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"Returning to First Principles:  
Reducing the Fear of Crime in Newark"

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## Returning to First Principles: Reducing the Fear of Crime in Newark

Hubert Williams  
Antony M. Pate

*The fear of crime has become a major problem in contemporary society. The National Institute of Justice selected the Police Foundation to conduct rigorous evaluations of several different law enforcement programs designed to address that problem in Newark and Houston. This article describes how the programs in Newark were developed, implemented, and evaluated and summarizes the results of those evaluations. The findings indicate that programs designed to carry out the original mandate of urban policing—to remain in close and frequent contact with citizens—were most effective. In response to these results, the Newark Police Department has adopted and expanded those program components found to be successful.*

Fear of crime has become a major problem in our nation. Left unchecked, it can destroy the fabric of civilized society, causing us to become suspicious of each other, locking ourselves in our homes and offices, and relinquishing our streets to predators. The level of fear, however, is often far out of proportion to the objective risks of crime. This incongruity stems from the fact that fear derives from many sources other than direct or indirect experience with crime. For example, research has shown that social disorder and physical deterioration—so-called “signs of crime”—cause people to be fearful even if no actual crimes occur (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Hunter, 1978; Biderman et al., 1967). Some have even suggested that if these signs are not

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alleviated, their presence can lead to more crime, even more fear, and, eventually, abandonment of entire neighborhoods (Kobrin and Scherman, 1982; Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Others have suggested that the relatively few contacts police have with citizens are not sufficient to moderate the fear of crime. They note that the contacts are often brief and occur under stressful circumstances (Wilson and Kelling, 1982). Finally, research has indicated that fear can be increased by the absence of knowledge of concrete, relevant, and effective means of preventing crime (Tyler, 1984; Stinchcombe et al., 1978; Mendelsohn et al., 1981).

Although basic research has been accumulating for some time, there have been no sound tests of ways that law enforcement agencies can use these findings to create practical programs that can reduce the level of unjustified fear. In 1982, however, the National Institute of Justice decided to fund empirical research to determine how the police can effectively address the problems of fear, disorder, the quality of police service, neighborhood satisfaction, and, ultimately, crime itself. The police departments in Newark, New Jersey, and Houston, Texas, were selected to develop and implement fear reduction programs specifically suited to their local problems. The Police Foundation was awarded a grant to evaluate those programs.

Kenneth Gibson, Newark's mayor from 1970 to 1986, once said that wherever our nation's cities are going, his city would get there first. Whatever the ultimate accuracy of that prediction, Newark is representative of densely populated "frostbelt" cities attempting to reinvigorate themselves. Founded in 1666, Newark is America's third oldest major city, second only to Boston and New York. According to the 1980 census, the city had approximately 329,000 residents, almost 60% of whom were black. Since the city consists of only slightly over 15 square miles of occupied land, this makes Newark second only to New York City in its population density. Based on 1983 recorded crime data, the city had a higher personal crime rate than any of the nation's ten largest cities and had a total index crime rate higher than all but two of those cities. In recent years, the city has experienced declines in both population and revenue base. Nevertheless, the city's police department, which has lost about one-third of its officers in the last ten years, has been faced with an ever increasing number of calls for service. Newark, then, can serve as a valid testing ground for programs that can deliver improved police services on a limited budget. This article provides a summary description of the Newark programs—how they were designed, implemented, and evaluated as well as the results they produced.<sup>1</sup>

## *THE PLANNING PROCESS*

Planners had to design programs that could be carried out within a one-year time limit. In addition, to increase the chances of their continuation, the programs had to be supported entirely by local public and private sector funding. Most important, the programs were to be designed by persons familiar with the local context—its problems and its resources.

To plan the various programs, a task force was created containing several members of the police department and representatives of the mayor's office, the Board of Education, the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts, the Essex County Courts, the Newark Municipal Courts, the Essex County Probation Department, and the Graduate School of Criminal Justice of Rutgers University. The group met once or twice a week for a month to discuss the general problem of fear, then broke into several committees to consider specific program possibilities. The Police Foundation provided technical assistance to the task force throughout the planning stage. Foundation staff assisted the members in locating potentially relevant projects operating in other cities, accumulated research on fear and its causes, arranged for members of the task force to visit other departments, and identified consultants who assisted the departments in program planning and implementation. In the spring of 1983, a conference was held in Newark at which the nation's leading experts on the subject of the fear of crime conferred with the members of the task force.

