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# **Reduction Of Assault Complaints Against Police (RACAP) Observational Study of Police-Citizen Encounters**

**An Initiative of the Queensland Police Service  
and the  
Criminal Justice Commission**

October 1998

# Introduction

In February 1997, following the release of the Criminal Justice Commission's report titled *Reducing Police-Civilian Conflict: An Analysis of Assault Complaints Against Queensland Police*, a joint working group<sup>1</sup> was formed to provide the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) with recommendations for the introduction of strategies that could be used to reduce complaints of assault against police.

This briefing paper examines one of the joint working group's initiatives involving an observational study of police-citizen encounters (PCE) in the Metropolitan and South Eastern Regions. These are incidents where a police officer exercises a coercive power, such as arresting someone, or where there is some form of verbal or physical conflict between the officer and a citizen.

City Police Station and Surfers Paradise Police Division were selected as the sites for the study. These two locations were chosen because they had very different complaint profiles, despite some obvious similarities in the role and function of police in these areas (e.g. inner city location with large numbers of people, licenced clubs, and public spaces). The specific objectives of the study were to:

- collect information about the frequency and nature of PCEs in Brisbane (City Station) and Surfers Paradise (Surfers Paradise Division)
- assess the manner and style of interactions between Brisbane/Surfers Paradise police and the public
- identify potential situations in these locations which give rise to police-citizen conflict.

Initially, the aim of the study was to try to explain why there were major differences in the rates of assault complaints against police officers in two seemingly analogous operational policing units. However, in the end, this proved very difficult to achieve because of the wide range of factors impacting on complaint rates. Therefore, the emphasis of this briefing paper is on how the police officers in these two units interacted with the public with a specific focus on how the officers dealt with conflict. Where relevant, examples are presented to draw out the differences in the approaches taken by City Station and Surfers Paradise Division which may explain variations in the rates of assault complaints.

## Methodology

For the purposes of this study, a researcher from the CJC<sup>2</sup> and a police officer<sup>3</sup> from the Ethical Standards Command (ESC) accompanied operational police on patrol in Brisbane and at Surfers Paradise. The role of the researcher was to observe and record data on PCEs. The role of the police officer was to act as a liaison between the operational unit and the researcher, as well as assisting with the interpretation of the data.

The study, which commenced in early December 1997, was divided into three phases. The first phase was a pilot of the report form, which had been designed to collect observational data. This took place

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<sup>1</sup> The group was known as the joint working group for the Reduction of Assault Complaints Against Police (RACAP).

<sup>2</sup> During the course of the study, two observers from the CJC were used. Most of the observations (62 hours) were made by a CJC Officer. The Director of the CJC's Research Division was also involved in the project, recording observations on PCEs over a 6 hour period on 14 February 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Due to other operational commitments and industrial relations issues, three different police officers from the ESC were assigned to the study on a rotational basis.

at City Station (Brisbane) in Metropolitan North Region on the 4th and 6th of December 1997. Following several revisions to the data collection instrument, the second stage of the study commenced at City Station on 30 January 1998. This phase of the study was conducted over a span of three weekends ending on 14 February 1998. The third and final stage of the study commenced at Surfers Paradise on 27 February 1998. The last stage involved three observation periods spread over two weekends. The study formally ended on 27 March 1998.

In total, 135 hours of observations were undertaken in the two locations. This included a total of 96 hours of observation in Brisbane and 39 hours on the Gold Coast. Table 1 (below) shows the date, location, and total number of hours of observations undertaken during the study.

**Table 1 — Date, location, and number of hours of observation**

| <b>Date</b>                  | <b>Location</b>           | <b># hours</b> |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| 4.12.97                      | City Station              | 9              |
| 6.12.97                      | City Station              | 9              |
| 30.01.98                     | City Station              | 13             |
| 1.02.98                      | City Station              | 13             |
| 6.02.98                      | City Station              | 13             |
| 7.02.98                      | City Station              | 13             |
| 13.02.98                     | City Station              | 13             |
| 14.02.98                     | City Station              | 13             |
| 27.02.98                     | Surfers Paradise Division | 13             |
| 28.02.98                     | Surfers Paradise Division | 13             |
| 27.03.98                     | Surfers Paradise Division | 13             |
| <b>Total number of hours</b> |                           | <b>135</b>     |

Generally, the observations took place on Friday and Saturday evenings starting around 9:00 pm and ending at around 3:00am to 4:00 am with each observer undertaking about 6.5 hours of observation per shift. These days and times were chosen because records indicated that this was when assault complaints were most likely to arise.

