

#39 (NATALIE HILTZ)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Natalie Hiltz is an inspector with Peel Regional Police Service in Ontario, Canada and an advocate for evidence-based policing across the country. We talk about the emergence of evidence-based policing in Canada and her research into the overlap of violent crime offenders and victims in her community.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hi, I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe, and welcome to Reducing Crime.

While the theme to the last episode was the long-running Aussie police drama *Blue Heelers*, regular listeners will detect we are back to the podcast's original theme, the outro to the classic British police series *The Sweeney*. This 1970s police drama featured members of London's armed robbery and violent crime unit called the Flying Squad. Shunning the crashing excitement of the opening tune, the theme playing over the closing credits is more melancholy, reflecting that in many episodes, as well as in policing generally, not everything goes to plan or ends well, regardless of the protagonist's best efforts. It seems appropriate.

By the way, if you're confused by the show's name, then you have to Google 'Cockney rhyming slang', where a speaker will replace common words with unrelated phrases that just happen to rhyme. So Flying Squad becomes the fictional Barber 'Sweeney Todd'. That in turn gets shortened to The Sweeney. Flying Squad, Sweeney Todd, The Sweeney. If you're from the East End of London, look, it all makes complete sense.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Anyhow, back in August, I headed up to Canada, and more specifically, Dundas, a delightful little town just outside Hamilton, Ontario, for my nephew's wedding. Congratulations, Peter and Emily! And because she lives just around the corner, it was also a great opportunity to catch up with Natalie Hiltz. Natalie has just moved up to duty inspector, having until recently been a detective sergeant, working in the Intelligence Support Services for Peel Regional Police Service in Ontario. She served in various uniform and gang unit capacities, as well as conducted several undercover operations for vice, drugs and homicide. She's a former member of the Canadian Society of Evidence-based Policing's Executive and Advisory Boards and has traveled widely across Canada to advocate for evidence-based practices. Natalie was

instrumental in organizing the first evidence-based policing conference in Canada in partnership with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police and the Cambridge Center for Evidence-based Policing. This, and for her work more widely in evidence-based policing in Canada, has earned her a nomination for the Governor General's Meritorious Service Award. Natalie has an undergraduate degree from Carleton University and post-grad qualifications from both Dalhousie University and the University of Cambridge. Her Cambridge research was recently published with coauthors Matt Bland and Geoff Barnes in an article titled *Victim-Offender Overlap in Violent Crime*. In it, they highlight the disproportionate level of harm associated with a small percentage of people who are both violent crime offenders and violent crime victims.

In this episode, Natalie discusses the environment for evidence-based policing in Canada, receptivity of police chiefs, whether recruits should be introduced to evidence-based policing concepts at the academy, and her research on the victim-offender overlap. She also drops an insightful quote from Frederick Nietzsche and let it slip that she has some sort of a covert past in insurance. I'm not sure I really got to the bottom of that.

For my part, I fake an understanding of 19th Century German philosophy, had a really nice sandwich, and get distracted by a police horse. My girlfriend and I caught up with Natalie at the appropriately named bar restaurant *Thirsty Cactus* on the hottest day in living memory. I was sweating like a teenager watching his mum check his browser history.

Natalie Hiltz:

What's your poison? What are we doing? First of all, what did you overdose on last night?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Smithwick's beer.

Shelley Hyland:

Probably had too much Smithwick's.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, too many Smithwick's.

Shelley Hyland:

But then we combined it with gin and whiskey.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. By the time we were drowning in the whiskey late at night, it was like one o'clock in the morning and I'm dehydrate-

Natalie Hiltz:

What are you, a rookie?

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. I'm a damn rookie. I'm an idiot. This is true. I can't take my drink.

Shelley Hyland:

But then to be fair-

Natalie Hiltz:

I thought the Brits were supposed to know how to drink?

Shelley Hyland:

It's been a long time since you've been able to hang out with your family.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I mean-

Natalie Hiltz:

That's true too.

Shelley Hyland:

And the family.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

I work so far away. This is like two seconds from my house. I actually did a surprise visit on my kids on the way here. Just quick. I whipped open the door and they're like, "Who is it?" And I caught them ordering Uber Eats.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. And then-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How old are they?

Natalie Hiltz:

16 in November, and 18. So one's in second university and the other one is-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So let me guess. The fridge is full of food?