In April, 1983, the committees submitted lists of proposed programs to the entire task force for approval. These programs were reviewed by the panel of consultants assembled by the Police Foundation and the National Institute of Justice.

## *THE PROGRAMS*

After four months of discussion and deliberation, the task force decided there were three basic sources of fear that they wanted to address:

- (1) the lack of local, relevant information about crime and ways to prevent it,

- (2) the presence of social disorder and physical deterioration in a neighborhood, and
- (3) the limited quantity and quality of contacts between police officers and the public.

In response to these sources of fear, the task force developed three different programs:

- A police-community newsletter designed to increase crime prevention activities without increasing fear.
- A program to reduce social disorder and physical deterioration ("signs of crime").
- A coordinated program incorporating a newsletter, the "signs of crime" approach, and several components designed to increase the quantity and improve the quality of contacts between citizens and the police.

In schematic form, the nature of the programs tested in Newark was as shown in Figure 1. Each of the programs is summarized below.

### *Police Community Newsletter*

To address the problem of a lack of local information, the police department published a monthly newsletter, mailed to a randomly selected set of households. This publication contained a mix of general and specific local items designed to give residents a realistic sense of the crime problem in their neighborhood and ideas about how they could effectively prevent it. General items included crime prevention and other safety tips meant to provide readers with a sense that there were precautionary measures that they could employ to increase personal, household, and neighborhood security. Specific items included information about local neighborhood events and meetings and descriptions of police activities in the area. Information also included "good news" about the neighborhood, especially crimes that had been prevented or solved.

To further test the effect of providing information, half of the newsletters included a one-page insert including a map of the target area and a list of the Part I crimes that had been reported to the police during the last month.

Program			
Component	Newsletter	"Signs of Crime"	Coordinated Community Policing
Newletter	*		*
Intensified Law Enforcement and Order Maintenance		*	*
Neighborhood Clean-Up		*	*
Police Community Service Center			*
Door-to-Door Citizen Contact			*

Figure 1

### *Reducing the "Signs of Crime"*

Two separate but coordinated approaches were developed to address the second source of fear—"signs of crime" such as social disorder and physical deterioration.

*Directed patrol task force.* The first approach, consisting of random intensified law enforcement and order maintenance operations, was designed to reduce social disorder. These operations were conducted by the Directed Patrol Task Force, a group of 24 patrol officers selected by precinct commanders and given special training. This task force engaged exclusively in the following operations in the target area at least three evenings per week:

- foot patrol, to enforce laws and maintain order on sidewalks and street corners
- radar checks, to enforce speeding laws on the streets
- bus checks, to enforce ordinances and maintain order aboard public buses
- enforcement of the state disorderly conduct laws, to reduce the amount of loitering and disruptive behavior on corners and sidewalks
- road checks, to identify drivers without proper licenses or under the influence of alcohol, to detect stolen automobiles, and to apprehend wanted offenders

The timing of these operations was based on a random assignment schedule to minimize predictability. Over 70% of the officers' time was spent on foot patrol, about 15% conducting radar checks, 7.5% on bus checks, 4% on the enforcement of disorderly conduct laws, and 3% on conducting road checks.

*Neighborhood clean-up.* The second part of the "signs of crime" program, designed to address instances of physical deterioration, had two components: (1) an intensification of city services to clean up and repair streets, improve lighting, and collect garbage, and (2) a revision of the juvenile judicial sentencing process to allow youths to perform community service work by cleaning up the program area.

### *Coordinated Community Policing*

The coordinated community policing program was designed to address all three major causes of fear identified by the task force: lack of information; sense of distance between ordinary citizens and the police; and the social and physical signs of crime. Specifically, besides replicating the newsletter and the signs of crime programs, this coordinated effort included a police community center and a directed police-citizen contact component.