The normal routine for the observers was to assemble at the Station in time to attend the pre-shift briefing. Following the briefing, the Shift Supervisor would allocate each of the observers to a different patrol unit. The observers then departed the station in the company of the officers for the remainder of the shift. On a couple of occasions, the observers worked together as a team. However, this was only for the purposes of accompanying the shift supervisor to assess the nature of the advice and assistance being provided to the patrol crews.

The data were recorded by the CJC researcher using a *Observational Study Report (OSR)*. The report was divided into three parts. The first part was designed to record a general description of the police-citizen encounter. This included details such as the date, time, and duration of the PCE. As well, the first part of the OSR allowed the observer to describe the nature and location of the incident.

The second part of the OSR recorded details about the police role in the PCE and identified the actions

taken by the officers involved in the incident. The types of data collected included:

- description of the patrol unit (e.g. general duties unit, supervisor's unit)
- designation of the officers (e.g. uniformed officer, plain clothes officer)
- gender, rank, and length of service of the officers
- main actions taken by the officers
- types of de-escalation/escalation strategies utilised by the officers
- demeanour of the officers
- extent of supervision and the nature of the advice given to the officers
- final outcome of the PCE.

The third part of the OSR looked at the citizen's role in the PCE. The types of data collected included:

- gender, age, stature, and ethnic appearance of the citizen
- the nature of any injuries suffered during the PCE
- general state and demeanour of the citizen
- behaviour and actions taken by the citizens
- evidence of impairment.

For the most part, the OSR was designed as a 'tick and flick' report with additional space made available for the observer to record comments about various aspects of the interaction between the officers and the citizen. In addition, the format of the OSR was designed in such a way that the data would be easily transferable to an SPSS<sup>4</sup> database for later analysis. A copy of the OSR is attached as an appendix to this briefing paper.

It should be emphasised that this study involved only 135 hours of observation. This is considerably less time than would be required to complete full-scale observational study. However, a study of this size and type was considered appropriate by the RACAP Committee for the purposes of gathering basic information about how police officers were dealing with conflict in the two different settings.

Another issue when considering the findings of this study is the possible impact that the mere presence of a CJC researcher or member of the Ethical Standards Command has on the behaviour of the police officers involved in the study. Although it is difficult to judge, it did not seem to be a major problem. Once the officers found out about the study and grew comfortable with the observer, they seemed to go about their business in the usual manner. This is generally consistent with overseas research suggesting that the presence of the observer has no real effect on officer behaviour<sup>5</sup>.

## Structure of the paper

The results of the study are presented under the following major headings:

1. General descriptions of the Police-Citizen Encounter
2. Police involvement in the Police-Citizen Encounter
3. Citizen involvement in the Police-Citizen Encounter
4. Summary of the key findings and implications of the Study.

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<sup>4</sup> SPSS - Statistical Package for the Social Science (database application).

<sup>5</sup> Worden, R. (1995) 'The Causes of Police Brutality: Theory and Evidence on Police Use of Force' in *Justice for All: Understanding and Controlling Police Abuse of Force*, W. Geller and H. Toch, eds., Police Executive Research Forum, Washington D.C.

# Description of the Police-Citizen Encounter

## Type of Incident categorised as a PCE

The observed incidence of police-citizen conflict in the two areas was actually quite rare. During an average shift, the observer would spend approximately 3 hours on general patrol with the rest of the time spent attending between 2 - 6 calls for service or backing-up other units.

The average number of PCEs observed per shift was two. This ranged from a high of four observations at the City Station on 14 March 1998 to no PCEs at all in Surfers Paradise during the 27 March 1998 shift.

Over the course of the study, details on 22 police-citizen encounters were recorded by the CJC researcher. Table 2 (below) shows the type of incident categorised as a PCE.

