1250

Assessing the Community Effects of Tactical Narcotics Teams

Michele Sviridoff

and

Sally T. Hillsman[1]

Introduction

The litany of social ills associated with the urban crack epidemic of the late 1980s became one of the most pervasive media themes of the decade's end. Report after report focused on the emergence of visible, wide-spread street-level drug markets, drug-plagued neighborhoods, drug-related violence, shootings of children and other innocent by-standers, burgeoning rates of ancillary crime, drug-addicted mothers and babies, fear-ridden communities and the general disorder associated with urban drug marketplaces.

Although problems associated with the abuse of crack and other drugs in the inner-city were widely reported along with proposed solutions to those problems (law enforcement, public health, and/or community mobilization initiatives), there was somewhat less attention paid to questions about the efficacy of the various solutions. Law enforcement approaches in particular -- the primary component of the "war on drugs" -- were widely heralded and substantially funded at both the federal and local level. Throughout the nation, the arrest, prosecution,

---

[1]This research was conducted with the support of the National Institute of Justice (grant 89-IJ-CX-0056) and the New York City Polcie Department, neither of whom is responsible for the contents of this report. The authors wish to acknowledge the active collaboration in the data collection and analytic process of the following members of the Vera Institute of Justice research staff: Richard Curtis, Randolph Grinc and Susan Sadd.

conviction and incarceration of individuals arrested on drug-related charges commanded an increasingly large share of criminal justice resources, in response to the public demand that "something be done" about the drug problem.

Yet, within the criminal justice research and policy communities, debate has remained lively about the degree and type of impacts that various law enforcement approaches have on these problems. As the crack epidemic became more prominent, there was initial skepticism, rooted in empirical research, about the extent to which the dominant approaches of the 1970s and early 1980s -- interdiction at the borders, drug eradication efforts in drug-producing countries, joint federal and local law enforcement efforts targeting "Mr. Big" at home -- could affect the availability or price of drugs sold on the street, the amount of violence associated with local drug markets or the quality of life in inner-city neighborhoods.

Increasingly, therefore, public policy attention in the late 1980s returned to the strategies of an earlier day and law enforcement efforts focused once again on street-level crackdowns in highly visible, concentrated drug marketplaces (Zimmer, 1990; Kleiman, 1986; Mulgrav, 1985). Policy makers looked with growing interest on reported successes in Lynn, Massachusetts and the Lower East Side of New York City (Operation Pressure Point) in designing new initiatives that attacked concentrated street-level heroin markets directly.

The advantages claimed for the "targeted crackdown" approach were several: increasing the non-financial costs of purchasing drugs (search time, "hassles", etc.); reducing

consumption among new drug users; reducing the ancillary crime that springs up in areas surrounding drug marketplaces; reducing perceived disorder and fear of crime in targeted neighborhoods; and improving relationships between the police and the community. In large part, the expected effects of targeted crackdowns depend upon the ability of focused drug enforcement to arrest street-level dealers with sufficient frequency that they are not immediately replaced by new dealers and/or to drive visible, street-level trafficking indoors:

> Operation Pressure Point has removed drug dealers and addicts from the streets. Pedestrians no longer have to push through hoards of dealers and addicts to enter and exit their apartment buildings. Not only have the crowds disappeared, but the number of double-parked cars and out-of-state cars associated with drug-dealing has diminished (Mulgrav, 1985: 7).

The "ideal focused crackdown", it was argued, would stabilize a given drug trafficking area, leaving maintenance efforts to local police and concerned community groups, while new "crackdowns" focused on other local marketplaces (Kleiman and Smith, 1990). Research on the effect of enforcement targeted at "hot spots" of criminal activity suggests that crackdowns are most effective when they are "limited in duration and rotated across different targets" to maximize the residual deterrent effects of short-term interventions (Sherman, 1990: 1).

Some reservations were voiced, however, about the appropriateness of the targeted drug crackdown approach in newer contexts, ones that differ significantly from the older, more concentrated heroin markets to which it was initially applied. Some theorists were skeptical about the potential of such efforts to have any effect on cocaine markets, that are comprised of a

very large number of dealers and users of cocaine and crack -- markets that were increasingly common in the late 1980s (Kleiman, 1986; Reuter and Kleiman, 1986). Indeed, knowledge is only now beginning to accumulate about how local markets for drugs other than heroin respond to enforcement efforts. Questions remain to be answered by research now on-going and by future research about whether such marketplaces spring back up after enforcement efforts are relaxed, and, if they do, how soon; whether drug selling and/or drug purchasing are readily displaced to existing, alternative marketplaces or to as-yet undeveloped locations; whether new drug purchasers are deterred by visible enforcement and, if they are, whether local markets feel the effects of this; and whether community residents and local police work together over time to maintain the gains achieved by the focused crackdown.

