

X PATROLLING HIGH-CRIME NEIGHBORHOODS: CHANGING CITIZEN ATTITUDES
AND CRIME EXPERIENCES THROUGH A MINI-POLICE MODEL (1)

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ACQUISITIONS

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Abstract

Crime in low income and public housing neighborhoods has been a perennial problem throughout the nation. It attracted a great deal of public and academic attention during the 1960s and 1970s. As a consequence public and police officials came under increasing pressure "to do something" about crime without increasing citizen hostility toward the police which has generally been found in these areas. As a partial response to these pressures police departments experimented with different policing styles in the high-crime neighborhoods: saturation patrol and variations of crime attack models were tried with little success. In 1976 and 1977, the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, tried a mini-team policy approach in which a small team of officers were assigned to patrol in a high-crime neighborhood on a full-time basis. This approach proved to be more successful in both reducing crime and improving police-community relations than any other model which had been discussed in the literature. Evidence was found suggesting that a combination of foot patrol and community service efforts results in the greatest benefit both for the community and the police.

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INTRODUCTION

Every community contains neighborhoods in which crime and negative attitudes toward the police seem to thrive. In particular public neighborhoods, such as those in this study, where the combination of a concentration of low-income families, large numbers of adolescents, and architectural designs (Newman, 1972) present special challenges to the police by reducing the effectiveness of conventional crime control strategies. Many communities have written these neighborhoods off as lost and have done little to control crime within them. Other communities have responded to the challenge by attempting to involve the residents in crime prevention programs, increasing the frequency of patrol or assigning special police civilian teams to patrol in these neighborhoods.

A review of those programs which attempted to reduce crime in high-crime areas (See Brannon, 1974; Chaiken, 1974; Dahman, 1974; Eldred, 1976; O'Rourke, 1975; Phelan, 1977; Stenzel, 1977) suggests that the creation of a special police team to patrol within high crime areas will have the greatest likelihood of having an impact on crime, especially crimes against persons such as robbery and assault. Research by Kelling and others (1974) has suggested that mere presence of preventive patrol was not effective and that a combination of team policing and a modified crime attack (2) model of policing would, in the long run, prove to be most effective (See Wilson, 1974; Manning, 1977). Based on the results of such previous work it appeared that a mini-team approach which offered a full range of police services to a specific

high crime neighborhood should result in: 1) a reduction in the level of victimization, 2) an improvement in citizen attitudes toward the police, and 3) an increase in citizen perceptions of safety.

Research Design

The concept of targeting a mini-team to a specific high crime neighborhood was employed in an experimental policing project in a public housing project in Charlotte, North Carolina. A team of ten officers, one sergeant, and one special services civilian was assigned to operate a neighborhood office, provide 24-hour intensive patrol and offer a full range of police services designed to reduce crime and improve police-community relations. The mini-team approach was implemented for a period of one year in which the patrol of the neighborhood was divided between vehicular patrol during the first six months and foot patrol during the second six months. The range of police services which were offered included: staffing a neighborhood police office 24 hours a day; sponsoring of crime prevention meetings; instructing residents in the use of engravers and encouraging participation in marking personal property in a program known as Operation Identification; conducting home security inspections; expansion of the Police Athletic League Program; provision of athletic equipment to Target Community youth; development of an innovative truancy program; and attempts to provide more services to families involved in family disputes.

As a means of evaluating the success of this policing experiment a research design which would measure conditions before, during, and after the experiment was established. Surveys were conducted in the

target community before the police experiment began, at the end of six months, and again after the police experiment ended. (3) In addition, police statistics concerning offenses and arrests before, during, and after the experiment were analyzed. To attempt to control for variations in performance and assess the effects of the style of implementation, the conduct and administration of the program within the Target Community itself were monitored for an average of 10.8 hours per week. Observers attempted to assess the amount and types of patrol, interaction between police and citizens and the manner in which programs were implemented.

Previous research on projects similar to this policing experiment had found that intensified law enforcement efforts had resulted in a displacement of a crime rather than its actual reduction (e.g., O'Malley, 1973; Brannon, 1974). In addition, crime patterns and citizen attitudes had been shown to change considerably without corresponding changes in police behavior. To control for both of these possibilities we examined victimization patterns and attitude changes within the surrounding residential areas and a second public housing neighborhood that was closely matched with the target community. (4) These additional areas were then used to compare the experiences and attitudes of the residents within them with those of the Target Community residents.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings related to the mini-team policing experiment can be divided into two areas. First, we will consider the conditions in the Target Community before, during, and after the experiment. Second, we will consider the conditions in this community vis-a-vis the

control neighborhoods.