Table 2 — Type of incident categorised as a PCE

| Type of incident  | Number    | Percentage* |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| Disturbance (e.g. intoxicated person, noisy party, etc.)        | 8         | 36          |
| Traffic stop (RBT, traffic violation)                           | 3         | 14          |
| Minor criminal offence (e.g. peeping tom, assault)              | 3         | 14          |
| Other incident (e.g. transporting prisoners, dispersing crowds) | 3         | 14          |
| Field interview   | 2         | 9           |
| Domestic incident   | 2         | 9           |
| Major criminal offence (e.g. homicide)                          | 1         | 5           |
| <b>Totals</b>   | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>  |

\*Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

The most common type of incident categorised as PCEs were disturbances. This includes noisy parties, arguments and minor fights, ejected patrons and intoxicated persons. The large number of disturbances is not surprising as the City Station and Surfers Paradise Division encompass many entertainment venues and drinking establishments. In addition, these areas attract hundreds of young adults out for a 'night on the town'. As a result, a substantial volume of police work in both City and Surfers Paradise Stations involves the policing of public order offences such as excessive noise and public drunkenness.

The observer recorded that an almost equal number of PCE's were prompted by a call for service (9) or an offence being observed by the officers while on patrol (8). Three (3) PCEs were the result of a field interview and two (2) involved a routine traffic stop.

## Time and duration of the PCE

The majority of the PCEs occurred between the hours of 11:00 pm and 1:30 am. This was not surprising as this is also the peak period for the food and entertainment venues in both of the observed areas. However, the observer noted that as the overall workload for police declined after the peak period, the actual level of conflict seemed to increase in severity. In other words, after 1:30 am the officers were involved in fewer, but far more serious incidents. The likely explanation for this relates

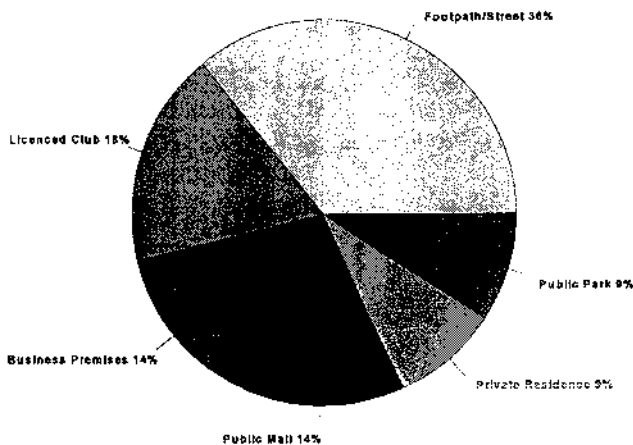
to the police having to deal with higher levels of intoxication, but could also be the result of the tendency, during quiet times, for patrol units to work as mutually supportive teams and deal with PCEs in a much more assertive manner.

The duration of the average PCE was 21 minutes. The range was from 2 minutes for a sharp verbal exchange with a traffic offender to about 90 minutes for an incident involving an assault causing bodily harm.

## Location of the PCE

Details were also collected on the locations where the PCEs occurred. Figure 1 shows that most of the PCEs occurred on a footpath or street. However, a large number of these incidents actually occurred in the immediate vicinity of a licenced pub or club. For example, one of the incidents involved an intoxicated female who was ejected from a nightclub by security staff. Upon the arrival of the police, the female subject verbally abused, then resisted, the officers and was subsequently arrested on the footpath in front of the club.

Figure 1 — Location of PCE



Relatively few PCEs occurred in private residences (9%) and no PCEs occurred in and around the two main police stations or at the police posts in Cavill Avenue and the Queen Street Mall.

# Police involvement in the PCE

## Police officer profiles

In the vast majority of cases, the officers involved in the PCE were uniformed general duties officers on mobile patrol (82%). Only 14 per cent of the PCEs involved beat officers patrolling on foot. The differences reflect the fact that the observer spent substantially more time with mobile patrol officers than beat officers. It may be that beat officers approach conflict very differently than mobile patrol officers, but the study design did not enable this issue to be explored.

Table 3 presents a profile of the officers involved in the study. The difference between officer 1 and 2 relates to the seniority of the officer. In a patrol vehicle or when patrolling with a beat crew the officer most senior in service was designated officer 1.