In addition, to the extent that recent focused drug crackdowns represent a conscious effort to win back the streets for specific communities, their structure and goals are outgrowths of the emerging philosophies behind both community-oriented policing (McElroy et al., 1990; Kelling and Moore, 1988; Moore and Kelling, 1983; Trojanowicz, 1982; Police Foundation, 1981) and problem-oriented policing (Eck and Spelman, 1987; Spelman and Eck, 1987; Goldstein, 1979). In their goals and expectations, these crackdown initiatives share with community policing the belief that by reducing the level of fear and disorder in the community, the cycle of escalating disorder and criminality might be reversed (Skogan, 1990, 1986; Wilson and Kelling, 1982.) In operational structure, these newer crackdown

approaches attempt to draw upon partnerships with community residents and leaders (e.g., "drugbuster" hotlines) and with various public and private agencies.

There is, however, also some skepticism about the ability of the drug crackdown to have a broader community impact. Although there is some evidence that efforts of this type can reduce the levels of fear within a community (Pate et al., 1986; Trojanowicz, 1982; Police Foundation, 1981), there is little evidence as yet that such efforts reverse the cycle of decline (Reiss, 1983). Indeed, the mechanisms through which such a reversal might take place are poorly understood:

> ...knowing that a neighborhood with a high level of disorder also has a high level of fear tells us very little about whether a program to reduce fear can do so by reducing disorder. We must begin to document 1) that a program can reduce levels of disorder and 2) that these changes in disorder are associated with changes in fear level (Rosenbaum, 1988: 381).

Methodological Issues in Research

Recent research on the effects of targeted crackdowns on drug markets and on the quality of life and level of fear in inner-city neighborhoods has been designed to address these policy issues. However, they are hampered by a number of recognized methodological problems. A primary methodological issue confronting assessments of the effectiveness of anti-drug law enforcement initiatives is the scope and intensity of the initiatives themselves. Targeted crackdowns must represent a substantial commitment of concentrated resources if they are to have any measurable effect. Despite the public commitment of resources to law enforcement efforts, police departments are spread thin, concentrated heavily in only a few areas. To

provide credible information, any empirical assessment of the impacts of such initiatives must fully document the nature and intensity of the intervention itself by comparing the number of arrests, drug and property seizures, convictions and incarcerations produced by the crackdown to figures for comparable, non-crackdown areas.

Obviously, while such program documentation is essential, it only sets the stage for research to measure the initiative's actual impact on consumption patterns, drug markets or the community's quality of life, all of which are notoriously difficult to measure.

> (E)ven th(e) simplest of policy approaches is frustrated by lack of current city-by-city (or, better yet, neighborhood-by-neighborhood) data. The number of crack smokers in New York City is far harder to measure than the reading level of its tenth graders. Thus drug-enforcement effectiveness is even less easy to measure than educational effectiveness. (Kleiman and Smith, 1990: 74).

Available public health data on consumption patterns, for example -- drug-related emergency room visits or new entrants to drug treatment -- are meaningful in an evaluation context only if the law enforcement intervention being studied targets a relatively small geographical area, containing a limited number of hospitals and treatment centers. Typically, however, in large metropolitan centers at least, there are too many health facilities serving too many people from different neighborhoods to link trends in admission patterns to any single intervention.

Measuring law enforcement effects on the structure and operation of drug markets (e.g., price, availability, trafficking patterns and "search time") is no easier than measuring consumption trends and requires even more access to street-level

information. Information on market activities can be elicited from users and dealers, as well as from direct observation, although traffickers may be particularly suspicious of strangers asking questions about drugs and may adjust their behavior accordingly. There may also be information available about drug purchases made by undercover police officers, although it is likely that comparable information on price and availability will be scanty for periods and areas in which the crackdown is not implemented.

Policymakers and researchers alike have also voiced concern that street-level enforcement efforts may merely displace drug markets to adjacent areas, thereby having little influence on the overall volume of drug sales. Yet some contend that the movement of street-level drug sellers is inherently limited because retail-level drug operations are dependent upon established turf. They argue that drug sellers cannot move freely to other areas because they will be moving into someone else's turf. This line of reasoning suggests that drug buyers, who are readily displaced (at least theoretically) to adjacent areas, may be little affected by crackdowns, but that concentrated pressure on local drug traffickers might have the capacity to disrupt drug marketplaces.

If, however, drug markets are, as some suggest, highly localized neighborhood-based phenomena (see, for example, Fagan, 1991), then it may be difficult to draw generalizations based on assessments of specific targeted crackdowns. It is not clear whether a strategy that works in one setting will be equally successful in another or whether some generalizations about

displacement effects can be drawn.[2]

Such effects are more often speculated about by researchers and policy makers than measured. This is because displacement analyses are difficult to conduct, particularly without good hunches about the type of displacement that is likely to occur in the specific setting to be studied.[3] Researchers have considered various types of displacement -- crime increases in a contiguous area (Press, 1971); crime carried out at different times (Schnelle et al., 1977); increases in crimes of a different type (Chaiken et al., 1974). Yet such analyses depend on access to readily available crime-report data and, therefore, are more appropriate to property crime analyses than to analyses that attempt to document patterns of drug trafficking.[4]

Measuring the effects of drug crackdowns on the general quality of life in target areas (e.g., levels of fear, use of

---

[2]Some forms of displacement may be inherent to the crackdown approach. For example, intensive, prolonged efforts to close down street-level markets, thereby making drug trafficking less visible to the community, may result in moving trafficking indoors within the same neighborhood, rather than moving trafficking to other neighborhoods.

