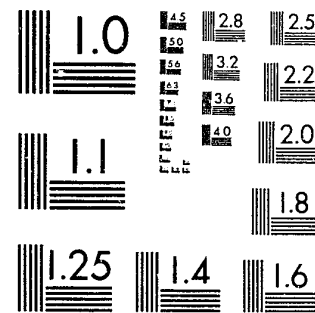


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National Institute of Justice
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D. C. 20531

4/9/84

LXVIII

EXPERIMENTS in CRIME CONTROL :
an interim statement

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Ministry of Justice The Hague - Netherlands
1983

Experiments in crime control: a researchers review

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ACQUISITIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1980, the Research and Documentation Centre (RDC) of the Ministry of Justice has been conducting research projects to examine the effectiveness of new experimental methods of policing. Now that several of these projects are finished and have been individually evaluated, the time is ripe to draw up an evaluation of the various projects. The aim of any such review should be not just to look back at the results achieved so far, but also to provide guidelines for possible future projects. A first review is particularly relevant at this juncture in view of the discussions in the Advisory Committee of the experiments about follow-up experiments.

Before indicating a number of ways in which practical follow-up experiments could be set up, we begin by outlining the present position, mentioning the origin of the experiments and the content of the projects, and go on to review the most significant results. Several important problems of content and methodology are listed in the light of these results. Finally, the way in which these problems affect the conclusions to be drawn from the results leads us to consider whether new projects should be set up and, if so, in what way.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE EXPERIMENTS

The basis of the RDC's police experiments can be seen as the final report in 1976 of the study group on reporting offences. In this report the study group stated that it would be difficult to lay down national policy guidelines for priorities in detection and reporting. Instead, a selective policy should be determined at local or regional level, which could apply particularly to those categories of offence which can be defined as petty crime. On the grounds of this report and of the steady rise in petty crime, The Assembly of Procurators General decided in 1978 to

commission various experiments which were to be conducted on a local basis and would involve the establishment of a selective policy on the detection and reporting of offences. The decision on the precise form should be taken in the tripartite consultations between the chief public prosecutor, the burgomaster and the head of police. This policy would then be systematically evaluated.

It was decided to conduct the experiments in several municipalities in order to assess the effects on the crime rate of different kinds of selective detection, reporting and prosecution criteria. Initially, the emphasis would be placed on detection and reporting by the police. Prosecution by the prosecuting authorities in coordination with police policy would be examined at a later stage. During the course of the experiments, the emphasis shifted from the development of a selective policy to methods of crime control, partly as a result of the findings of similar experiments abroad.

The successful application of such methods may provide a basis for the development of a selective detection and reporting policy in the future.

The fact that the scope of the experiments was narrowed to concentrate on the police and their methods was offset to a certain extent when preventive experiments were set up in addition to the repressive ones. The experiments should, therefore, be able to give at least a preliminary indication as to how the police can make a better contribution to preventive and repressive crime control. The stress is on petty crime, partly because it is on the increase, and partly because the clear-up rate is steadily declining both relatively and absolutely.

THE EXPERIMENTS

A number of experiments carried out by the municipal police forces of Amsterdam, The Hague, Hoogeveen and Utrecht have now been completed and a provisional evaluation can be made of the results so far. Allowing for differences in content and intensity, the experiments in the first three municipalities stressed preventive activities by the police, directed against burglary, vandalism and theft of all kinds. Uniformed patrol officers were principally involved. A second important element common to the experiments was a visible police presence in the streets, in the form of foot patrols which were readily accessible to the public. Each of the three preventive experiments had individual features and will therefore be discussed briefly. Afterwards the most significant results common to all three will be described. The experiment in Utrecht stressed repressive activities of the police.

Hoogeveen

This project concentrated on crime prevention by means of uniformed police patrols having special tasks and by a crime prevention officer. The task-oriented patrols gave special attention to vandalism, hooliganism and theft from vehicles, concentrating on places and times where these offences were most frequent according to the police's own information. Depending on time and place, the patrols were conducted by car, on foot or by bicycle by uniformed and plain-clothes officers, all of whom were involved in the project for two years. At the same time a crime prevention officer was put in charge of all the activities designed to prevent crimes such as burglary, vandalism, bicycle theft and theft from cars or changing rooms etc.

The Hague

A special team of eight uniformed patrol officers and two detectives was set up for six months, primarily to reduce the number of burglaries in the Moerwijk district. Their work consisted of

intensive patrols on foot and by bicycle, spreading information about ways of preventing burglary and recording and dealing with reports of burglaries.