Table 3 — Officer Profiles

|                   |                       | Officer 1 | Officer 2 |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Gender            | Male                  | 21        | 15        |
|                   | Female                | 1         | 7         |
|                   | <b>Totals</b>         | <b>22</b> | <b>22</b> |
| Rank              | Constable             | 8         | 20        |
|                   | Senior Constable      | 5         | -         |
|                   | Sergeant              | 9         | 1         |
|                   | Not recorded          | -         | 1         |
|                   | <b>Totals</b>         | <b>22</b> | <b>22</b> |
| Length of service | Less than 1 year      | -         | 8         |
|                   | 1-5 years service     | 7         | 12        |
|                   | 5-15 years service    | 11        | 1         |
|                   | Over 15 years service | 4         | -         |
|                   | Not recorded          | -         | 1         |
|                   | <b>Totals</b>         | <b>22</b> | <b>22</b> |

As indicated in table 3, the majority of police officers (82%) observed during the study were male. This is broadly consistent with the current gender balance in the Service, according to the most recent QPS Annual Report. In addition, most of the officers observed during the study were Constables (62%) or Sergeants (23%). Surprisingly only 11% of officers involved in the study held the rank of Senior Constable. More than half (61%) of the officers observed during the study had less than five years service. This is common to most police services and reflects the fact that 'front-line' policing tasks, such as responding to calls for service, are generally performed by relatively junior officers.

## Main action taken by police during the PCE

During the study, the observer recorded details about the main action taken by the officers during the PCE. Figure 2 (below) shows the main actions taken, expressed as a percentage of all PCEs.

Figure 2 — Main action taken by police during the PCE

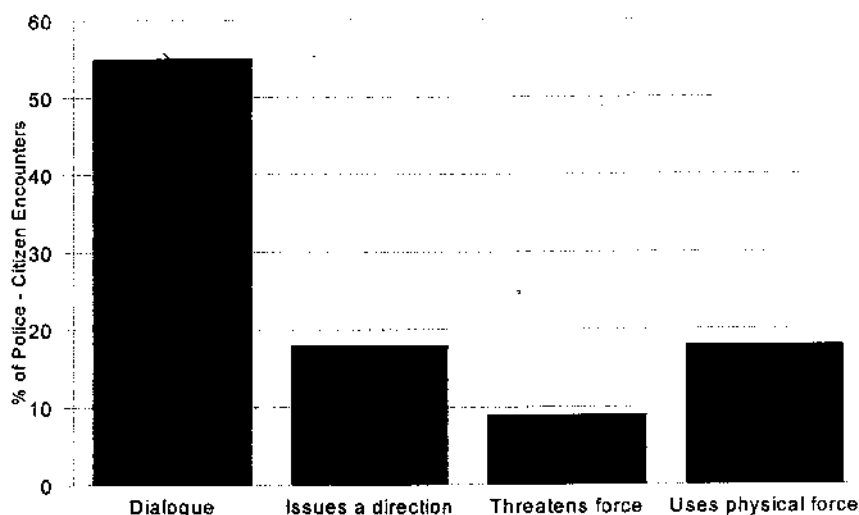


Figure 2 shows that the vast majority of PCEs (82%) did not involve any use of physical force. For the most part, the officers dealt with conflict using a range of strategies ranging from the use of light dialogue aimed at gaining cooperation to the officer threatening the citizen with arrest.

Physical force by officers was observed on only four occasions during the study. In two cases, a tight grip was used by different officers to restrain an intoxicated person. In the third case, a male subject was knocked to the ground and pinned down by an officer using a knee. The fourth incident involved a female officer grabbing an Aboriginal female by the hair - then applying a lateral vascular neck restraint.

There were some differences noted in the attitudes of some officers to conflict and the use of force in the two locations. Several Surfers Paradise officers spoke about their general reluctance to resort to 'the big stick'. One officer explained that Surfers Paradise was the kind of place that people went to relax and let off steam. Other than during Schoolies Week, the officer felt it was undesirable in a major tourist area to deal with conflict in a heavy-handed manner<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, one patrol crew from City Station considered that the inner-city area was like a 'powder keg' where the smallest spark could set the whole thing off. As a result, the officer's felt it best to deal authoritatively with situations so that they didn't get out of hand. As well, several officers from City Station felt that they were extremely busy and rarely had the luxury of time to deal with problems in a less than direct manner.