[3]This is becuase you need to know where crime is likely to move to measure whether or not it has moved.

[4]Although most crimes are underreported, the gap between the number of complaints about drug trafficking and the actual incidence of drug transactions is generally much greater, for example, than the gap between the number of robbery complaints and the number of robberies. To some extent, drug complaints are generated by enforcement itself; in some jurisdictions, an arrest on drug sales charges generates a crime report by police, in the way that an arrest following an observed robbery-in-progress generates a robbery crime report. In such jurisdictions, an increase in the volume of drug complaints may simply reflect the fact of increased police enforcement activity. In addition, the volume of citizen-initiated complaints about local drug trafficking may be affected as much by beliefs about the likelihood of a police response to those complaints as by changes in the actual incidence of drug trafficking.

neighborhood amenities, attitudes toward the police, community mobilization against drugs) is also difficult. Areas characterized by concentrated drug trafficking and high levels of fear and disorder are often socially fragmented and anomic. In such areas, response rates to personal or household surveys are often low. Even if some neighborhood residents respond readily, they may not be the people of most concern to researchers or their audiences; it may be conceptually and practically difficult to determine which segments of the population constitute the relevant "communities" with regard to the law enforcement impacts under study. Should research efforts reach out primarily to community leaders? ordinary residents? drug abusers? individuals associated with local trafficking organizations? To what extent do these trafficking groups cut across "ordinary" families in the community and other relevant social units (e.g., local businesses)? In complex and troubled communities, willingness to express concern about the effect of drug trafficking on the quality of life of individual residents may be unevenly distributed across groups.

Finally, in measuring the effects of drug crackdowns, researchers clearly need to understand the historical and political context of local drug markets, enforcement activities and quality of life conditions. A variety of complicating factors -- area-wide trends in drug prices, overlapping or conflicting police initiatives, dramatic and notorious crimes -- can affect drug markets, neighborhood conditions and community attitudes. The influence of these factors must be taken into

account by research designs that examine comparable areas not subject to current intensive narcotics enforcement as well as areas that are the target of law enforcement interventions. Only this level of rigor will permit analysis of whether perceived market changes result from the enforcement initiative itself or from other complex socio-cultural trends.

Research on New York City's Tactical Narcotics Teams

TNT as a Strategic research Site. The development and expansion of Tactical Narcotics Teams (TNT) by the New York City Police Department provided a unique opportunity to examine the street-level effects of relatively short-term but intensive narcotics enforcement on crack cocaine markets and the urban neighborhoods in which they are most prevalent. TNT represents one of the most fully elaborated drug crackdown strategies in the country. Designed to provide a short-term "concentrated overlay" of street-level drug enforcement in a narrowly defined target area, TNT supplements existing narcotics operations with intensive "buy and bust" activity, focusing primarily on crack sales, but also addressing powdered cocaine and heroin trafficking. TNT operations are targeted primarily at street sellers, although some enforcement efforts have focused on interior drug-sales operations as well (vacant city-owned buildings, taken over by drug dealers; the lobbies and hallways of apartment buildings; etc.).

Although TNT relies heavily on the tactics of rapid "buy and bust" to generate arrests, the initiative also draws upon the tools of problem-solving policing and community policing to

address both quality-of-life and drug conditions. TNT has developed cooperative arrangements with a wide range of city, state and federal agencies whose cooperation is needed to enhance drug enforcement and address the quality-of-life problems that so often arise when neighborhoods are taken over by active drug markets.

There are currently seven TNTs (one in each of New York City's police patrol boroughs). They stay in a designated target area for approximately 90 days at a time (i.e., roughly four areas per team per year). In 1990, TNTs produced over 24,000 narcotics arrests citywide; nearly two-thirds of those arrests were felonies.[5]

A Quasi-experimental Multi-method Approach. Support from the National Institute of Justice, from the New York City Police Department itself and from private foundations has provided the Vera Institute of Justice with a unique opportunity to study the community-level effects of TNT with a comprehensive design that addresses many of the methodological issues raised above. The Vera research, begun in the fall of 1989, employs a quasi-experimental multi-method design, focusing on two relatively small TNT target areas and a comparison area (designated as a future TNT site), located in contiguous neighborhoods in Brooklyn. In addition to multiple-wave surveys of households in the community and analyses of statistical record data, the

---

[5]Although the TNT strategy produces a large number of arrests, it differs from the traditional "sweep" strategy in several respects. It does not depend on a large highly visible uniform presence, but relies upon a strategy of undercover purchases. The "buy and bust" strategy typically produces better quality (i.e., convictable) arrests than the traditional "sweep".

research employs a variety of qualitative techniques (in-depth panel interviews with community leaders and residents; operational analysis of TNT itself; and ethnographic interviews with drug users and sellers) to supplement information on community effects and to provide detailed information on the police intervention and its impact on local drug markets.