Natalie Hiltz:

Stacked.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Natalie Hiltz:

Stacked full of food. There couldn't be any more food.

Waitstaff:

What flavor? [inaudible 00:05:08] of salads.

Natalie Hiltz:

Okay. And what's the pick here for salads?

Speaker 4:

A tostada salad is... For you, sir?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cranberry and Brie sandwich, please.

Speaker 4:

Great choice.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It was recommended and it sounds lovely.

Speaker 4:

Yeah, for sure. It's a good one. [crosstalk 00:05:18] on this side?

Natalie Hiltz:

It is. It's amazing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's interesting is your experience is probably absolutely everybody else who's trying to be innovative around evidence-based policing, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I felt like evidence-based policing, at least in North America, and I don't know about the Canadian experience, had some momentum and then COVID kicked in.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah, it did.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then in much of America, crime started going through the roof and we went back into reactive panic mode and it's like people's interest in evidence-based policing has declined.

Natalie Hiltz:

Plummeted.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Natalie Hiltz:

Plummeted, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's it been like I Canada?

Natalie Hiltz:

I think it's a pretty similar experience across the board. I think then when you run into any type of emergency planning, and pandemic planning would certainly be part of that, people don't have time for extras. So I think that really policing has gone into survival mode. Before, where there was a good, solid, receptive environment for evidence-based policing, there's been a huge lull now.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think that there was originally a receptive attitude for it before the pandemic?

Natalie Hiltz:

That's a tricky question. Right now I think there's competing police philosophies that are embedded in different police generations, that a lot of the older police generations, many of them ascribe to that really ultra-traditional policing paradigm that we all know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's what makes it easy, right? If in doubt, somebody once said at a conference at Cambridge, I know you've been to, you can fail in policing as long as you fail conventionally.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah, there's nothing wrong with it. Exactly. So it's safe. It's comfortable. The one thing that police hate is change. Sticking to stuff that doesn't make you feel vulnerable and makes you feel comfortable, especially during these times that are quite volatile and feel quite unstable, it's human nature and it makes a lot of sense. Before the pandemic...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. We're never going to get that because of [inaudible 00:07:00] just driving past at [inaudible 00:07:01] in that wagon. Yes. The before pandemic time in Canada, I know you were involved in the early stages of the Canadian Society of Evidence-Based Policing.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I know that you've been working much more recently with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

Natalie Hiltz:

Association of Chiefs of Police. Yeah, you got it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's interesting because that's working directly with the police chiefs, which is an interesting level to come in at, because I think a lot of the associations, it's working with frontline officers or mid-level supervisors. But you're working directly with the police chiefs at that level, right? Is that a different experience, having tried to move them towards evidence-based policing?

Natalie Hiltz:

I got to say that we're really lucky in Canada, that I think we can be very different but very similar.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, the policing here feels kind of similar. Probably a little less violent, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Possibly, at times a little more cerebral.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But this is one of the things, having traveled, is that the fundamentals of the job are surprisingly similar.

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolute-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's dealing with people's dramas and issues when you have no idea of the background and it's been a drama that's taken 10 years to kick off between their neighbor dispute or someone's got mental health problems and you're just trying to wing it and figure out the solution.

Natalie Hiltz:

Getting involved in the police executive program through the University of Cambridge.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So that's the masters in?

Natalie Hiltz:

Applied Criminology and Police Management.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

At the University of Cambridge with Larry Sherman, yes.

Natalie Hiltz:

Because what it did is you're sitting in a room full of police professionals with a lot of experience. Hong Kong, Australia, Canada, Britain. And what you soon realize is everyone has the same problems, the same political pressures. The same problems.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's my point. The job is surprisingly similar.

Natalie Hiltz:

It is surprisingly similar. I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect that. What that made me learn is human nature is human nature. As long as we have police officers and we're dealing with human beings, the problems are all going to be relatively similar.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Natalie Hiltz:

The problems with the media, politicians, public perception, it's all the same. It's the same issues.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's also good news for things like evidence-based policing as a movement-

Natalie Hiltz:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... because you can pick up things from one country and take them to another. They're certainly worth thinking about and trying, right? I often hear people say, "Oh, that wouldn't work here." And I'm thinking, are you using that as an excuse just to do nothing?