Amsterdam

This project was conducted in the Osdorp district, and can be seen as a duplicate of the one in The Hague, with appropriate adjustments. First, more offences were involved; secondly, the Amsterdam project did not include both prevention and detection activities: its main aim was the improvement of relations with the public through as much direct contact as possible. To this end, most of the patrols went on foot, and the project concentrated on spreading information about preventing crimes against property. Again, a team consisting of uniformed patrol officers was at work for six months.

Results of the three preventive experiments

In the first place, the general crime rate did not fall because of the experiments: the most that can be said is that it stabilised, a result in line with the conclusion drawn from the Foot patrol experiment in Newark (USA), where the use of a certain foot patrol method did not produce any decrease in the crime rate either. We would stress, however, that no blanket conclusion should be drawn from the Dutch experiments since it appears that certain offences, especially those committed in public like vandalism, are more susceptible than others to this method of prevention. So for certain offences the experiments may be successful in regard to national crime rates.

Some of the experiments did have a positive effect on the local population's subjective perception of crime. Foot patrols or more visible patrols, carried out in different ways, can reduce people's fear of crime, particularly if the presence of the police is not related to a feeling that something is wrong in the district or the town. This also corresponds to the findings of the Newark project.

The experiments had other significant effects: victims of violent crime became more willing to report it to the police, and people showed themselves more ready to inform the police of suspicious situations in which they themselves were not directly involved. Generally speaking, the project induced the local population to take a more favourable view of the police.

Although a direct approach was more effective than disseminating information through the media, the projects' informative activities, designed to increase people's willingness to take preventive measures, produced few positive results.

Utrecht

In addition to these preventive experiments, a burglary detection project was set up in Utrecht to investigate whether the introduction of more efficient and effective procedures in criminal investigation departments would help to combat theft and burglary. Some duties of the detectives were adapted and additional patrol officers were temporarily deployed in an attempt to improve the clear-up rate for reported crimes: that is, that more cases of theft and burglary would be cleared up for the same expenditure in terms of time and/or manpower.

The project was organised as follows:

- a team of detectives and patrol officers was formed;
- as the team's members were exempted from normal duties, they were able to work without interruption;
- several members of the team worked together on one case;
- a project leader was responsible for assigning duties, monitoring the process and supervising and coordinating the work;
- better use was made of the information of the Central Information Department of the Utrecht police force;
- the project had an information system of its own, concentrating on burglary and theft;
- administrative support was provided;
- administrative procedures were simplified.

Research proved that the burglary project was successful. The number and the proportion of cases cleared up increased. Besides the cleared-up cases were more difficult to solve; relatively fewer offenders were caught in the act and relatively more cases were cleared up without direct clues.

The chances of catching offenders also increased: more cases were cleared up and statements taken from more offenders. Also the average time spent on each case fell.

Any fall in the crime rate will possibly occur a while after the burglary project, so that it will be impossible to say whether or not the fall in crime rate in Utrecht (according to victim surveys) is a consequence of the project.

4. PROBLEMS

Initially, the assumption underlying the serie of experiments was that any special measures taken by the police would have a favourable effect on the incidence of crime. In view of the results so far it is perhaps a good idea at this point to examine in more detail several problems which affected the experiments at all three stages, namely design, implementation and evaluation. Two types can be distinguished: first, problems of content, centred around the relationship between police methods and the crime rate. The second type are more technical and methodological. In discussing

both types a start will be made on more detailed consideration of possible new police experiments.

4.1 Problems of content

The relationship of police methods to the crime rate is the most significant question under discussion here, and is therefore of the utmost relevance in any consideration of the experiments' results. If the crime rate alone is under consideration, these results are, unfortunately, none too hopeful. Only certain offences possibly can be influenced.

A preliminary explanation may be found in the type of offence on which the experiments concentrated: comparatively minor forms of crime which occur very frequently. Society's norms of permissive behaviour are accepted up to a certain point as a force for social good; the question is: to what extent people accept these norms and take them for granted. Hardly anyone believes that murder can be allowed, but acceptance of the norms governing burglary, theft or vandalism is less widespread, perhaps much less so. Sanctions in the form of provisions in the Criminal Code are necessary if legal norms are to be maintained. The police and the judicial authorities are responsible for ensuring that the norms are not broken (prevention) or, if they are broken, that sanctions are enforced against the offender (repression, punishment).