The research on TNT offers an opportunity to explore whether TNT can effectively reduce disorderly conditions related to drug trafficking in target areas and, if it can, whether there is a concomitant reduction among community residents in fear of crime. It is designed to provide information about perceived community conditions before, during and after the implementation of TNT; the nature of the TNT intervention; the responses of community leaders to TNT; impacts on drug markets (including perceived displacement effects and effects on "search time"); impacts on ancillary property crime; the duration of impacts; and the court processing outcomes of TNT cases.

Within a quasi-experimental design, the multi-method approach has many advantages for this type of research. For example, conducting personal interviews with people representing different neighborhood groups helps bolster findings based on the household survey; this is valuable because the rate of response to the survey was disappointing. The ethnographic component of the research, conducted by a seasoned research team all of whom already had some connections with street-level users and dealers in the study neighborhoods, proved to be unusually fertile. Ethnographers carried out a substantial number of interviews with

street-level traffickers on subjects difficult to study, including the structure of local drug markets, responses to the threat of TNT and displacement. Taken as a whole, the components of the research will ultimately permit an assessment of the community-level effects of TNT reflecting a wide range of community voices -- street-people, ordinary residents, neighborhood leaders, local politicians, local precinct personnel and TNT officers who participated in the initiative itself.

The Study Neighborhoods. The three research sites are relatively small concentrations of hot spots within the projected TNT target areas.[6] Because the experimental and comparison research areas were selected by asking the NYPD to define the three most likely TNT target areas in the Brooklyn South patrol borough (and to identify the hot spots of drug activity within those areas), it was important to determine whether and how they differed. At the start of the research, analysis of official data indicated substantial similarities among the study areas in terms of demographic composition, income levels, and drug and crime conditions. Police and ethnographic data indicated that all three study areas included active street-level crack markets.

---

[6]Because each study area is substantially smaller than the precinct (ranging from roughly a third to roughly a sixth of the precinct area), the study areas are not coterminous with geographical units for which relevant data are routinely maintained. Yet the sub-area strategy is appropriate to the TNT intervention, which focuses on specific "hot spots" within a defined target area (itself a sub-area within a selected precinct). A community impact study would run the risk of failing to detect any effect of the intervention if the study area were too large; intervention effects can easily be diluted if the research is not narrowly focused on the area in which the intervention is concentrated.

The three precincts within which the study areas are found were all characterized by a relatively high volume of crimes against the person in marked contrast to other precincts in Brooklyn South.

In baseline research interviews, the large majority of community residents in all three areas reported that local drug trafficking was a "big problem".[7] Although baseline interviews with community residents pointed to significantly higher levels of fear and dissatisfaction among residents in the first experimental area compared to the other study areas, these differences were relatively small. It is important to note, however, that although scales measuring physical deterioration, social disorder and fear of personal victimization pointed to citizen concerns about quality of life, such problems in all three areas were not, on average, perceived as "big" problems. Levels of fear and disorder in the study neighborhoods were in the moderate range, a finding that reflects the TNT focus on "reclaimable" neighborhoods.

The Status of the Research and Preliminary Findings.

The collection of data in the three research precincts, begun in November 1990, is complete. Analyses of baseline community resident interviews, conducted before TNT entered any of the study precincts, have been conducted. A preliminary assessment of the impact of TNT on the community in the first experimental precinct has been carried out for all research

---

[7]To facilitate cross-site comparisons, the resident survey employed scales of demonstrated reliability that were developed by Pate and Skogan (1985) for the Police Foundation study of community policing and fear reduction in Newark and Houston.

components except the survey of community residents -- the analysis of TNT operations, ethnographic study of local drug sellers and consumers, and panel interviews with community residents and leaders. Research staff are currently analyzing the influence of TNT in the second experimental precinct and systematically comparing all the data from both experimental areas to the data from the comparison area. Analysis of the impact of TNT on ancillary crime in the study precincts and analysis of the criminal justice outcomes of TNT arrests is on-going. Nevertheless, even at this preliminary stage in the analysis, some clear patterns, based primarily upon the first study area, are emerging.