Natalie Hiltz:

It's very easy to find 10 officers to tell you how you cannot do something and a lot more difficult to find the one that will tell you and inspire you so that you can. We can be a real pessimistic lot, I guess, full of cynicism.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's what draws me to it.

Natalie Hiltz:

Right? The evidence-based policing piece is pretty incredible because you realize there is direct applicability between countries, between neighborhoods, between police services.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the police chiefs you've been dealing with, we'll talk prior to the pandemic and before things went horribly wrong, there was receptivity through the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police?

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolutely, there is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What is it about the chiefs? Is there a different pitch to get them to buy in?

Natalie Hiltz:

No. I think there's some pushing and pulling going on, these generational differences where we've got some police leadership that is really ascribing to these ultra-traditional police philosophies and paradigms of the way we've done our business for quite a number of years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How we've always done it.

Natalie Hiltz:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

Luckily enough, we've got some real talent across the country, in the police chief's level as well, where there is definitely a band of strong police leadership that is extremely innovative, who are pushing the boundaries of creativity and approaching problems in new ways.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's not going to be all of them, right? So you're going to run into roadblocks at places?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is there a particular technique that works better in terms of selling the message with chiefs than with-

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah, there is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How'd you do that? I mean, if we can hear it over the sound of the refrigerated truck that's decided to park right next to us.

Natalie Hiltz:

You need to find ways of marketing evidence-based policing to the police psyche.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There has to be a different way to sell it, because I can sell the message to mid-level police commanders by saying, "Hey, this could be something that could get you promoted." But when you're a police chief, that's not a message that's really going to fly because those guys are already at the top of the organization.

Natalie Hiltz:

When I started to go outside of policing and started to really look around I realized there's a lot of articles and a lot of journal articles and a lot of research and so many things going on outside of policing, but if you are siloed within your own police organization and you make no effort to self-educate or look around you and see how policing overlaps and connects with different systems within your community, you're only going to see one side.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're a detective sergeant with?

Natalie Hiltz:

The Peel Police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Peel Regional Police is a fairly large organization. How many of you got sworn?

Natalie Hiltz:

We're around the third or fourth largest municipal service in the country. I think around just at a 3,000 mark.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a big department in North America.

Natalie Hiltz:

It's big for Canada.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So your role at the moment is?

Natalie Hiltz:

Intelligence Services.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And what does that actually entail?

Natalie Hiltz:

We deal with a lot of joint forces operations, organized crime, traditional organized crime, anything to do with large-scale projects for drug [inaudible 00:12:11].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's interesting is that you say there isn't much evidence-based policing around that area, but that's insightful in itself, right? So much evidence-based policing has been around patrol operations.

Natalie Hiltz:

That's right. But this goes back to what we were talking about. I think we've got lots of generations of officers that are coming up through the ranks who are starting to look around, and there's a curiosity about the craft of policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you looked into the intelligence side, for example, and there just isn't a lot of research around that field, is there?

Natalie Hiltz:

No, there isn't. But I think when we get back to coming up with marketable ways to get people to buy in to what evidence-based policing has to offer, violence is, for any evidence-based police research, low-hanging fruit. That's why I chose to do my research on the victim-offender overlap. I didn't come at it from a traditional journey. It was different.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What were you doing before you joined the job?

Natalie Hiltz:

What wasn't I doing before I joined the job?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That opened some doors right there, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. I working since I was 14. I've done it all.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do we have to do some really interesting internet searches here? I was like, "Oh."

Peel Regional Police knows something. How good were their background checks?

Natalie Hiltz:

Pretty good.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They found it, did they?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. No, I was in advertising.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That went surprisingly lame considering the lead up that you were pitching at as there.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah, I know. It's lame. My life's not that exciting.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Getting the feeling there's stuff you're not telling us, but yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

Is it the facial expressions?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They always work well for podcasts. So you were in advertising and you joined the job. Changed your name, moved countries.

Natalie Hiltz:

Moved countries. Made sure they didn't have access to my record. No, I'm kidding.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This looks great. Thank you very much. Good-looking food here.

Natalie Hiltz:

What did you order? That's amazing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank you.

Shelley Hyland:

Huevos rancheros.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, my God. It's like a work of art.

Natalie Hiltz:

That looks incredible. Oh, my God.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The food here's great.