## Strategies used by police to de-escalate conflict

During PCEs, the observer looked at the kinds of strategies that police officers were using to de-escalate or minimise conflict. Ordinarily, these strategies range from merely 'listening' to advanced communication skills designed to gain trust or compliance. For the most part, the officers repeatedly relied on a fairly basic set of skills such as speaking in a calm and deliberate manner (50%), assuming a relaxed and non-threatening posture in the face of provocation (42%), and listening to both sides of

<sup>6</sup> Comment made by general duties Constable, Surfers Paradise, 28 February 1998.



the argument (8%).

There were no observable differences in the types of strategies used by officers at the two different units. However, some individual officers were clearly much better at defusing a situation than others. One particularly good example of this involved a relatively junior officer who got involved in a heated discussion with a male patron who had just been ejected from a major entertainment venue in Brisbane City. The discussion was about whether security staff had the legal right to forcibly remove a patron. The approach taken by the young officer was authoritarian and ended with the officer threatening to arrest the subject if he did not immediately leave the area. This was observed by the more senior officer of the patrol unit who intervened and resolved the matter simply by asking an associate of the subject to take him away for a coffee and discuss whether or not they should lodge a complaint with the club's management in the morning. This was agreed to by the subject who thanked the member for the 'good advice' and departed without further incident.

## The demeanour of police during the PCE

During the study, the observer considered the officer's demeanour during the PCE. This involved an assessment of the manner in which the citizen was treated, such as the officer's body language or tone of voice. Slightly over 68 per cent of the officers observed during the study displayed a supportive/passive demeanour (e.g. cooperative, sympathetic) or were neutral in their dealing with citizens. This means that, despite being involved in a conflictual situation with the officer, most citizens were still treated by the officer with compassion and/or objectivity. In slightly less than 32 per cent of the incidents the officers displayed an outwardly assertive/aggressive demeanour towards the citizen involved in the PCE; for the most part, these were situations in which the citizen was also openly hostile towards the officer.

## Presence of other police during the PCE

One of the issues that stood out in the study was the impact that the presence of additional officers has on a PCE. Table 4 (below) shows the number of officers that were present during a PCE.

Table 4 — Number of police officers present during the PCE

| # of officers present | # of PCEs | Percentage <sup>a</sup> |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1                     | 1         | 5                       |
| 2                     | 8         | 36                      |
| 3                     | 2         | 9                       |
| 4                     | 4         | 18                      |
| 5                     | 1         | 5                       |
| 6                     | 2         | 9                       |
| 8                     | 2         | 9                       |
| 12                    | 1         | 5                       |
| 16                    | 1         | 5                       |
| <b>Totals</b>         | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>              |

<sup>a</sup>Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

Table 4 shows that over half (60%) of the PCEs were attended by four (4) or more officers. Interestingly enough, two of the encounters had in excess of 10 police officers in attendance at the scene. Of particular interest was that one PCE attracted the attention of no less than 16 officers of various ranks and duty assignments (e.g. beat officers, general duties patrol, CIB, and JAB). This incident had to do with three young males (2 aboriginal) who were observed urinating on the side of a building in the Central Business District (CBD).

The number of police present at the scene has a substantial influence on how individual officers handle PCEs. In a number of situations where the incident attracted more than two officers, there was a noticeable tendency for the officers to deal with the matter using a far more forward and direct manner. There is no doubting that the presence of extra police enhances the safety and security of the officers involved. However, this can also create a situation where the citizen is at an increased risk of being treated more harshly than would be case when the officers acting alone take the time to defuse the situation by resorting to basic communication and negotiation skills. Furthermore, the presence of large numbers of police, akin to a swarm of police, actually increases the level of police - citizen conflict. For example, in the case involving the three young males alleged to have urinated against a building, one of the subjects became extremely agitated at the sight of so many police and began to yell and scream that he didn't care if they sent an 'army' he would take them all on. Clearly, in these types of situations there is scope for the senior officer present at the scene to ensure that the response to a particular call for service is appropriate, and if not, to redeploy excess units to other duties.

## Presence of a supervisor during the PCE

A shift supervisor, usually a Sergeant (Surfers Paradise) or Senior Sergeant (City Station) was rostered to work during the times that the observations took place. In both locations, the role and function of the supervisor was similar (e.g. ensuring that patrol objectives formulated for each shift were tasked accordingly, providing operational advice and direction to members, attending all serious incidents).