TNT Activity. The TNT enforcement effort is sustained and intensive. In the first target area in 90 days, TNT officers made over 1,000 arrests. Approximately half of these arrests involved felony-level drug sales, generally of crack. In addition, TNT personnel confiscated 70 vehicles from individuals who had driven to the neighborhood to buy drugs.[8]

Both the ethnographic data and interviews with TNT officers pointed to a variety of responses to the implementation of TNT in the first experimental area. Police officers and traffickers both reported that street-dealers quickly became aware of TNT's presence and learned to recognize the back-up teams which

---

[8]The volume of enforcement activity in this research area was comparable to that of TNT units in other patrol boroughs, although a somewhat smaller proportion of TNT arrests in the research target area involved felony charges than in other target areas. The frequency of misdemeanor possession charges in this area may reflect the presence of a substantial marijuana market in this heavily Caribbean neighborhood.

surrounded locations where undercover officers were operating. One officer, for example, reported that he was fairly sure that dealers recognized the unmarked cars investigators rode in, adding that if they were unable to do so in the beginning of the enforcement effort, "in a little while they definitely will. In the --th precinct it was the same as riding in a blue and white." Nevertheless, analysis reveals that TNT officers continued to make an undiminished number of arrests on charges of felony narcotics sales throughout the 90-day enforcement period.

Yet the TNT effort in the first study area appears to have been less intensive than other TNTs with respect to stimulating interagency enforcement initiatives. Although TNT has given rise to enhanced enforcement activity in other target areas by a variety of agencies with regulatory powers (e.g., the Department of Buildings, the Taxi and Limousine Commission, the Department of Consumer Affairs), there were comparatively few interagency enforcement initiatives directed at specific drug locations in the first target area studied. There appear to be structural reasons for this, arising out of the nature of the community rather than the implementation of TNT. This area contains few city-owned buildings. In other TNT target areas, where there were substantially more city-owned buildings, TNT worked actively with the New York City Department of Housing Preservation (HPD -- the agency which manages city-owned property) and other city agencies in an effort to shut down active indoor drug locations. Yet even in these areas, the volume of interagency enforcement activities is relatively small compared to the very high volume of street-level arrests of traffickers by TNT. In short, TNT

appears to have implemented the street-level narcotics enforcement component of this initiative more fully than the longer term, problem-solving component.

Market Effects. A substantial number of street-traffickers were arrested during the first few days of TNT operations, but ethnographic data indicates that they were quickly replaced by other street-level user-dealers. But this isn't the whole story. Over the course of the TNT enforcement period, street dealers adapted to the intensive enforcement activity in a variety of ways, some of which directly affected the community: by moving selling locations indoors; by shifting selling hours to times when it was believed that TNT might not be operating; by devising schemes to reduce hand-to-hand exchanges; by moving out of the selling location after a sale; by using "observers" adept at spotting TNT vehicles; and by reducing the volume of outdoor sales for the duration of the intervention. As one dealer put it:

> One way to protect yourself is to just keep people from seeing you...just keep inside all the time. You got somebody outside, just lookin' out for you, tellin' the customers where you are. That's what most people are doin' now because they know that the cops are (around)...so nobody ain't doing no business outside. It's very hard now for the police to see who's dealing.

There was general agreement on some of the effects of TNT in this first target area in the data collected from street-level respondents, from TNT officers, from local precinct personnel and from ethnographic observers. All the data indicate that TNT was able to virtually shut down street-level dealing on one block in the first research study area; this suggests the possibility that other such areas exist within the larger TNT target zone not

studied by this research. However, data from the control area reveal similar locations that experienced a decline in drug trafficking during this period without the intervention of TNT, suggesting that broader market processes were at work along side the effects of law enforcement. It appears likely, therefore, that TNT enhanced a process that was already underway and probably influenced where it happened most intensively. This conclusion is supported further by data which indicate that there were also specific locations within the first research area that experienced concentrated growth of drug activity in specific locations following the TNT intervention; this concentrated growth in specific locations was also found within both the second experimental area and in the control area.

The data also indicate that, overall, drug trafficking became less blatant and less visible on the streets of the first experimental area than it had before the TNT enforcement period. Yet some movement of drug trafficking off the streets was evident in the control area as well. In the first two experimental areas, TNT appeared to be most effective in reducing the visibility of street markets in areas that were geographically separate from highly concentrated drug markets and in areas that catered to purchasers from outside the neighborhood. TNT appeared to be less effective in areas that catered to recognized local purchasers and in areas that provided ecological protection to traffickers (e.g., the courtyard of a self-contained apartment complex with a single entryway).

The data also support the general conclusion that this reduction in the blatant visibility of street drug markets was

not the result of large-scale geographic displacement either within or outside the TNT target area. While there were some small geographic shifts in the drug market (including the intensification of activity in some areas) and some temporal shifts, displacement was substantial only in the movement of drug activity from the street to indoor locations in the same geographic areas.