Natalie Hiltz:

But, seriously, the whole marketing piece, I think, is so important. You really got to start to think about something that people are going to be interested in to even get engaged on a surface level. There has to be a hook, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it can't always be violence. So is violence the way in to get people to buy in to other areas?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So we demonstrate the value through violence prevention or with evidence and then we transition that to saying, "Look, we can also look at things like recruitment or dealing with minorities, community policing."

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or here in Canada, it'd be First Nation People, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yep.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And so there are particular ways to use evidence at different aspects of the policing world?

Natalie Hiltz:

It needs a seed to grow from, right? You got to plant a seed and you got to give it the right conditions to grow, where there's an easily identifiable potential benefit to going through all this extra work and abandoning your comfort zone and everything that you know that's comfortable, and going to a place where you feel vulnerable, you don't know it all, where you can dare greatly and fail greatly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. There's no failing allowed in policing. You know that.

Natalie Hiltz:

Well, I think that's changing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If we don't fail, you don't try. If you're not allowed to fail, you don't try anything. People are risk averse and they're worried about failing at anything, so half the time you don't try stuff.

Natalie Hiltz:

I think that's changing. The craft, the policing certainly does require and demand some level of risk and vulnerability, and I think evidence-based policing is one of those areas where it's worth daring greatly for. One of the slides I use in my presentations are these baking fails, #fail. My favorite one is one of these beautiful cupcakes that's been decorated as Cookie Monster. It's the one you saw on Pinterest. And then you go and you try to apply the same ingredients and try to do exactly that and it comes up looking like a horrible alien. It looks terrible.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, but the solution to that is just tell people you're pitching for alien to begin with and just never show them the Cookie Monster picture. That's an easy solution, right there.

Natalie Hiltz:

Well, apply that to policing, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

So you're going after something that looks like this, you have all the best intentions in the world, but we don't go back to have a look to see, after we've done our own recipe and we've applied ourselves to produce this wonderful thing, we never go back to back check it to see, is it exactly doing what we intended and designed it to do? We never do it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it's funny you say that, because I produced a video documentary that's on YouTube called Oscar One about the Kensington Transit Corridor Study, and that was pretty much the same thing. We designed a great Cookie Monster-looking cake and then things changed and we couldn't run the randomized trials we wanted to. But we got something else out of it. We got something really insightful in terms of understanding how officers feel about dealing with different kinds of groups and different kinds of social service providers in the largest heroin market on the East Coast of the United States.

Natalie Hiltz:

Wow.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you can find that little silver lining, but you have to be out there to try things.

Natalie Hiltz:

You have to have the inspiration, the excitement, the curiosity, the ability to want and be creative.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I got the sense that you got some of that inspiration from Cambridge. Tell me a little bit about your experiences there.

Natalie Hiltz:

Cambridge is probably one of the greatest things I'll achieve in my lifetime. There are some real milestones for me, and that is certainly one of my life milestones.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You picked up a master's in, remind me again what was?

Natalie Hiltz:

Applied Criminology and Police Management.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Just the notion of having Applied Criminology has probably surprised some people, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

That's right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

"You can actually use this shit?"

Natalie Hiltz:

"Applied Criminology?"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Obscure theories in the middle of nowhere. We can use that kind of stuff. Yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, sometimes, yeah.

Natalie Hiltz:

It's amazing. We can apply it. Who knew?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most people are not going to have that opportunity to go, how do they get that same insight and understanding? How do they get that glimpse into that different world of what policing could be if they don't have the opportunity to go to somewhere like Cambridge?

How do you sell it to other people in your agency if they haven't been to Cambridge?

Natalie Hiltz:

If you are invested and completely engaged in your job and you are having a look at what we've been doing and you have serious questions about how we're doing it, because ... boots to the ground, you can actually see, is it working or not working?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's an interesting approach. I'll do it in rooms when I'm doing training in this area, "Has anybody ever thought about there are some things that we do and you just wonder, why the hell are we doing it that way?"

Natalie Hiltz:

All the time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Every single hand goes up. But this is that hook to kind of say, "Okay, here's the mechanism to change that."

Natalie Hiltz:

It's a mechanism of change.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

As opposed to just whining about why the fuck are we always doing this this way, here is the mechanism.