Conditions in the Target Community

Before the police experiment began, the Target Community was characterized by a high level of both crime and the fear of crime. During 1976, over 40 percent of the families living in this housing project had been victimized at least once and less than 40 percent of the residents felt safe when out in their neighborhood alone. The residents were dissatisfied with the patrol of their neighborhood and police services in general. The contacts the citizens had with the police were generally limited to when police responded to calls for service or to when they were stopped for questioning; in each of these types of contacts citizens expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the treatment they received. There was a general hostility toward the police which was evident not only in the responses to survey questions in the victimization study, but was also evident in the behavior of citizens toward the police when they did come into the neighborhood. Because of hostility, often openly demonstrated, the police themselves were reluctant to both patrol and answer calls in the neighborhood.

After the experiment began, citizen satisfaction with police services, the handling of reported victimizations, and the police department's efforts to reduce crime and improve the quality of police-community relations increased markedly. Attendance at crime prevention meetings and involvement in various crime prevention activities increased from the beginning to the end of the experiment. Although the police team was discouraged by a seeming lack of interest in and cooperation

with some of these activities, both the attendance data and the survey data indicate that the barriers to involvement were breaking down: about two-thirds of those who had been contacted regarding the various programs said they had either consented to participate or had already participated in those activities. Similarly, the number of informal contacts between the police and citizens increased. At the end of the experiment over one-fourth of the residents said they considered the police as friends compared to less than seven percent at the beginning.

The most significant impact of the experiment was on the perception and fear of crime. Early studies on the fear of crime claimed that people least in danger were the most afraid, but Furstenberger (1971) made the point that those studies failed to distinguish between a broad, general concern for crime and fear of actually being victimized and that when this distinction was made there was a close correlation between the actual incidence of crime and fear of crime. Before the police team entered the community, the fear of crime (Table 1) was disproportionately high compared to other residential areas. During the course of the experiment Target Community residents perceived a significant drop in crime (a perception which, as we will see later, was not accurate). They began to feel that their neighborhood was less dangerous than other neighborhoods and, as a consequence, began to feel safer. After the police left the Target Community, however, many of the fears and old feelings returned. An article in the local newspaper (January 12, 1978) after the project ended, quoted one of the residents as follows:

Since the police have left, it's very seldom you see a cop patrolling. You just don't see a police car in here unless something has happened.

Sunday night, I was followed by a car that came into the parking lot. I had to get a policeman to escort me home. That didn't happen when the police were here.

Table 1

FEELINGS OF SAFETY BY NEIGHBORHOOD AREAS, 1976

Feelings of Safety				
<u>Neighborhood Area</u>	<u>Feels safe under most conditions</u>	<u>Feels somewhat unsafe</u>	<u>Feels unsafe under most conditions</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Target Community				
N	109.0	96.0	48.0	253.0
%	39.9	35.2	17.6	100.0
Control Neighborhood				
N	55.0	39.0	11.0	105.0
%	52.4	37.1	10.5	100.0
Residential Area				
N	104.0	71.0	13.0	188.0
%	55.3	37.8	6.9	100.0

Our data suggest that while fear is related to the actual incidence of crime, the controlling factor in the emergence and maintenance of fear is police presence. The basis for this statement lies in the fact that victimizations (crime) did not decrease even though citizens felt it had. In fact, crime, measured as a rate of reported incidents, increased during the period that citizens said that crime had decreased and decreased during the period when citizens said that crime was increasing. Obviously people get more reassurance from seeing the police in the neighborhood, than from being able to talk to them, and from

knowing that they are familiar with and aware of what is going on in the neighborhood than they do from random preventive patrol. As indicated in Figure 1, we found little evidence that the police had a positive effect on crime during the year they were in the Target Community: total crime (as measured by victimization surveys) went up during the experiment and then dropped at the end to about the same level it was before the experiment began. The police experiment appeared to be particularly ineffective in deterring crimes against persons, although the number of street crimes declined during the last half of the experiment by a significant amount (Figure 2). There was, however, some decline in property crimes during the year (Figure 3). As shown in Figure 4 the rate of burglary dropped consistently from the beginning to the end of the experiment: only half the number of burglaries were reported at the end of the experimental period as were reported before the experiment began. In addition, an investigation of the number of families experiencing property offenses revealed a 50 percent decline during the experimental period.