Whatever the reasons may be, the norms relating to the offences involved in the experiments have become very blurred, and perhaps as a result the sanctions have lost a good deal of their effect. This is illustrated by the fact that the probability of being arrested and of being prosecuted or sentenced at a later stage is relatively low.

The experiments were set up on the assumption that the police would be able to get a grip on crime and halt the steady rise in the crime rate by deploying extra manpower and undertaking many new duties. But it was soon realised, even during the course of the experiments, that this assumption was an oversimplification, because the relationship between police action and the crime rate is much more complex, and is affected by various other factors. Although we do not intend to give a complete picture of these factors, the following may illustrate certain points.

Police action is believed to influence the actual probability that an offender will be arrested, and above all the public's subjective perception of this probability, thus changing

criminal behaviour. The attempt to influence the behaviour of certain categories of people will have different effects depending on the degree of criminal behaviour they exhibit. The following categories may be distinguished:

1. Offenders: that is persons who actually commit an offence.
2. Would-be offenders: that is persons who are on the point of committing an offence.
3. Potential offenders: persons who, perhaps because they have already committed an offence, are more likely to be faced with the temptation to commit another, and to yield to it if there are not too many obstacles in their way.
4. People at risk: persons who run a greater risk of committing an offence because of their personal, social, economic, cultural or demographic characteristics.
5. Conformists: persons who have adopted certain values and norms to such an extent that they will not commit offences unless their situation undergoes a radical change.

Police action can take different forms, and to avoid the problem of defining preventive, pro-active and repressive action, we shall restrict ourselves to the forms found in the RDC experiments:

1. patrolling and information work, by the uniformed patrol unit;
2. activities designed to solve crimes, by the criminal investigation department;
3. preventive activities by the crime prevention officer.

The effects of a substantial increase in each of these forms of action on the behaviour of the categories listed above can be shown by combining the two factors in the form of a matrix.

	police action		
	patrol	C.I.D.	crime prevention officer
offenders	(1)	(6)	(11)
would-be offenders	(2)	(7)	(12)
potential offenders	(3)	(8)	(13)
people at risk	(4)	(9)	(14)
conformists	(5)	(10)	(15)

An indication can be given, somewhat tentatively, of the effects of a substantial increase or decrease in police action for each of the sections of this matrix. (We shall not go into exactly what a substantial change is, i.e. an increase or decrease of 50%, 25% etc., as we are simply trying to make a start.)

Patrolling

a. Where police action is increased

Here the question is: will this mean that more offenders (section 1) will be caught at the time of committing the offence? Considering that the extra police would then have to be employed at the times and places where offences are most frequent (which is by no means always known), this does not seem very probable. The percentage of offenders caught in the act is probably low for most offences, and increased action can accordingly not be expected to have much effect on the crime rate. As the experiments showed that patrol activities will only affect offences which can actually be seen by the police or were unformed police patrols are visible to actual or potential offenders, the kinds of offences which may be affected are therefore limited. The "visibility" requirement applies to sections 2 to 5 as well. We may ask ourselves if would-be offenders (section 2) would be deterred by chance police patrols, which would probably come past more often than usual because of the greater numbers

of police employed. It seems more likely that they would hide and wait until the patrol had passed or else commit the offence elsewhere. This would not result in a drop in the crime rate so much as a shift in the time and place of offences, or perhaps a move to offences that are not so visible to police patrols.

Individuals' own circumstances will also influence their reactions to increased police activity. Is their criminal behaviour linked to their situation - their peer group, for example - or their personal circumstances (drug addiction, unemployment)? Is it the product of an impulse or of careful consideration? These questions also apply to sections 3 and 4 of the matrix, though it is very doubtful if potential offenders and people at risk would be prevented from committing offences by increased patrols. People in the last category (section 5) will not be affected by increased patrols, as they would almost certainly not have committed an offence in any case.

b. Where police action is reduced

If offenders (section 1) are aware that police patrols have been reduced, it is possible that the average number of offences per person will rise. It is also possible that people in categories 2, 3 and 4 (and perhaps even section 5 in the long run) will move upwards in the matrix column. All in all, a reduction in police action may well result in increased crime.

Criminal investigation

a. Where police action is increased

An increase in detective work can mean two things: an increase in the number of officers available to the force or an increase in the amount of really detective work actually done by the force at normal strength, by eliminating activities such as clerical work.