Natalie Hiltz:

Do something about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Here's this process to engage with that you can actually make this better instead of just whining about it for the next 30 years.

Natalie Hiltz:

That's a good point. And I think Cambridge is that tool to help you explore different ways to understand where the opportunities are and where there are mechanisms that you can influence to spark change.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you're teaching on the program at Cambridge now. What have you learned from the process of teaching other people?

Natalie Hiltz:

We all have the same problems. We all have the same things we need to learn. We all need to start expanding our minds about what the possibilities are in bringing about more hope, inspiration and change and what our desired future should and can look like.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hope, inspiration, change starts to sound like a political logo, doesn't it, at that point?

Natalie Hiltz:

It does a little bit, but-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that what we need on posters? "Evidence-Based Policing: Hope, Inspiration and Change"?

Natalie Hiltz:

You know what? We're close. I think we're close.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I wonder in so many organizations if there's one or two people who think like this, but, one, they don't have a mechanism, like evidence-based policing, to move forward, and, secondly, what places like Cambridge or the Societies of Evidence-Based Policing or the work you're doing for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police is you give people that collegiality that almost says, "You're not alone in thinking we could do shit differently."

Natalie Hiltz:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you know what I mean? That sense that I'm not the freaky weirdo at work, as actually there are other people like me. We may still be the freaky weirdos, but it's nice to have that companionship of other people who go, "Oh, that shit happens in my organization and I can't get people to pay attention."

Natalie Hiltz:

That's huge. I have at times felt like a complete freaky weirdo.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's nice to know you're in company, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

It is nice to know you're in company. I equate it to finding your tribe. Sometimes being an advocate of a different way of doing business finds you in a very socially isolated, alienated and rejected kind of place in your career.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Machiavelli wrote about that 500 years ago, is that you try to bring in change, you may to get lukewarm support, because a lot of people are vested in the old ways of doing things. That's the mechanism they were successful under.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because if you think about a police chief, they were successful under the old regime, so they'd have little incentive to take on something new because it didn't help them.

Natalie Hiltz:

No. And that's where really hats off goes to the Canadian Society of Evidence-Based Policing, which I was a part of for a couple of years, was such an important stage of growth because it really started to validate people, again, who were thinking differently and connecting us.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When the history of evidence-based policing is written at some point in the future, I think there is a lot to be said for the work of people like Renee Mitchell and Alex Murray and Laura Huey-

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... in terms of make the time and energy and effort and the commitments and the sacrifices that they all made to start something that they cared about.

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolutely. All credit.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And so it's interesting to see that we're in the second generation now, where the societies are going, and if we still need the societies or if there's a place for them to become unified or if we need to refocus away from the societies to things like the Association of Chiefs of Police that you're working with perhaps. I don't know where that's going, but I certainly think we have to recognize the sacrifices that people made early. But then it's interesting post pandemic where it might go. Does that make sense?

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolutely. It absolutely does make sense. But things grow and things evolve for better or for worse. And I think the fact that evidence-based policing has been able to grow from that seed that she planted, that's all Laura Huey.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't know if the societies will survive or if there is a better place to instead think about infiltrating research and evidence-based policing into the existing organizations, which is why I'm so interested in your experience working with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, because getting in directly with the decision makers may be a more effective way than having our own separate clubs.

Natalie Hiltz:

If you can influence the minds and hearts of people from lower frontline ranks and to influence upward.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think a lot of frontline people just don't think evidence-based policing is relevant to them. You're a sergeant, which is not frontline, but you're very closely connected to the frontline.

Natalie Hiltz:

I don't expect a frontline guy or gal.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We can use "guy" in a non-gender specific sense.

Natalie Hiltz:

Okay, good. That's where I was going. I don't think that they have the time, the emotional or mental space, to really start to ponder life's issues. But I think that those growing minds and that growing work experience is really important. You might not completely understand how it relates to what you're doing, but eventually you will. I have this old sergeant who was one of the teachers when I went to the Ontario Police College, when I was a rookie. He gave me this quote and the quote meant nothing to me and it bothered me that it didn't mean a thing to me. The quote he took was from Frederick Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, which is obviously pretty heavy when you're 25.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Pretty heavy when you're in your fifties.

Natalie Hiltz:

Right. So the quote is, "He who fights with monsters should see to it that he too does not become a monster. And when you gaze into abyss, that abyss also gazes into you."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, that's great.