Comparison With Control Groups

While an examination of crime patterns within the Target Community suggested only marginal success on the part of the experiment in reducing crime, an examination of these patterns in relationship to the patterns in the Control Neighborhood (the second public housing neighborhood which was matched with the Target Community for comparison purposes) suggests that the experiment kept crime against property in check during a period when it seemed to be soaring in the Control

FIGURE 1

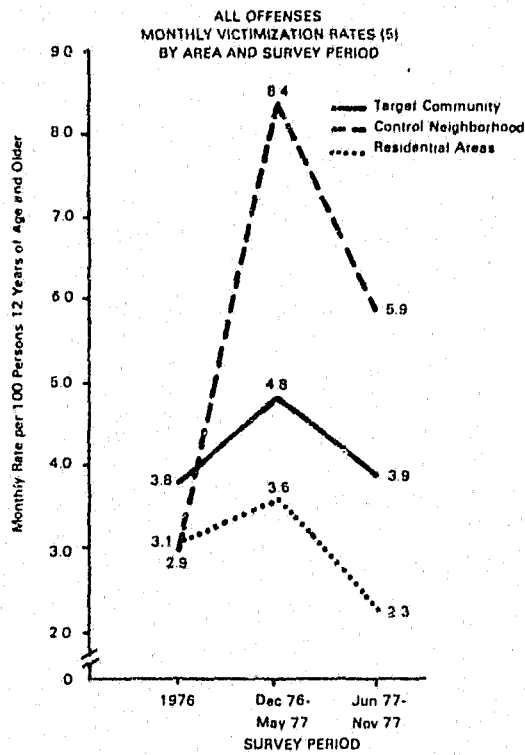


FIGURE 2

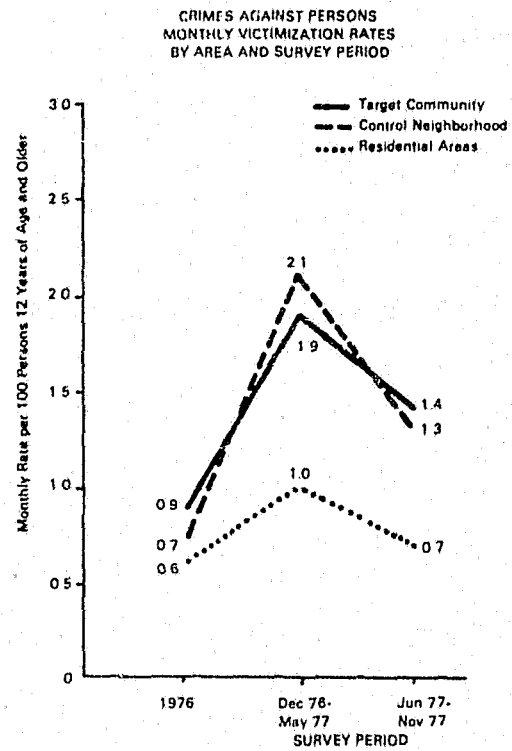


FIGURE 3

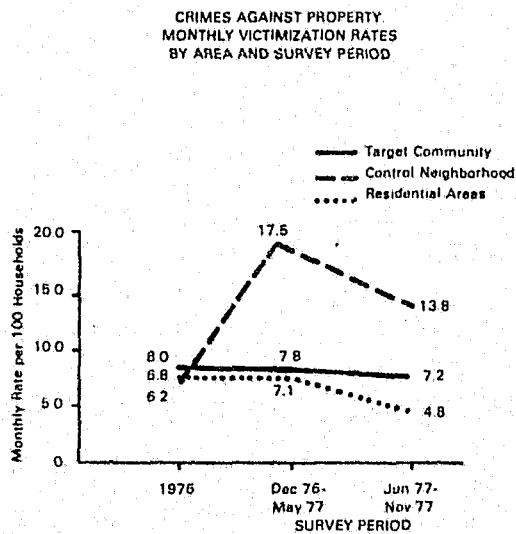
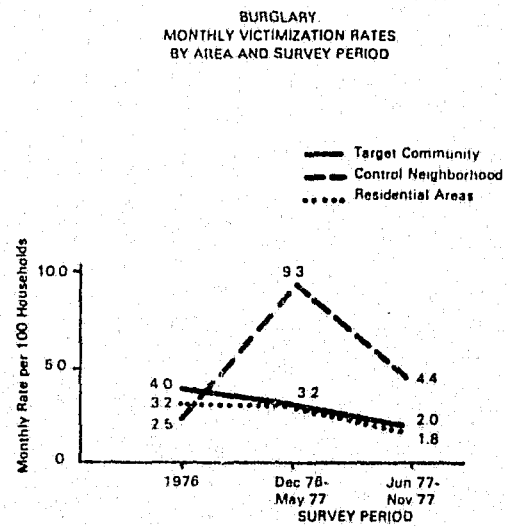


FIGURE 4



Neighborhood. However, a slightly less optimistic note about the effects the experiment had on reducing crime was found when crimes against persons were examined (Figure 2). Here it appears with the other public housing neighborhood that the police experiment had no effect on reducing assault or robbery rates relative to the Control Neighborhood. In addition, a reduction in all crime noted during the second half of the project could well have been the result of a general trend toward lowered crime rates that seemed to be occurring throughout the study area. The rate of reduction in crime in the Target Community was about equal to and sometimes less than the rate of reduction in the other areas.