In addition, both ethnographic data and quantitative analysis of the time spent by TNT units before making a successful undercover drug purchase point to an increase in "search time" (the amount of time it takes to find a dealer and buy drugs) over the course of the enforcement period in this first study area. Ethnographic data also suggest, however, that the increased difficulty of finding drugs among established users was associated with more erratic consumption patterns -- an increase in drug "binges" -- rather than a reduction in their overall consumption. Although occasional users (known locally as "weekend warriors") and buyers from outside the neighborhood may have reduced consumption because of increased difficulty in finding distributors, ethnographic data reveal that daily crack users consumed at least as much, and possibly more, crack. For daily users, patterns of use during the enforcement period became characterized by episodes of bingeing, perhaps in response to both increased consumption taking place indoors, and to occasional periods of enforced abstinence in response to law enforcement activity.

Some observed changes in drug market activity were evident in the comparison area as well as in the experimental area and,

therefore, do not appear to be direct effects of the TNT intervention. Both ethnographic data and quantitative analysis of the cost of crack per unit of weight point to an increase in the cost of crack during the enforcement period.[9] A comparable wholesale price increase was widely reported both locally and nationally during the same period, although newspaper accounts suggested that higher prices for large quantities might not filter down to small-scale street markets. The TNT research reveals that there was indeed some "filtering down" of price increases. Although the unit cost of a vial of crack remained unchanged, the quantity of crack in those vials was reduced.

The ethnographic team found another characteristic of local drug markets to be common to both experimental and comparison areas. In developing an extensive network of contacts among street-level users and dealers, ethnographers came in contact with few new crack users during the year in which they actively observed the study areas. Most respondents had been using crack for at least two years. There appeared to be few new entrants into these markets and little evidence of recent crack consumption patterns among local teen-agers. The ethnographic team believes these findings are related to a citywide leveling-

---

[9] Research staff collected data on the cost of drugs purchased by TNT and on the weight of those drugs, as measured by the police department lab. The data maintained by TNT on the weight and price of drug purchases constitutes a unique data base. Analysis of these data on a citywide basis would permit an assessment of local variation in price structure for small drug purchases of comparable type and weight, as well as variation in price over time across sites. According to media accounts and personal communications, there is growing ethnographic evidence of increased prices although there is no parallel evidence that supplies declined.

off in the demand for crack, even within inner-city markets. Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish any impact on overall demand that may have been associated specifically with the TNT enforcement effort from broader patterns of demand reduction that extended beyond the experimental area.[10]

Although the period of TNT enforcement was associated with a variety of changes in drug market operations and structure, there was a strong perception among research respondents of all types (traffickers, police, community residents) that these market adaptations were temporary and that street-level drug trafficking would resume in full force once TNT was gone.[11] Subsequent interviews and ethnographic observations suggest that overall volume did not decline in the study area as a whole and that a substantial volume of drug trafficking did return to some areas after the departure of TNT, although the specific locus of trafficking (particular street locations, shifts indoors) and its intensity (concentrated growth in some ares, declines in others) appears to have changed. The data indicate that, even during the peak of the enforcement period, the overall level of drug trafficking remained steady throughout most of the target area, although patterns of trafficking did change to adapt to TNT's activities.

---

[10]Over the past year, media accounts have reported reductions in crack consumption both citywide and nationwide. It is difficult to determine the role played by any specific enforcement intervention, or increased enforcement generally, in these trends; clearly multiple factors are at work, including the frequently observed cyclical nature of drug epidemics.

[11]This belief was prevalent in spite of the fact that the TNT initiative is designed to return on a regular basis to target areas on specified maintenance days after the initial enforcement period has ended, In fact, in the first target area, this

Community Effects. Although TNT's focus on street-level markets is designed to improve the quality of life in target neighborhoods, the adaptations of the drug market to this enforcement activity had both positive and negative effects on the community. Although some street locations improved, others did not. In a number of settings, a movement indoors reduced the volume of visible street drug traffic; yet, for some residents, this movement off the street brought drug conditions even closer to home. For different members of the community, therefore, the disruption of street-level drug markets appears to have had a different influence on quality of life; the degree of these impacts, however, whether positive or negative, is not as yet clear.

Because analysis of the survey of households in the target area during and after the TNT intervention is not complete, the research is not yet able to assess the broader impact of TNT on community perceptions and attitudes (e.g., fear of crime, perceptions of disorder, attitudes toward the police). Yet some information on these issues is available from in-depth panel interviews with community leaders and knowledgeable residents.[12] It should be recognized, however, that the awareness of TNT among such members of the community may differ from that of more

---

maintenance effort proved to be unusually intnensive.

[12]Panel interviews were conducted with leaders of block and building associations, local business people, church leaders, members of local community boards and members of local police-community councils. In addition, a few panel interviews were conducted with informed residents who had few official links with community organizations, but were unusually knowledgable about local issues and conditions.

typical, less involved community residents who are less familiar with public officials and local policy issues.