Natalie Hiltz:

A profound thing that totally escaped me. It was way over my head at 25. I had a lot of respect for this guy and I knew he was trying to tell me something that I didn't understand. I looked at this quote on my locker for probably a good four years before I could completely understand what he was trying to tell me, which is kind of that learning curve that officers go through, where you're kind of at the high end at four years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I have little interest, most of the time, in speaking to new recruits, because their brain is just too much, "I want to make sure I don't fuck up. I want to throw the lights on and the sirens on, and I'm going to raise--"

Natalie Hiltz:

We've all been there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You have to work that out of your system before you can have a few years and then go, "Okay. Been there, done that. This is what the shit is for the next 26 years." At some point, you've kind of got to go, and not everybody will take this route. That quote is only going to make sense to a few people. Some people will go their entire career and not understand its significance, but when they do it could be an entrance requirement for some of these other concepts that people are going to get exposed to. Because if you understand that, you're ready to embrace with the new ideas.

Natalie Hiltz:

When I was in recruiting for five years and been involved in hiring about 45 officers for my police service, I passed that on and I photocopied that. And every time we hired somebody, I quietly inserted that into their employment package. I don't think I've actually ever mentioned it to anybody. But the whole evidence-based policing piece too, and talking about new recruits and training and where should we start inserting that to grow seeds.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Should we be introducing recruits to evidence-based policing? That's the question you're asking, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

I think yes and no. Yes, it should be a part of common language, and they should understand for sure what that is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But do they really know what it means?

Natalie Hiltz:

They won't know exactly what it means. But here's the thing. All I can do is equip you with all the tools that you need to do your job, whether it's a baton or whether it's a knowledge of a really important policy, and I think evidence-based policing as part of that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So there is scope for people to get these higher level concepts in the academy?

Natalie Hiltz:

I think so. Some people will get it. So even with the evidence-based policing piece, do you not push it forward because only some people will get it? No. It's all about planting seeds. The problem with new recruits is your first four years are about assimilation. You assimilate as much as you can, so not the best environment to question police practices.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. So we're always saying to people, "Listen to this and think about this."

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

"It's probably not going to make any sense to you right now, but in about four or five years' time, when you've had enough of going to the same calls for service, the same places, dealing with the same shit in ways that don't seem to work, come back and find us where it makes more sense."

Natalie Hiltz:

I guess that's a good way of putting it, Jerry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I want to pivot for a moment to the research that you did. Mainstream criminologists, and that's like using bad language around this podcast, but mainstream criminologists have looked at some of the offenders-as-victims approach, but you came at it from a policing perspective, which I thought was interesting.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yes, it was policing. But I think that I'd be remiss if I didn't go a little bit more further back. I grew up in the community that I'm policing. I lived and breathed those streets that I now police. I've experienced my community on both sides of that fence. So as an officer, I do have that police perspective, but I'm also coming at it from, "Hey, I grew up with a lot of kids that made bad decisions and ended up in jail or died, or did-"

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Kids make bad decisions, but only some of them end up in jail.

Natalie Hiltz:

Kids make bad decisions and grow into adults that make bad decisions. Saying that's important, because once you get into policing, if you've grown up somewhere... I've had the same officers, Peel, going through my pockets and stopping me on the side of the road. Now I do have a police lens with all this lived experience on the other side of it, and now that's what I bring to the table.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that's an important piece that is often lost when people are struggling to think about what research to do and what areas to bring research into. There isn't a magical formula. It's what have you seen? What have you done? Let's do research on that. I'm always surprised by people's struggle to think of research ideas.

Natalie Hiltz:

No struggle.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's just get up in the morning, wander around, do a couple of shifts, something will come up.

Natalie Hiltz:

At this point, I should bring up my academic soulmate, Dan Jones, Inspector Dan Jones, out of the Edmonton Police Service. He also was a student at Cambridge. Both of us were very interested in the victim-offender overlap. He has the same lived life experience in terms of being a youth in a place that might have been rough, where he was exposed to kids and scenarios that were edgy and tough neighborhoods. We've seen a lot of kids and young adults make really bad decisions who are in our own friendship circles.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think if you don't have some friends who have made bad decisions, you need to widen your scope of friends.