The center, a "storefront" police office, was to provide the following services:

- walk-in reporting of crimes
- reporting of less serious crimes by telephone
- distribution of crime prevention and Operation I.D. information
- referral of problems to other city and community agencies
- dissemination of newsletters
- recruitment for and holding of meetings of block watch and other community organizations
- coordination for door-to-door activities
- provision of space for police officers to meet, fill out reports, and eat meals

The directed police-citizen contact program involved assigning police officers to visit program-area residents in order to:

- elicit information about the nature and basis of citizens' fears—and possible means of combating them

- provide follow-up assistance, information, and referral advice
- encourage citizens to become involved in block watch and other neighborhood groups
- distribute crime prevention information
- distribute the neighborhood police newsletter
- alert residents to the existence of the local Police Community Service Center

At each home, the visiting officers, using an open-ended questionnaire, asked what the resident thought were the biggest problems in the area, what caused them, and what should be done to solve them. Based on these responses, the officers devised ways to address the problems identified by the residents.

The most frequently mentioned problems were juveniles (22.3%), burglary (13.4%), auto theft or damage (11.1%), and personal crime (5.6%). Police responded in a variety of ways, including changing police tactics (24.6%), encouraging citizen involvement (12.5%), increasing police presence (11.2%), recommending security devices (10.6%), contacting other agencies (8.9%), and providing information (5.6%).

The newsletter distributed by this program was similar to that described earlier, except that no local crime inserts were included and that it was distributed, in a separate area, to block and tenant associations, retail stores, apartment buildings, banks, grocery stores, and other locations, rather than randomly by mail.

The signs of crime program was conducted in the same way as in the other target area, as described above.

## *EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY*

### *Site Selection*

Three neighborhoods were selected as program areas so as to be as similar to each other as possible. In addition, one area, matched to the others on several criteria, was selected as the comparison area, in which no new police programs were to be implemented. Using data from the 1980 census, recorded crime data, observations of numerous potential sites, and extensive discussions with police crime analysts and local district commanders, areas were selected which appeared to have

problems of disorder, fear, and crime sufficient to justify special attention, but not so great as to be unable to be significantly affected within one year. Each area consisted of about 18 square blocks and contained approximately 4,500, largely black residents of low- to middle-income levels, living in about 1,500 units.

### *Data Collection*

To provide an objective understanding of how the programs were implemented, a full-time observer was hired by the Police Foundation to observe, on a random schedule, all of the programs and document their operations.

Primary measures of program impact were provided by interviews of residents in the program and comparison areas. The surveys provided measures to determine the extent to which each of the following primary program goals were achieved in the program area:

- reduce physical deterioration
- reduce social disorder
- reduce fear of personal victimization
- reduce worry about property crime
- reduce personal and property crime in the area
- improve evaluations of police service
- increase satisfaction with living in the area

### *Evaluation Designs*

Two basic evaluation designs were used to measure the effects of the various programs: an experimental design, with random assignment, for the newsletter and an areawide quasi-experimental design for the other programs.

*Police community newsletter evaluation design.* The evaluation was designed to measure the effect of distributing two types of police community newsletters to selected households and, after this distribution had continued for six months, interviewing one representative from each household sent newsletters, as well as from households not sent newsletters.

Since not all persons interviewed could be expected to have read the newsletter sent to their homes, this does not, strictly speaking, constitute a test of the effects of the newsletters themselves. Such a test could only be possible under conditions in which the newsletter was given directly to a person who would be closely monitored. A test of that type, however, would not simulate the practical circumstances under which printed materials could be distributed by a police department. The biggest advantage of the design adopted, then, is that it evaluates a delivery mechanism that, if found effective, could be adopted easily and inexpensively.

One neighborhood area was designated as the experimental field test site in which two versions of the newsletter were tested. One version was the newsletter with an insert showing local recorded crime statistics for the past month. The second version did not contain a local crime statistics insert. In the area selected for this test, households were *randomly* assigned to one of three experimental categories: the two treatment conditions (represented by each version of the newsletter) and the "control" condition represented by households that were not mailed the newsletter.

