm not going to listen to you." I'm like, "You have to listen to me." So it was like a really good, loud debate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, but what's really cool about that is that if you can actually get into these kinds of debates with people, you can at least get a chance to see their perspective of where they're coming from, which is the starting point to getting stuff done. Because we do struggle to get experiments, to get research, up and running in policing. And I think it's a lot of the times because we don't really appreciate the perceived risks or the perceived positions of so many of the stakeholders, who are necessary to make it work. Because people don't necessarily step out on a limb and actually say, "I'm absolutely authorizing all of this," we've got to write 20 pieces of paper and send it through the chain of command up and down 20 times, before we get anything approved.

Renée Mitchell:

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If you compare evidence-based policing to evidence based medicine, and for the people that don't know, that's where Larry Sherman took the model and translated it into evidence based policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Except for, of course they have about a hundred years' head start on us.

Renée Mitchell:

Exactly. But if you look at where they started with their RCT's and their research, my understanding, I'm a doctor, but not that-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You just play one on television.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah, not that kind of doctor.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're not the useful kind.

Renée Mitchell:

I'm not the useful kind, I'm just the kind that argues with you about everything. Is they talk about how medicine wasn't really listening either. So the doctors were to me, a lot like our cops. A lot of them are practitioners, they're doing the surgeries, they're doing the therapies, they're doing the interventions. Evidence based medicine to them as the same as evidence-based policing, it's usually a researcher who's telling them here's best practice, or the best antibiotic, or the best medicine. So it's not them willingly taking on that evidence based medicine.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, and Geoff Barnes, in an earlier episode of this podcast, was articulating and saying the researchers are saying, "Hey, we don't know what will work, so we'd like to try a couple of things," but what the practitioners are often hearing is, "We think how you're doing it is wrong."

Renée Mitchell:

Right. We haven't had our pivotal experiment. So medicine had the CAST experiment, which was the cardiac arrest stress trial. And their logic was, which I think is great logic, most people aren't killed by their first heart attack, they're killed by the arrhythmia after the heart attack. So they thought, okay, if they're killed by arrhythmias and we know that there's medicine that helps arrhythmias, well, why don't we give our heart attack victims this arrhythmia medicine right after their heart attack? Because now they won't have those arrhythmias, and they won't die.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a perfectly logical mechanism.

Renée Mitchell:

Right, totally logical.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I'm sure there were lots of people who were saying, "Absolutely, we should just do this. We know this works."

Renée Mitchell:

We know this works, exactly. So that's where medicine was at. And they finally did an RCT on it, so there was a control group that got nothing, and the other three groups got different arrhythmia medications. They actually came to a halt after six months of running the study, because they realized they were killing off the treatment group at a greater rate, at such a high rate that they said, "Oh my God, we can't ethically run this study anymore." It was so great that they thought, "Holy shit, we can't do this anymore."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely contrary to everybody's expectations.

Renée Mitchell:

So that was their pivotal study to get more doctors on board with evidence-based medicine. Because it sounded, just like you said, it sounded so logical, it made so much sense. And so many doctors were like, "We know this works. Why would we test it?" So when they had that result, it was their wake up call. So I feel like in policing because we're behind historically, and the decades of research we have, we just haven't hit our CAST study yet.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that hasn't happened with the Kansas City Preventative Patrol experiment in 1979?

Renée Mitchell:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Maybe that's the issue, is that for your average cop, as you are, well, you're not average. But I certainly was, slightly below average cop as I was, this is not ingrained in what you learned at the academy. There's no ongoing, year on year professional development, where it's expected that you're updated on evidence based policing practices. It's just still focused on some first aid, can you shoot straight, and don't get the department sued, so here's your obligatory class on legal updates. And that seems to be a stumbling block for moving policing forward, because it still doesn't feel like we're a learning profession.

Renée Mitchell:

No, and we're not. I would say we probably spend more money on leadership classes across the board, across the whole entire country, than we do on understanding crime and why crime works. I mean, any of the sociological issues that policing deal with, we don't learn about it. And I don't mean training, I always cite Ed Flynn about how the answer to every sociological problem is police training. I mean what you say, about what we're taught. We don't have a really good understanding of that crime concentrates. We don't understand regression to the mean, and how crime fluctuates. You get a lot of noise within your signal because you get so much variance in crime from a week to week basis, but we still all do CompStat from a week to week basis. So we don't have these fundamental understandings of how it all works.