In the majority of cases (64%) the supervisor was not present during the PCE. However, during eight incidents where supervisors were in attendance, they were noted to play a key role in reducing the level of conflict between the officers and citizens. In particular, the mere presence of a supervisor seemed to have a calming effect on both the officers and the citizen.

There were no apparent differences in the level of supervisor participation in incidents between Surfers Paradise and City Stations. In both locations, the shift supervisor was noted as making a reasonable effort to attend most of the PCEs occurring during a shift when the observer was present. In the cases where the supervisor was not in attendance it was usually because the supervisor was involved in other matters such as conducting shift briefings or assisting a unit other than the one to which the observer was assigned to.

# Citizen involvement in the PCE

## Citizen profiles

The role of the citizen in promoting or restraining conflict during a PCE was considered to be equally as important as the officer's involvement in the incident. During the study, details were recorded about the gender, ethnicity, role, and age of the citizen. Table 5 (below) shows a profile of the citizens involved in the PCEs.

Table 5 — Citizen Profile

|                  |                  | Citizen   | Percentage* |
|------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <b>Gender</b>    | Male             | 17        | 77          |
|                  | Female           | 5         | 23          |
|                  | <b>Totals</b>    | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>  |
| <b>Ethnicity</b> | Caucasian        | 16        | 73          |
|                  | Aboriginal/A&TSI | 4         | 18          |
|                  | Asian            | 2         | 9           |
|                  | <b>Totals</b>    | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>  |
| <b>Role</b>      | Informant        | 2         | 9           |
|                  | Offender         | 15        | 68          |
|                  | Victim           | 1         | 5           |
|                  | Suspect          | 2         | 9           |
|                  | Other            | 2         | 9           |
|                  | <b>Totals</b>    | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>  |

\* Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

In most cases, the citizen involved in the PCE was a Caucasian (73%) male (77%). Only 23 per cent of the citizens were female. Furthermore, most of those encountered by the officers were individuals who had committed an offence (68%) or were suspects in the investigation of an offence (9%). Relatively few of the citizens involved in conflict with the police were informants (9%) or victims (5%).

Generally, the individuals involved in the incident were under the age of 30 years (71%). There were two individuals aged between 30-45 years (19%) and only one subject over the age of 45 years (10%).

## Citizen demeanour

The observer also considered the demeanour of the citizen during the PCE. For the purposes of this study, a typology of five general demeanour states was developed to describe citizens involved in PCEs. These demeanour states are: cooperative, distressed, withdrawn, aggressive-verbal, and

aggressive-physical.

Table 6 — Citizen demeanour

| Demeanour states    | Number    | Percentage* |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Cooperative         | 8         | 36          |
| Distressed          | 5         | 23          |
| Withdrawn           | 3         | 14          |
| Aggressive-verbal   | 4         | 19          |
| Aggressive-physical | 1         | 5           |
| Not recorded        | 1         | 5           |
| <b>Totals</b>       | <b>22</b> | <b>100</b>  |

\* Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

Table 6 shows that generally, the citizens were either cooperative in their dealings with the officers (38%) or self-involved (e.g. distressed or withdrawn). Overt displays of citizen aggression were relatively uncommon and were observed during only six PCEs. Even in these few cases, the citizen was rarely physically aggressive (5%).

## Citizen impairment

Approximately 60 per cent of citizens involved in PCEs appeared to be impaired by alcohol or a drug (see table 7 below).

Table 7 — Citizen impairment

| Substance         | Number    | Percentage* |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Alcohol           | 11        | 50          |
| Drugs             | 1         | 5           |
| Substance unknown | 1         | 5           |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>14</b> | <b>60</b>   |

\* Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

The finding that alcohol or drugs play an important part in PCEs was not unexpected, given that Surfers Paradise Station and City Station both service areas where there are large numbers of licenced restaurants and clubs. It is important to point out that the general feeling amongst the members accompanied by the researcher was that they felt ill-equipped to deal with intoxicated or drug effected individuals. In particular, the suggestion was made by one officer that members would benefit greatly from training that focused on how to best deal with individuals under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

# Summary and implications of the study

The findings of this study are as follows:

- The incidence of police-citizen conflict was quite rare. During the course of the study, details were recorded on only 22 PCEs. These were incidents where police exercised a coercive power or there was some form of verbal or physical conflict between an officer and a citizen.
- The largest number of incidents categorised as PCEs were disturbances. These generally involved police officers having to deal with intoxicated persons, unruly crowds or fights.
- Almost all of the PCEs observed during the study occurred between the hours of 11:00 pm and 1:30 am with the duration of the average PCE lasting about 21 minutes. Most PCEs occurred in, or near, drinking establishments such as nightclubs and taverns.
- In the vast majority of cases, the officer's involved in the PCE were uniformed general duties officers on mobile patrol. Most of the officers observed during the study were male.
- Most of officers observed during the study were Constables or Sergeants. More than half had less than five years service. This reflects the fact that most 'front-line' policing tasks are usually performed by relatively junior officers.
- The vast majority of PCEs did not involve any use of physical force. For the most part, the officers relied on a variety of non-physical strategies, ranging from the use of light dialogue aimed at gaining cooperation to the officer threatening the citizen with arrest.
- There were some differences noted in how the officers handled conflict in the two locations with officers from City Station seeming to take a much more assertive approach when dealing with a PCE. However, some caution needs to be taken in interpreting this finding as PCEs were both far more common and serious in the City than at Surfers Paradise during the period of the study.
- Over half of the PCEs were attended by four or more officers with two of the PCEs having in excess of 10 officers at the scene. An excessive number of police present during a PCE was observed to have a substantial influence on how the officers handled the PCE. Where a large number of officers were present, there was a greater risk of the citizen being treated more harshly than would be case when the officers acting alone were more likely to take the time to diffuse the situation using basic communication and negotiation skills.
- In most cases, the citizen involved in the PCE were young caucasian males. Approximately 60 per cent of citizens involved in PCEs were impaired by alcohol or a drug.

Overall, the study found that there were few major differences between City Station and Surfers Paradise Station in terms of the types of situations that give rise to police-citizen conflict. However, there were some differences noted in the way that police in the two areas responded to PCEs, as well as in the way that individual officers handled them.

The findings of the study highlight a number of issues that need to be examined and dealt with in order to minimise the level of conflict between citizens and police.

- **Training.** Some police officers felt that they were ill-equipped to effectively de-escalate conflict or deal with persons under the influence of alcohol or drugs. There is little doubt that enhancing the training in these areas would substantially improve both the level of confidence and the effectiveness of police officers in dealing with conflict or non-compliance. Of particular importance is training that focuses on:
  - \* conflict analysis (observing, listening, probing)
  - \* conflict resolution (dialogue, mediation, negotiation, diversion)
  - \* effective restraint techniques.
  
- **Supervision.** The provision of proper field supervision, especially of relatively junior officer, is widely considered to be important to minimising the level of police-citizen conflict. As this study found, the mere presence of a person in authority seems to have a calming effect on both the public and police officers involved in a confrontation. At other times, a supervisor was noted to be able to defuse the situation by talking a problem through with a citizen or providing proper advice and guidance to the officers at the scene. Unfortunately, most shift supervisors are required to perform a wide-range of administrative duties which have a tendency to restrict the amount of time that supervisors are able to spend supervising operations in the field. It is important that ways are found to reduce the non-operational workload that shift supervisors have so that they can refocus their efforts towards ensuring that:
  - \* junior officers are paired with appropriate role models
  - \* proper guidance is given to officers in the field
  - \* appropriate strategies are used to deal with conflict and citizen concerns.
  
- **Tasking.** The attendance of large numbers of police to relatively routine incidents was noted to substantially increase the level of police-citizen conflict. This has two main effects. First, it increases the risk of the citizen alleging excessive force because the officers did not take the time to diffuse the situation using non-physical means (e.g. communication and negotiation). Second, the presence of large numbers of police increases the likelihood of 'multiple' allegations of assault against different officers arising out of the same incident.

To ensure that the police response to a PCE does not contribute to a further escalation of conflict, it is important that field supervisors pay particular attention to this issue. In addition, consideration should be given to whether operational guidelines are needed to reduce excessive 'shows of force' as a tactic to deal with relatively minor incidents.