Two different samples were used to measure the effects of distributing the newsletters. In one, a *panel sample* of approximately 120 people were to be interviewed both before and six months after distribution began. By examining the same people over time, the effects of extraneous factors not associated with the experiment can be minimized, increasing the design's internal validity. This strength can be further enhanced by using predistribution scores as statistical controls when analyzing postdistribution scores. Unfortunately, some persons designated to be panel members cannot be reinterviewed during the postdistribution surveys. This "panel attrition" makes it inappropriate to generalize the results to the program area's entire population. In addition, it is possible that interviewing persons before newsletter distribution begins may sensitize those respondents to the experimental treatment they are about to receive.

In the second design, about 180 persons were to be interviewed only six months after newsletter distribution began. This *posttest only sample* avoids the potential sensitization that the initial interview may create. In addition, it does not have the attrition problem inherent in the panel design. The disadvantage of a posttest only design, however, is that it is not possible to use the predistribution scores as controls for analyzing postdistribution scores.

*Area-wide evaluation designs.* Quasi-experimental designs were used to evaluate area wide strategies. In each case, these designs involved comparing a program area to the comparison area. The fundamental analysis involved the comparison of attitudinal measures collected before the experiment began (Wave 1) and ten months after the introduction of the programs (Wave 2).

To determine program consequences on residents, Wave 1 and Wave 2 survey data were analyzed from two different types of samples. The first was a *cross-sectional sample*, which included all respondents in the pre- and postintervention surveys. The number of respondents in each area ranged from approximately 412 to 449 per wave, depending on the programs involved. The average number in any area at one wave was 429. Because respondents involved in the cross-sectional sample were selected at both Wave 1 and Wave 2 by a carefully randomized process, these data can be analyzed to provide the best estimate of the effects of the program on the neighborhood as a whole. But because the results of the first and second waves of survey are derived from interviewing two different sets of people, any changes between the two waves may be attributable to the differences between those people, not to the fact that the same people changed over time.

The second type of sample was a *panel*, which was composed of a subset of all respondents in the Wave 1 survey who could be reinterviewed at Wave 2. The number of respondents in each area in these panel samples ranged from 233 to 275, with an average of 259 per area. Analyzing the data in this way allows inferences to be made about the effects of the programs on the same persons over time. Such analyses allow preintervention scores to be used as statistical controls in the analysis of outcome measures, a technique that is not possible for the analysis of the cross-sectional samples. Inevitably, however, certain people will not be successfully reinterviewed. To the degree that the persons interviewed at both times differ notably from the general population, the panel results are not representative of the area as a whole.

### *Analysis*

Regression analyses were conducted on both sets of data. The cross-sectional data were pooled and 18 different characteristics of respondents were controlled statistically, allowing for tests of differences in

outcomes between the program and comparison areas. In the analysis of the panel data, the same characteristics of respondents were controlled as for the cross-sectional data; in addition, the outcome scores from the pretest survey were statistically controlled to account for differences across individuals.

Other analyses were conducted to determine whether there were different program effects for those respondents who recalled exposure to the program and those who did not. Finally, treatment-covariate interaction analysis was used to determine whether there were different program effects among different demographic subgroups of the panel sample.

## FINDINGS

The results of the regression analyses of the cross-sectional and panel data are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. The various programs are listed along the left side of both tables; the major goals sought are arranged along the top. Those goals achieved at a level of statistical significance of .05 or less are indicated with a check mark. Those not achieved are indicated by a blank. In both tables, the abbreviation for "not applicable" (n.a.) appears whenever an outcome was not considered relevant for a particular program.

### *Police Community Newsletter*

The evaluation showed that although people appreciated receiving the newsletters and wanted to continue to do so, neither version of the newsletter had significant effects on the desired outcomes. This is partly attributable to the fact that relatively few residents, especially those with less than a high school education, recall reading the newsletters.