Natalie Hiltz:

You need to widen your scope of friends.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because they're far and away the most interesting people to hang out with sometimes.

Natalie Hiltz:

They definitely are, yeah. I got some pretty fruity and spicy friends from my childhood, as we all tend to do. But then it made me realize that it's our life experience and how we interpret our police work environment that led us down the same road to the same research.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What did you find?

Natalie Hiltz:

When you come into policing and you're dealing with offenders, you see the human side of that and the fact that some of these offenders are really great people that just maybe didn't have the same privilege as you did, a good family, both parent, whatever it is that you got going on that they might not have. They don't go down the same path as you because of a combination of bad life decisions. So at the point, when we start looking at policing as a service, because we don't call ourselves a police force in Canada, we call ourselves a police service, you think about where you grew up, you think about those friends and all the trouble they would have gotten into and think, are we doing enough? Is what we're doing hurting? Is it helping? How does it help people thrive?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Your research was focused on the harm that is associated with the victimization side of offenders. Mounted police. Hello.

Natalie Hiltz:

Beautiful.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Don't see police horses very often.

Natalie Hiltz:

They're one of the only services that have these nowadays.

Shelley Hyland:

Really?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What I think is really interesting to come out of the victim-offender overlap area is in policing terms that gets into these interesting morality questions, because you'll get some people in policing who get it and then other people are like, "These people are offenders. What does it matter?" Do you know what I mean? I think it's that gulf between people who see the world in shades of gray and people who see the world as everything is black and white.

Natalie Hiltz:

Well, think about it for a second. You are asking police officers and looking at the victim-offender overlap for them to understand that offenders are also victim, and you have to think what a Typhoid Mary Paradox that is. Let's look at the police ethos as being crime fighters. Let's just look at that for one second. So I'm a crime fighter. Well, that means there's an enemy. You're fighting an enemy. So what I'm trying to say, we should be innovating for and treating precisely those people that we've declared a war on. That's a very difficult thing to ask an officer to do, and it does come to some moral ethical responsibilities there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because there are some officers mistaken, but there are some officers with the perspective that as victims they're less morally worthy because they're offenders.

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And so it's interesting that you're doing this work from a policing perspective. I'm not agreeing with it. Understand me from that perspective.

Natalie Hiltz:

I think-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But they're out there, right?

Natalie Hiltz:

I think that that is something that would be considered really ultra traditional. I think in this day and age, I think that where we're going is we're understanding that this notion of law enforcement intersects with the social determinants of health. In policing, we're crime fighting. We should be treating and innovating for exactly that enemy that we are told and trained to fight.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the pushback against that would be people saying, "Well, look, offenders who are themselves victims are probably less likely to report it to police." So, one, it doesn't get onto the radar of many people in policing, and, secondly, there's less incentive to deal with it because it's not showing up. I think what's interesting is how to sell it to get people to understand it a little bit more, because I think it's really important. People look at the moral worth of shooting victims depending on whether they've been shooters themselves. And yet I think we have to be realistic that offenders as victims is so much of the community, the people that policing deals with on a regular basis.

Natalie Hiltz:

I don't know. This isn't my best work. I'm not going to lie.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The paper or just this conver-

Natalie Hiltz:

No, the paper is amazing. I've done presentations all over the country, I've presented to the chiefs of police, and I am not doing it justice right now. I've overheated. Can you see the beads of sweat?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not a video podcast. We will put a copy of your journal article on the reducingcrime.com/podcast website so people can access it. But I think it's really worth reading because it's good research. It's good evidence-based policing. Have you had pushback from people in policing?

Natalie Hiltz:

Again, traditional policing, there's not a big buy-in in evidence-based policing to begin with, so you have some segments of policing that would just reject that concept. But I think now there's a real awakening, I think, in terms of you look at George Floyd, you look some of the major political international events that have happened that are forcing a different lens.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Whether you want it or not-

Natalie Hiltz:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... change has come to policing.