Up to now, there has been little experimental research done in the Netherlands into the effects of either factor. A Home Office study in Britain (Clearing up Crime) showed that additional manpower certainly does not produce a proportional rise in the clearing rate. It seems reasonable to expect that increased manpower will produce an improvement in the short term, but it has yet to be seen if the same will be true in the long term.

Although the Dutch police force, including the criminal investigation departments, has grown considerably over the last few decades, the percentage of cases cleared up has fallen still further. We must accordingly ask if a continual increase in manpower is the answer if it does not produce results. The burglary project experiment in Utrecht proved that a combined approach seems more successful: that is, an increase in manpower combined with several organisational adjustments, which are probably more significant. The next question is whether a higher clear-up rate results in a reduction in crime. Do offenders (section 6) who are arrested and charged refrain from committing another offence? In the first place, they are not always prosecuted and sentenced, and secondly, research has proved that the special prevention effect is often low. It is questionable whether the behaviour of persons in sections 7 to 9 (section 10 is less relevant) would be affected by additional criminal investigation efforts or by an increased chance of being caught. As they would very probably not be aware of these facts, their decision to commit an offence would scarcely be influenced.

Overall it does not seem likely in the long term that an increase in CID staffing levels or organisational changes in criminal investigation methods will produce an increase in the clear-up rate and therefore a fall in the crime rate.

(The distinction between the short and the long term is a factor, since as long as an individual is in police custody, a remand centre or a prison, he/she is unable to commit an offence.) Further research will be required to test this conclusion.

b. Where police action is reduced

It could be assumed that, whenever people in categories 7 to 9 learn that the police are doing little or nothing to clear up crimes (so that the chances of being caught are very low), they will either commit more offences (section 7) or actually commit one for the first time (sections 8 and 9). In other words, more people will commit offences and the numbers in sections 7, 8 and 9 will rise. It could even come to the point where people from section 10 might take to crime ("everybody does some shoplifting, why shouldn't I?").

The results of a decrease in detective work would presumably be a lower clearing rate, and if this became more widely known, a rise in the crime rate.

Crime Prevention Officer

In this case, it is not so much a question of an increase in this officer's activities, as of whether a crime prevention officer has actually been appointed within the force.

The experience so far gained with the work of a crime prevention officer, and particularly with its effects, is very limited. Before the effects can be assessed, some indication must be given of the activities concerned and their aims.

We know of one evaluation thus far. Some of the principal duties of the crime prevention officer were:

- informing potential victims about preventing crime, either in a general sense or more specifically by making recommendations on prevention measures against burglary or theft and later monitoring their implementation;
- informing potential offenders about the seriousness of an offence within the community and the damage it might cause, especially of vandalism;
- applying preventive measures against burglary on a larger scale, through contact with contractors, housing associations etc.

The evaluation in the police force concerned proved that any results will probably be visible only in the longer term. The general burglary rate has not dropped yet, for instance, although houses protected by security measures were not broken into, and this may point to a certain success for steps to increase willingness to take preventive measures. Probably, however, the targets shifted to less secure premises. In the case of vandalism, where the crime prevention officer directed his attention to potential offenders as well, the rate did fall, although this was more probably due to other police activities. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether people in sections 11 to 14 will be influenced by the activities of crime prevention officers, and accordingly in the short term, the connection between their work and the crime rate would seem to be slight.

The questions set out above show that the course of the relationship between police action and crime is still far from clear. There is little information available to complete the matrix. For the sake of simplicity it was assumed that the matrix would take the same form for all types of offence. If this is not the case a different matrix would have to be drawn up for different types of offence. It is also important

to know the numbers involved in each of the 15 categories. Research designed to answer these questions is necessary before adequate police experiments can be designed.

Nevertheless, the results of the research conducted thus far, particularly the preventive experiments, do shed some light on the subject, even if they do not tell us very much about the crime rate as such. In the first place they affect the subjective experience of crime: it was possible to reduce fear of crime among the public by a change in police deployment. Moreover, many other preconditions for effective crime control could be satisfied. The readiness to report certain offences to the police increased, and the public were also more willing to warn the police where necessary. Lastly, the public's opinion of the police was more favourable than usual: the results indicate that a basis may have been formed for improved cooperation between the public and the police, which is very interesting in view of the police's reliance on information and assistance from the public if they are to do their work effectively.