### *Reducing the "Signs of Crime"*

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, this program did not appear to achieve any of its primary goals. Analyses of possible differential effects on subgroups of panel respondents revealed that the program's limited positive effects were even smaller for those who had previously been a

**TABLE 1: Effects of Fear Reduction Programs (cross-sectional results)**

<i>Programs</i>	<i>Primary Goals</i>							
	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Physical Deterioration</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Social Disorder</i>	<i>Reduce Fear of Personal Victimization</i>	<i>Reduce Worry About Property Crime</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Personal Crime</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Property Crime</i>	<i>Improve Evaluation of Police</i>	<i>Increase Satisfaction with Area</i>
Newsletters with and without statistics	n.a.	n.a.						
"Signs of crime" program								
Coordinated community policing		✓		✓		✓	✓	

NOTE: Checkmarks indicate desired goal achieved; significant at .05 level; n.a. = not applicable.

**TABLE 2: Effects of Fear Reduction Programs (panel results)**

<i>Programs</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Physical Deterioration</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Social Disorder</i>	<i>Reduce Fear of Personal Victimization</i>	<i>Primary Goals</i>			<i>Improve Evaluation of Police</i>	<i>Increase Satisfaction with Area</i>
				<i>Reduce Worry About Property Crime</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Personal Crime</i>	<i>Reduce Perceived Area Property Crime</i>		
Newsletters with and without statistics	n.a.	n.a.						
"Signs of crime" program								
Coordinated community policing		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓

NOTE: Checkmarks indicate desired goal achieved; significant at .05 level; n.a. = not applicable.

victim of crime, perhaps because their attitudes were more firmly grounded in personal experience. The results with respect to residents of single family homes differed in certain cases from those of other types of housing. But no consistent pattern was discovered among these results.

### *Coordinated Community Policing Program*

Regression analyses of both the cross-sectional and panel data indicate that the program had consistently significant results in both types of analysis on four different outcome measures:

- In both analyses, the program was associated with significant reductions in perceived social disorder problems.
- Both analyses indicated that the program was related to significant reductions in worry about property crime.
- The program was shown to be associated with significant reductions in the level of perceived area property crime problems.
- Both types of analysis showed the program to have been associated with significant improvements in evaluations of police service.

Analyses of the panel data revealed two significant effects on its primary goals in addition to those revealed by both types of analysis:

- fear of personal victimization declined significantly
- satisfaction with the area increased significantly

Analyses of possible differential program effects on subgroups of panel respondents indicate that the program's positive effects were stronger among females than among males. In addition, those respondents who had lived in the program area the longest showed the smallest relative increase in satisfaction with the area, the least improvement in evaluations of police service, and the greatest reduction in household crime prevention efforts.

### *IMPLICATIONS*

While the evaluation of each program stands alone, it is worthwhile to speculate why some were more successful than others. Neither version

of the newsletter, for example, had any measurable effects either relative to each other or the group receiving no newsletter at all. It is possible that both such newsletters provided treatments that were simply too weak and too short in duration to have an effect. In addition, the newsletters may not have been designed appropriately to appeal to residents with less than a high school education, such as those in the program area, especially those with poor facility with English.

Among programs with an areawide focus, and evaluated using quasi-experimental designs, a clear distinction in program content was apparent between the signs of crime approach and that used in the coordinated community policing program. The signs of crime program, which was basically a test of what Wilson (1983) has called a "crime attack model" and what has become known as the "Broken Windows" approach to order maintenance and law enforcement (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Kobrin and Schuerman, 1982), appeared to achieve none of its desired goals. This may be because the program produced few physical improvements and because the enforcement efforts were implemented at random and without extensive contact with citizens. It is also possible, however, that such programs cannot deliver the benefits anticipated from them without even greater levels of effort than those committed in this test.

The coordinated community policing program, on the other hand, was designed to increase the quantity and improve the quality of contacts between citizens and police, in line with what Wilson has called the "community service" approach. In this approach, "officers are encouraged to become familiar with the neighborhoods in which they work and to take larger responsibilities for following through on citizen requests for assistance as well as on complaints of crime . . . [so that] they will win the confidence of and thus the cooperation of the public and will gather better intelligence about criminal activities" (Wilson, 1983, p. 68).