So I think it's flawed in the way we teach, because we just teach you just like you said, the way you were trained too, it's do you know these laws? Do you know how to be safe? Do you know how not to kill anybody with your car? And

then, do you know how to shoot well enough that we could put you on the street? A lot of those things center around which you mentioned, was liability. But I wonder as we learn more about police research and evidence based policing, there's going to be a day where somebody's going to sue because a police department didn't engage in an evidence based practice. Because I think it's going to be an ethical issue, and spending taxpayer's monies and all these things that we are responsible for as police departments. Where if you have outdated policies or outdated practices, that somebody some day is going to say, "Hey, you engaged in this thing. You caused some harm, and there's actually research that shows you should have never been doing that in the first place."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or it will drive research that will help inform those practices.

Renée Mitchell:

Or that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I chatted to Rob Briner about one of the challenges is how much insurance companies have helped move some fields forward. Because the insurance companies want to make sure that these fields are engaging in good practice, I don't think there's a best practice, but there's always better practice. But so many cities insure themselves, so there isn't some overarching insurance company or agency who's going, "You know what? It's in our financial interests," which drives so much of what's taking place. Pilots spend a lot of time flying. They don't spend a huge amount of training after their initial training. They go for current training, but they are a very safe business because good practice is instigated into updated checklists.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. Because I love Atul Gawande's book *The Checklist Manifesto*.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a great book.

Renée Mitchell:

It's a great book, and I think about how many things we should be doing that we should have checklists for in policing, to really understand why we do what we do. My other favorite book is Matthew Syed's *Black Box Thinking*, because I like how he talks about the aviation industry, and how they improved over 30 years. Because they're not pointing fingers, they're doing the root cause analysis.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And the nice thing about the blame side, so you know I'm a pilot in my spare time, even to this day in the aviation industry, as a general aviation pilot flying a four seater with a single big fan at the front that propels me slowly through the air, if I make a mistake, if I bust controlled airspace, or if I make a mistake, or if I turn onto a runway before I have permission and make a genuine error, most of the time I can report that to the federal aviation administration through a website and NASA. Because they document errors to see where the problems are in the system. And if I report it in most cases, that precludes then, them prosecuting me for it. What it does is it encourages people to report errors, and allows the system to learn where the flaws and the weaknesses are. And we almost have the reverse, we have systems in policing that are designed to resist learning from mistakes.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. And they talk about policing all the time, that we'll circle the wagons when we get criticized or whatever. To me, it's because the way the whole system is built, that you do, you get this blame game, so everybody locks down. So nobody's really looking at how do we learn from this holistically? If we approached it like the FAA, and went into every officer involved shooting, and had a federal agency that went in to just examine the root cause analysis, why this occurred. If somebody intended to harm somebody, okay, that's different. Then you do point blame, you're basically like, "You're a bad apple."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And there are a few in policing.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. If it's unintentional, like you said, like you make an honest mistake-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Split second decision making.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. Then you don't shift to blame, you shift to what is it organizationally? What is it in police culture? What is it in the training? What are the mechanisms that set this up for a failure in a sense? But we don't have anything that really gathers the data. I know the Washington Post, once, all officer involved shootings. You're just gathering statistics that don't really give you a lot of information about how to fix a system that is fundamentally going to, every year, shoot a certain amount of people. It just is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And not just shooting, but we seem to have be running at around a thousand people killed a year by police officers in the United States. Most of which seem to be lawful shoots, the lawful, but awful. But there going to be a small subset of those that are optimal for being designed out of the system, if we could look at it in a critical way that wasn't blame oriented, but was learning oriented.

Renée Mitchell:

Right. No, and I think if we shifted to a whole learning oriented... Because even the way we do field training, it's not really like a learning environment.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's an experience environment.

Renée Mitchell:

Yes, and it changes by your FTO. You might have an FTO that's very good at explaining things, and very good at getting people up to speed, you might have an FTO that shouts at you all the time, and that's their mode of trying to get you to learn.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And we also don't know with field training officers, how to identify good ones. We have no knowledge or science on what makes a good field training officer.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, and a lot of it, we go on intuition, if you were a good cop. And then you've got to look at, okay, what's your definition of a good cop? So are you proactive out in the field? Nowadays, it might be how much community engagement are you doing? So are you reading to second graders during one shift during your week, or are you stopping at your businesses to shake hands? All of those things doesn't necessarily make a good training officer. I've heard it before, with coaching in the NFL, a lot of times you have somebody switch from being a player to a coach, and there's failures there because they don't know how to switch from I'm in the game and I'm playing the game and I'm a really good quarterback, to now I have to take people and coach them, and teach them how to do things better. It's a total different skill set.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People who are good at rowing as opposed to people who are good at steering. So I think that shows the value of something like the American Society of Evidence Based Policing. Because just in terms of the topics that we've covered during the course of this chat, the whole wealth of areas that are open to being discussed, and to being evaluated. What advice have you got for police officers who want to know a little bit more about it, other than of course joining the American Society of Evidence Based Policing, and there's a website that people can go on and sign up. And it costs next to nothing, a year's membership gets you all of this for-

Renée Mitchell:

40 dollars a year.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Bargain.