The question is therefore: why are the results not more hopeful at first sight? It may be that the effects in terms of crime control were expected to be visible in the short term, which brings us to the first of the technical and methodological problems to be discussed.

4.2 Technical and methodological problems

The second factor affecting the form, implementation and evaluation of the experiments can be defined in terms of technical and methodological problems. The researchers came up against six of these, which will be discussed one by one.

1. The first problem, which was briefly touched on above, refers to the period over which effects occur and can be measured. When the experiments were started, it was more or less assumed that the effects would be visible shortly after the experiment finished because of the fairly direct connection between police action and the crime rate, as it was then understood. Several later experiments made this connection somewhat less direct by introducing additional effect measurements. It is still unclear when the effects will appear: will it take six months, a year or longer? And can effects that can only be measured in the long term be ascribed to experiments that have been finished for such a long time, or are they caused by other factors?

2. The second problem is how to measure the effects of the experiments. The studies of the experiments discussed above took a representative sample of the local population, who were asked about their fear of crime, their willingness to take preventive measures and to call the police in potentially suspicious circumstances or when they were themselves victims of an offence, and about personal experiences of victimisation. Questions of this kind i.e. experiences of victimisation, were shown by national surveys to be a reliable method of measuring the actual figures for several common types of crime, unlike opposed to the police's figures for recorded crime. Doubts arose as to the reliability of this method when employed on a local scale, however, since the number of victims was too small to draw reliable conclusions about changes in the "real" crime rate. A solution for this problem has not yet been found.

While it might be possible to use a stratified sample among those sectors of the population which run a greater risk of victimisation according to national surveys, the lack of representative data for the other effect criteria would then be a serious drawback. An alternative would be to obtain additional information on financial loss, e.g. by noting the number of claims submitted for compensation for robbery, burglary etc. and the sums involved. This could not be done for all types of crime, however.

Despite their faults, we could also consider the recorded crime figures, which do not, it is true, give a complete picture of the crime rate but which will nevertheless indicate the trend, if the method of recording crime is assumed to remain unchanged.

3. The third problem is the extent to which the public is aware of police action and of experimental police methods. It was assumed in the Hoogeveen experiment for example, that the task-oriented patrols would have a generally preventive effect on vandalism, especially on potential offenders, both in the short term, when the police patrols could actually be seen in the streets, and in the long term, by convincing people that they might well be caught, and by altering their values and conceptions of permissive behaviour. If the patrols are to have these effects the local population in general and potential offenders in particular will have to be aware of the activities of the police. Our research showed that even after a considerable period only one third of local people were aware of the police patrols, and even they had often learned of them from local media reports rather than through

personal observation. It should also be noted that persons of 15 and under were not included in the population survey, and the question is to what extent this group, with its relatively high proportion of potential offenders, noticed the experiment. On the whole, the task-oriented patrols probably did not achieve the maximum possible deterrent effect because the stimulus -i.e. conspicuous police activity- was not great. If police action were more obvious it could probably deter more people from committing offences.

The results of the Amsterdam experiment, which had a markedly greater effect, show that public awareness can be very significant.

4. The fourth problem can be expressed in terms of the costs and benefits of the various projects. The extra patrols made temporary demands on the manpower of the police forces involved, and thus reduced normal police activity, because it was decided to make a substantial effort (though it may not have been enough) in view of the limited duration of the experiments. It is difficult to calculate the internal and external effects of this factor as no allowance was made for it in the projects' design.

5. The measurement of comparative effects presents a fifth problem. The experiments were designed to assess overall effects in terms of varying criteria, but problems arise if the evaluations are expected to assess relative effects in terms of specific criteria.

6. Lastly, all the experiments conducted so far have experienced practical problems in their implementation. In practice, the intended changes in police activity proved to be more difficult to achieve than was foreseen, despite previous agreements. Certain parts of the experiments could not start as planned because more extensive internal or external preparation was required. Preliminary steps had to be taken within the police force concerned: information on crime rates and place or time of the crimes had to be obtained

and classified, patrol groups set up and instructed, and detectives released from other duties, etc.

Internal consultation and preparation were again required in the intermediate stages. The timing suffered because it was considerably more difficult to influence external preparations: the vandalism project in Hoogeveen, for example, which was planned as far back as January 1981, could only begin in February of the following year.