What is most notable about the community-oriented approach, apart from the fact that it achieved several of its desired goals, is that it was especially adroit at continually responding to change in the environment. Most explicitly, the program provided police officers with the opportunity to learn from the people they serve by listening to them intently and regularly. By so doing, the police obtained current information about what local residents felt were problems, what the causes of those problems appeared to be, and the kinds of approaches that could be used to resolve those problems. There is ample evidence among the data

analyzed to suggest that this approach had significant, positive effects on the attitudes of residents exposed to it.

In addition, anecdotal evidence has shown that other clearly desirable results have been achieved. For example, the standing ovation given to officers after a bus check, which restored order in an otherwise disorderly environment, could leave no doubt that positive effects had been achieved. Furthermore, five new businesses opened within the coordinated community policing area. Several of their owners indicated that they had selected their site specifically because of the police programs in the neighborhood. Talking to visitors at the "storefront" office clearly demonstrated the sense of police concern for the neighborhood that those facilities conveyed.

Unexpectedly, much of the success of the coordinated program came from the fact that it relied on the autonomy, initiative, innovativeness, and responsibility of individual officers to develop and implement programs best designed to respond to the needs citizens had identified. Unfortunately, there were too few officers involved in this program to permit a rigorous evaluation of the effects of this approach. Nevertheless, we saw the pride displayed by officers who solved the apparently disparate problems of loitering youth and a litter-strewn lot by obtaining financial assistance from local businesses to support a baseball team, and by having the team members clean up the littered lot on which they would play. We remember the officers who told us that when first instructed to go door-to-door to talk to residents, they thought it was a "ridiculous" assignment but two weeks later, these same officers said in astonishment, "We're really learning a lot. We can help. And the people *like* it."

In the end, the most successful programs provided the opportunity to treat people—citizens and police officers—as adult partners, with respect and trust. Both citizens and officers appreciated such treatment and demonstrated that they deserved it.

What does all of this mean? It shows that there is good reason for hope that our police, by adopting certain inexpensive and simple strategies, can interrupt the cycle of fear that plagues our cities. By listening closely to the people they serve, the police can learn more about what is going on in local neighborhoods and by working with those people successfully reduce the fear of crime and, in some cases, crime itself. The Newark department was so impressed by these results that it has maintained and expanded revised versions of these programs

throughout the city. For example, neighborhood newsletters have been instituted in several areas of the city, the directed citizen contact program has been adopted in several neighborhoods, and a new community police service center has been opened. The bus check component of the signs of crime approach has not only been adopted throughout the city but also throughout the State of New Jersey.

We believe these findings, in the context of research demonstrating the effectiveness of several "cutback management" approaches to conserving police resources, offer significant hope for maintaining and improving the delivery of police services even as budgets tighten. Specifically, we believe that these results suggest that some of the time of beat officers should be reserved for making contacts with citizens so that officers can become more aware of the concerns of the people they serve. Stringent efforts should be made to reach out to all types of people, not just those who are easiest to reach or who initiate contacts with the police. Further, officers selected to become involved in fear-reduction strategies should be screened to ensure that they are community service oriented, adaptable to changing conditions, and self-motivated. Once selected, these officers should be given the maximum trust and respect to determine the nature of the problems they should address, based on the concerns of the citizens they contact, and how best to do so.

Because these programs are unlike usual police operations, special efforts should be taken to provide recognition and rewards to officers who perform them well. Tolerance, perhaps a great deal of it, will be necessary, especially at the early stages, to allow officers and their supervisors room to experiment and, occasionally, to fail.

Training will be crucial, and can be best provided by those who have demonstrated their ability to conduct such programs before. We strongly recommend that anyone considering such programs examine the Newark programs, and discuss them with the Newark officers, in person.

These findings should not be misunderstood to suggest that the police should abandon their concern about the prevention of crime and the apprehension of criminals. Instead, they should be viewed as providing a rationale for a return to the first principle of urban policing, enunciated in London in 1829, to be "in tune with the people, understanding the people, belonging to the people, and drawing its strength from the people" (Critchley, 1967, p. 52). We have, in effect, shown that the first principle of policing is still the most effective one.

## NOTE

1. This article does not address the Houston programs; for a full account of these effects see the Brown and Wycoff article elsewhere in this volume.

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