Natalie Hiltz:

I think that people are more open than they would ever be. I think post pandemic, I think that the future of evidence-based policing in Canada is very bright. Things going on socio-politically all around the world have forced us to be better, or want to be better, and do things differently that are more professionalized and modern, innovative. I think that victim-offender overlap, acknowledging victim criminals and criminal victims in our client base is very real, and I think that this is a place we're going to. It's a guaranteed eventuality of us looking at things differently.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Say you're a chronic offender but also a victim group, you're unlikely, or you're less likely, to come into the criminal justice system to resolve those issues, because to some degree they're going to be thinking that we're either not going to be supportive of them or that the system has largely failed them. So actually actively engaging about their victimization may just be the door that opens to more engagement and to interrupt some of the cycles of retaliation that we get between groups of offenders who go back and forth with each other.

Natalie Hiltz:

Maybe that could be part of it, for sure. Maybe the support services in our communities for victims isn't what it is for justice. If you're an offender, well, you're going to be incarcerated for a certain number of days of imprisonment. Well, if you're victimized, do you receive the corresponding number of days of support and intervention? I don't think we do.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

At a fundamental level, we do a lousy job of victim support to begin with, and then that's doubly so if the victims are also part of our offending chronic offending community. They get doubly shafted. If you know what I mean.

Natalie Hiltz:

There's a document here called Community Safety and Wellbeing Planning Framework that's come out of the provincial government here. It's a platform that really is forcing all the community services to look at things a lot differently and how social support can be bolstered and how we need to create more effective partnerships along a lifetime continuum of community client care, where in the justice system it doesn't begin with being an offender. In a life course of an offender, you might interact with the justice system and police for most of your life before you start offending.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And it possibly gives you an animosity to the criminal justice system, so you don't look to that system to provide victim support.

Natalie Hiltz:

Well, no, because you haven't gotten it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And in the absence of victim support, that probably just drives more offending.

Natalie Hiltz:

And serious offending. So the nexus for violence between victimization and offending is actually the highest for very violent offenses up to and relating to homicides.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, actually, rather than taking a moralistic standpoint and feeling like these guys are less worthy for victim support because they're offenders, there is actually a business case to be made-

Natalie Hiltz:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... that actually addressing specifically the victimization of people who are chronic offenders is actually a good practice in terms of reducing overall crime in the community.

Natalie Hiltz:

There's two papers, and basically they create a fictional person, but what they do is they start plotting their life course from when they're a child and not doing well in school to start getting involved in minor-level assaults and crime, and then graduating up to committing a homicide. What it does is it places the dollar value on each service that that person would need or come in contact with. In the end of this, you realize that there's a huge cost savings that's related to targeting violence more effectively so that you can more effectively provide interventions that are actually going to disrupt the cycle of violence and actually help people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And, again, we've got to move beyond this notion that offenders are not worthy people of getting victim support. I think for some people in policing that's still a bridge.

Natalie Hiltz:

I would agree with you. I think it's changing. I think we're going down a good path. How long it'll take to do a complete metamorphosis, I'm not sure. But there's definitely a police paradigm that'll be difficult to crack.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, I love the work that you're doing here in Ontario. You've embraced the police chiefs with their first evidence-based policing conference during the pandemic, didn't you?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. We did a virtual conference called the Evidence Will Move You. It was the first evidence-based policing conference in Canada and it was in partnership with the Ontario Association Chiefs of Police and the Cambridge Center for Evidence-based Policing. It was a huge moment for evidence-based policing in Canada. But we're due to have another one. We're just in the planning phases.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're due to have another one?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. We're going to try and have another one in February 2022.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Alas, the check is here, so that means by the rules of restaurants we have to stop talking and bail out immediately. But for spending some time with me here, as we fried gently in a-

Natalie Hiltz:

It's a hot one today.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a roaster, isn't it?

Natalie Hiltz:

Yeah. I've sweat through my shirt.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Haven't noticed. I can't. It's entirely inappropriate for me to suggest I've noticed. Boy, oh boy. We really [crosstalk 00:38:26]-

Natalie Hiltz:

It's a hot one. It's a sizzling hot day. Put it that way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We should definitely finish the podcast on that. I'm going to get a call from Social Services. Natalie, thank you ever so much.

Natalie Hiltz:

My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 39 of Reducing Crime, recorded in Canada in August 2021. I will post a link to Natalie's study on the podcast page at reducingcrime.com/podcast. There you'll also find a transcript of this and every episode. A free spreadsheet of multiple-choice questions for every episode is available for instructors. Just DM me on Twitter @jerry_ratcliffe or @_reducingcrime. Be safe and best of luck.