Renée Mitchell:

We're cheap.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely. And who was the very first member of the American Society of Evidence Based Policing?

Renée Mitchell:

That would be Dr. Jerry Ratcliffe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Membership number one, yep.

Renée Mitchell:

That's right. We were going to make you a t-shirt, one of these days we will, with a number one on your back.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sign up everybody. But there's somebody listening to this that want to do more, they want to learn more, they've got an area of interest.

Renée Mitchell:

I think you just need to reach out to your academics, and know who's in the field. So the American Society of Criminology has their whole list of all the academics that are there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's only a subset of those are actually useful for a police department.

Renée Mitchell:

True.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A lot of oxygen thieves out there, stealing it from other people who could use it better, especially in criminology. And I'm bagging on criminologists, but I think what you're really talking about, aren't you, is the subset of finding policing researchers? Because they tend to be more practically oriented, as well as have research skills that are geared towards understanding the policing environment, more than just broad criminology. Right?

Renée Mitchell:

Right. Well, and it's field research. So in one of our discussions we had in the panel, I talked about that you got to roll with the punches. Because field research in policing, doesn't mean you're locked into this exact science and you have to do it this very specific way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You have to be realistic. As General Von Moltke said, "No plan survives contact with the enemy."

Renée Mitchell:

Right, exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Very few studies are ever going to end up in the top tier journals to be perfect, but let's do a study that at least tells us something. Even if it only gets published in the Bangladeshi Journal of Sheep Stealing and Criminology.

Renée Mitchell:

I think if you're just starting into this, one, you have to do some reading. I wouldn't want somebody to just jump in and be like, "I'm going to do a randomized controlled trial, this sounds super easy." You actually have to read some of the literature that's out there. So Larry's, I always recommend Larry's first article of what works, what doesn't, and what looks promising.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Larry Sherman's article.

Renée Mitchell:

Larry Sherman's article. And then there's a couple of books on evidence-based policing, your Reducing Crime book, there's books that could give you an idea of what evidence based policing is. And then from there, you really just got

to start with like, well, what are my issues in my police organization? And then reaching out to the police researchers. Because that is the other thing, there's a lot of new researchers in the field. If you have a local university and you have somebody that's in the criminal justice or the criminology department, you can reach out to them to say, "Hey, I have this issue. I need you to make sure my design's good. I need you to make sure that it's analyzed correctly, and then you could publish on this."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, it's a very good relationship, because you get the academic rigor within policing and that external validity to some degree, of having somebody come in from the outside and say, "No, you've done this well, this is good science." And the academic researcher gets their article in the *Bangladeshi Journal of Sheep Stealing and Criminology*.

Renée Mitchell:

And we don't want to abuse the academics either, because we don't want them to just-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're fine with that, don't worry about it.

Renée Mitchell:

Well, I don't want the expectation of every academic's just going to work for free for a police department, for a journal article. So to me, it's like a give and take. You have people that over the course of my career, have helped me with my research, without our department paying them for their time, and they're getting the journal articles out of it. But to me the reciprocal part of that is, is you try to find grant funding, so that way you can pay your academic.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or at least just start a relationship and see where it takes you, in terms of how much you can both commit to doing these kind of projects. And maybe one day, turn up and give a co-presentation, because this is one of the few conferences where you have practitioners and academics presenting together on what they've done together. Which I think is one of the really special things about the societies of evidence-based policing. You've got them in Australia, and New Zealand, and the UK, here in the United States and Canada. So you've got these societies all over the place with new ones cropping up as well.

So maybe that's a good way to wrap this up, with the advice being, get interested, think about different questions in policing. Think about joining your local society of evidence-based policing in whatever country you're in, and start engaging with other people so you're not alone in your agency. But there are other people out there, police practitioners, police officers, researchers who are interested in policing, or working together, or trying to advance the science, the knowledge, the business, and to some degree the craft of policing. And Renée, I think we owe you a bit of a debt of gratitude here in the US for spearheading this, and doing all the damn admin.

Renée Mitchell:

Yeah. Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 13 of *Reducing Crime*, recorded in Cincinnati in May of 2019. You can find more episodes like this at reducingcrime.com or the usual podcast-y places. New episodes are announced on Twitter @_reducing crime, don't forget the underscore. Be safe, and best of luck.