Apart from unexpected changes in the timing, internal and external factors caused the activities themselves to turn out differently. Patrols could not take place as planned because the necessary manpower was not available (owing to illness, leave, sporting commitments or training courses) or was required for other duties, such as assistance patrols or arson prevention duties. It is also particularly important that the police officers involved should continue to be motivated over a long period: this proved to be a problem in the Amsterdam experiment. As time passed the officers concerned expressed the desire more and more to go back to their "real" work.

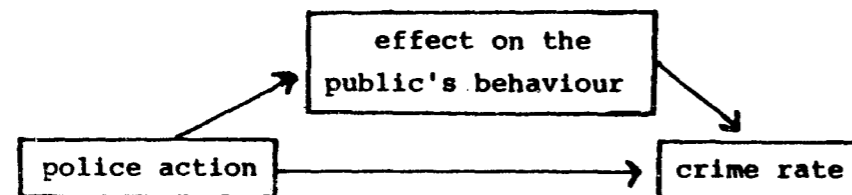
GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER EXPERIMENTS

The preceding sections give an outline of the results so far achieved by the crime control experiments and the main problems involved in conducting the experiments and interpreting the results. We shall now consider how a new series of experiments could be planned in the light of this information, and on the basis of the theoretical model of the experiments.

The theoretical model on which the experiments are based can be broadly described as follows: changes in police action will result in a fall in the crime rate, either directly through the action itself or indirectly through its influence on the

local population's behaviour, for example by increasing their willingness to take preventive measures and to report crimes, and by improving their confidence in the police.

Diagram:



Each of the three variables in the above diagram presents problems.

1. police action:

- practical difficulties such as preparation and timing
- concrete difficulties in carrying out the activities as planned
- motivation of police officers
- costs and benefits in relation to other police activity.

2. effect on the public's behaviour

- making police action visible to the public
- increasing public awareness of police action.

3. the crime rate

- period within which the experiments take effect
- measuring relative effects.
- reliability of local victim surveys

In general, future experiments should be designed in such a way as to keep the problems of (1) implementation (2) influence and (3) interpretation to a minimum and the applicability of the results to policy to a maximum. The experiments will therefore have to be modified in each of these three fields.

One way in which this could be done would be to reduce the scale of police action; by keeping the experiments brief and concentrating on simple police methods, it should be possible to minimise the problems of keeping the experiment on course, and at the same time to improve the causal interpretation of the results. Conversely, unless police action is very intensive it must be feared that short experiments do not have much effect, particularly when the measuring systems available are geared mainly to assessing large-scale effects.

Two types of steering problems arose during the various experiments: first, there was interference from outside factors not included in the plans, such as information given to the press, and second, decision-making by individuals in practice developed its own momentum. Such a momentum is generally geared to incidents and influenced by individual aims which are not always in line with the aims of the organisation as a whole.

A second possibility would be to stop regarding such problems as an inconvenient variable which should be eliminated from the study as far as possible. After all it is likely that the same problems will arise should policy makers act on the research results, and any experiments which ignore such problems will be of little practical value. The obvious answer is to incorporate these problems positively into the study. We propose that the encouragement of a problem-based approach should be at the heart of the next series of experiments.

In fact, this proposal is linked to the experiments in Osdorp and Moerwijk and the research project on detection in Utrecht. If future experiments are also to be conducted in groups, within the police force, the internal operations and functioning of the groups must become an explicit topic for research, as they have not been up to now. In other words, it will have to be established

whether the whole police force is willing to change its methods on an experimental basis. If not, no experiment can take place. Moreover, the extent of police readiness and involvement should be the subject of continuous attention throughout the experiment. Given the nature of the research, therefore, the design of the projects will be functional rather than quasi-experimental as usual.

With regard to influencing public behaviour, the extent of the effects of police action will have to be investigated, and which forms of action are the most effective.

In order to measure the effects on the crime rate, new, improved measuring instruments will have to be found to register the results in more detail so that conclusions may be drawn about their significance.

These broad outlines for future experimental research will have to be worked out in more detail. At that point, we must ensure that our research is not directed solely at the outcome, i.e. the effects of police action, but incorporates the nature of police action in its aims, by combining organisation development and outcome. As the entire police force must be willing to take part in such new activities before the effects of such activities can be investigated, an inquiry into the officers' opinions is a necessary precondition. If they are unwilling or reluctant to act, preliminary work must be done to change their minds, a point which applies to every experiment involving police action. This may be done with the help of literature and by diagnosing problem areas for crime in the municipality in question or problem areas within the police force involved.

END