Community leaders in the first experimental area were generally aware of TNT's presence in the neighborhood, although they did not know very much about its structure or operations. As in the baseline household survey, they generally defined drug trafficking and addiction as the most important problems in the community. Those who knew about the police intervention generally believed TNT had a positive effect on the level of drug trafficking in the area and some influence on levels of public disorder.

Yet these respondents had reservations about the strength of this effect. They generally believed that local drug trafficking and substance abuse were structural problem that could better be addressed by educational and job opportunities than by police action. Yet they were also anxious to ensure continued high levels of police attention as a symbol of public disapproval and political commitment to the area. Still, TNT does not appear to have had an impact on this group's perceptions of personal safety or on their patterns of behavior (use of public amenities, using the streets at night, etc.). As one respondent put it,

> I haven't noticed any changes in the way people behave at all in the last three months. I didn't go out after dark before TNT got here and I don't plan to now either. The same people who always went out at night still do, but that's it. Most people won't do that.

There is also no evidence that the TNT initiative, in itself, encouraged the emergence of new grass-roots or community-based anti-drug efforts. Community leaders in this first research site generally attributed the lack of community-level

response to the TNT intervention to the nature of the community itself. They characterized their area, in which a wide variety of recent immigrant groups (including Haitians, Jamaicans, Trinidadians) live in close proximity to longer-term African-American residents, as marked by a general lack of solidarity and community organization and by the presence of racial, ethnic and economic conflict. Perhaps because of this fragmentation, these leaders were critical of what they perceived as insufficient outreach by TNT personnel to the neighborhood and community groups that do exist in the area.[13]

Community leaders in the first research area were generally skeptical about the possibility that even an improved TNT might have any long-term influence on drug markets or quality of life in their community. They saw the intervention as too short to accomplish these goals. They also voiced skepticism (echoed by police officers and even street-level respondents) about the ability of the criminal justice system to respond with sufficient severity to individuals arrested by TNT.

> Most of the cops do their job. They take the dealers in and they do their paperwork and then turn them over to the prosecutors and judges and say, "It's up to you." They don't have enough lawyers and judges to handle this stuff and they don't have enough jail space to keep them all in. So what do they do? They turn them loose too quick...[14]

---

[13]Outreach between TNT staff and community groups was, in large measure, limited to formal presentations at scheduled community meetings at the beginning, middle and end of the intervention in a given target area, although there were occasional interactions between TNT leaders and political figures in some areas. Respondents who represented smaller neighborhood groups expressed a preference for the more interactive collaboration afforded by New York City's Community Patrol Officer Program in which officers trained in problem-solving methods patrol a regular beat.

[14]Analyses, now under way, of an initial cohort of TNT arrests

Nevertheless, community leaders generally supported the goals, tactics and presence of TNT and welcomed the official recognition that "something must be done" about drug conditions in their community.

Remaining Questions

One of the questions emerging from the research concerns which of the many segments that compose the target community are reached by law enforcement interventions of this type. Drug traffickers and users generally knew about the tactics and methods of TNT; many were arrested by it, often to be replaced by new (possibly less stable) entrants to the marketplace; others persisted in trafficking without being arrested by adapting their practices to the risks posed by TNT. Community leaders, particularly those who were most in contact with political officials, were also generally aware of TNT; yet most had limited knowledge of its goals and tactics and few had seen it in action. The research awaits further analysis of the general survey of households to determine whether this level of awareness filters down to those who have less knowledge about official responses to community conditions but who are an important audience for police efforts designed to affect the quality of life and levels of fear in a particular neighborhood.

Preliminary analysis of data from Vera's research on TNT suggests that the multi-method approach permits the perceptions

---

from the first experimental area will shed more light on this issue. Preliminary results suggest harsher outcomes for more TNT arrestees than their comments might suggest; however, the level of this impact -- regardless of its severity -- may not be observable to citizens, even those engaged in the drug traffic. Indeed, the continuity of drug market activity in general in the first TNT target area, as well as the continuous replacement of

of various groups to be matched against the perceptions of other groups within the relevant target community. The perspectives of various respondent groups differed; occasionally, similarities were striking and unexpected. For example, both community leaders and street-level respondents expressed a preference for a more community-oriented style of policing, in contrast to the enforcement-heavy TNT approach; not surprisingly, however, this community preference was not shared by TNT officers. There was, however, substantial agreement among street-level traffickers and police respondents about specific locations that were more or less resistant to TNT and about the nature and longevity of TNT's effect on local drug markets.

Future analyses will provide more information on the effects of TNT on ancillary crime, displacement effects and the criminal justice outcomes of TNT arrests. Whatever these final analyses reveal, the general findings of the research on TNT must be understood in the context of recent local and national events. During the period in which the research was conducted, a number of incidents in New York City -- "mushroom" shootings of innocent bystanders in the summer of 1990, the nationally publicized burning of a 14 year old boy by a local bully because he refused to smoke crack[15] -- affected levels of fear, community perceptions of disorder and consciousness of risks to personal safety citywide.