In terms of crime prevention activities, the Target Community residents were more involved than those of the control area. They were more satisfied with police patrol and, rated both their neighborhood police team and the police department higher than did the residents in the control areas. In their perception of crime trends and their feelings of safety, Target Community residents were more like the residents of the surrounding residential area than they were like the residents of the other public housing areas. Even though they felt safer in their neighborhoods during the experiment than either before or after, they still felt less safe than residents of the surrounding residential areas.

CONCLUSION

This study of the mini-team policing experiment has addressed a question posed by George Kelling at a recent meeting of the American

Society of Criminology: "Can the police arrest fear and develop strategies which assist communities to develop the normal social controls necessary for quality urban life?" (Kelling, 1977:17). The results of the experiment suggests that the police can achieve these ends. However, our research suggests that the police should not expect to either eliminate or significantly reduce crime particularly in a short period of time. But crime reduction may not be as important as reducing the fear of crime. Fear of crime paralyzes a neighborhood and inhibits the implementation of programs such as Neighborhood Watch. One Neighborhood Watch block captain phrased the response to fear as follows:

Nobody sees anything. Nobody knows anything. Nobody hears anything. They just know there was a break-in.
(Local Newspaper, January 12, 1978).

When people are afraid they withdraw, they ignore what goes on around them, and, in doing this, they reduce the normal social controls on human behavior. People begin to take a part in their communities and help maintain social controls when they feel that they, with the help of the police will be able to do something about crime.

Our research, however, does not allow us to clearly answer the question of whether it is the mere presence of the police or the multiple activities and programs that the police undertake that is best able to arrest fear and restore controls. The data do suggest certain conclusions when taken in combination with other research that has been done. For example, both our research and the research of others suggests that mere police presence does little good--presence must be combined with actions

which show people that the police are concerned about crime in their neighborhood and are willing to work with the residents to try to do something about it. The particular combination of strategies may not be as important as how they act when implementing them.

Concerning specific strategies which are most likely to attain the goal of reducing fear, we have found some evidence that foot patrol may be the most significant. Foot patrol appears to impact on both burglary and assaults and increases the amount of interaction between police and citizens. The implementation of foot patrol strategies in high-density, high-crime areas is strongly suggested as a strategy with great potential. Applying these findings to other low density residential areas is more difficult. In these areas it is doubtful that foot patrol would be practical.

Finally, whatever program a police department tries, it will be necessary for the officers involved in the program to fully understand the purpose and responsibilities entailed in the program and for them to be personally committed to it. The best ideas and plans cannot succeed if they are not implemented in the manner that was intended. This will be especially true in community service programs to which police officers generally attach little value. Unless officers are trained to adequately perform the duties and rewarded for it, non-productive preventive patrol strategies will remain as an integral part of urban area policing methods (e.g., See Kelling, 1977:23).

FOOTNOTES

- (1) The funding for the evaluation of the Charlotte Mini-Team Experiment came from a contract with the City of Charlotte and LEAA. The conclusions and implications drawn in this paper represent those of the authors and may or may not reflect those of the funding agencies.
- (2) A crime attack model is one in which the police target a specific type of crime, such as assault or prostitution, and employ aggressive patrol strategies to reduce the incidence of such offenses in an area over a specific period of time. (Stenzel, 1977)
- (3) An attempt was made to interview all families living in the public housing community at the time of each survey (approximately 295 families). Complete usable responses were obtained from 90 percent of the families in the first two surveys and about 70 percent of the families were interviewed in the last.
- (4) Interviews identical to those used in the target community were conducted in each of these areas. A 7 percent sample of the residents living in the surrounding areas was drawn and about 90 percent of this sample was successfully interviewed. One-third of the residents living in the Control Neighborhood were successfully interviewed.
- (5) Monthly rates were used in order that comparability between periods could be maintained.

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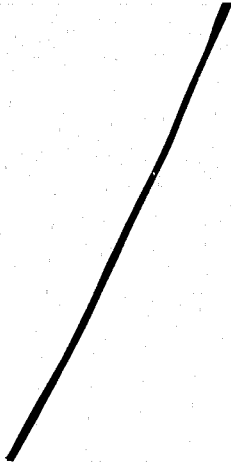
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