Other events complicate the analysis in other ways: the

---

sellers, may mask the criminal justice outcomes of TNT arrests.

[15]This incident took place in the first experimental precinct.

implementation of an intensive "high visibility" foot patrol initiative in the second experimental area ("Operation Takeback") during the summer of 1990 -- shortly after TNT left that area -- brought both TNT officers and foot patrol officers back to the community. Thus, during a period in which, according to the research design, there should have been a reduction in police presence, there was in fact a marked increase in enforcement activity. This variation in the implementation of the TNT initiative must be considered in the final analysis of research findings.

In addition, the analysis of the effect of TNT on neighborhood-based drug markets must take into account a widely reported national and local "leveling off" in the intensity of the crack epidemic during the research period. Without reference to the comparison area, it would be difficult to determine whether any apparent "drying up" of drug markets resulted from the enforcement initiative or from the natural history of drug epidemics. Yet even at this preliminary stage, the advantages of the quasi-experimental design and the multi-method approach as a means of assessing the community-level effects of targeted street-level drug enforcement are evident.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chaiken, Jan M.; Lawless, Michael W. and Stevenson, Keith
1974 The Impact of Police Activity on Crime: Robberies on the New York City Subway System. New York: The Rand Corporation.

Eck, John E. and Spelman, William
1987 Problem Solving: Problem-oriented Policing in Newport News. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice.

Fagan, Jeffrey
1991 "Drug Selling and Licit Income in Distressed Neighborhoods: The Economic Lives of Street-Level Drug Users and Dealers." Paper presented at the Conference on Drugs, Crime and Social Distress; Urban Opportunity Program; The Urban Institute.

Goldstein, Herman
1979 "Improving Policing: A Problem-oriented Approach," Crime and Delinquency. April. 25:2, 236-258.

Kelling, George L. and Moore, Mark
1988 "The Evolving Strategy of Policing," Perspectives on Policing. November. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice and the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Kleiman, Mark
1986 "Bringing Back Street Level Heroin Enforcement." Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government

Kleiman, Mark and Smith, Kerry
1990 "State and Local Drug Enforcement: In Search of a Strategy" in Crime and Justice A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Michael Tonry and Norval Morris, eds. 12: 69-108.

McElroy, Jerome; Cosgrove, Colleen and Sadd, Susan
1990 CPOP: The Research -- An Evaluative Study of the New York City Community Patrol Officer Program. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

Moore, Mark. H. and Kelling, George L.
1983 "To Serve and Protect: Learning From Police History," The Public Interest, 7, Winter.

Mulgrav, Jeanne
1985 "Operation Pressure Point: A Community Perspective," New York: New York City Police Department (mimeo).

Pate, Antony et al.
1986 Reducing Fear of Crime in Newark and Houston. Washington, D.C.: Police Foundation.

Pate, Antony M. and Skogan, Wesley G.
1985 Coordinated Community Policing: The Newark Experience. Technical Report. Washington D.C.: Police Foundation.

Police Foundation
1981 The Newark Foot Patrol Experiment. Washington, D.C.: Police Foundation.

Press, S. James
1971 Some Effects of an Increase in Police Manpower in the 20th Precinct of New York City. New York: The Rand Institute.

Reiss, Albert
1983 "Crime Control and the Quality of Life." American Behavioral Scientist, September/October. 27,1:43-58.

Reuter, Peter and Kleiman, Mark
1986 "Risks and Prices: An Economic Analysis of Drug Enforcement" in Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research, vol. 7. Michael Tonry and Norval Morris, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rosenbaum, Dennis P.
1988 "Community Crime Prevention: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature", Justice Quarterly, September. 5,3: 323-395.

Schnelle, John E.; Kirchner, Robert E.; Casey, Joe D.; Uselton, Paul, Jr.; and McNees, M. Patrick
1977 "Patrol Analysis of Saturation Police Patrolling During Day and Night Hours," Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. 10, 1: 33-40.

Sherman, Lawrence W.
1990 "Police Crackdowns: Initial and Residual Deterrence," Crime and Justice A Review of Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Michael Tonry and Norval Morris, eds. 12: 1-48

Skogan, Wesley
1990 Disorder and Decline. New York: The Free Press.

_____
1986 "Fear of Crime and Neighborhood Change," Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research, vol. 8. Albert J. Reiss, Jr. and Michael Tonry, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Spelman, William and Eck, John E.
1987 "Problem-Oriented Policing," Perspectives in Policing. January. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice and the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Trojanowicz, Robert
1983 An Evaluation of the Neighborhood Foot Patrol Program in Flint, Michigan. East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University

Wilson, James Q. and Kelling, George L.
1982 "Police and Neighborhood Safety: Broken Windows", Atlantic Monthly, March: 29-38.

Zimmer, L.
1990 "Proactive Policing Against Street-Level Drug trafficking." American Journal of Police, XI, 1: 43-74.