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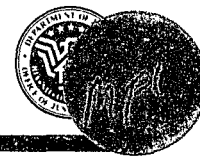
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Research in Action

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Local-level drug enforcement: New strategies

by David W. Hayeslip, Jr.

Faced with growing drug-related violence, crime, and mounting public concern, police departments across the country are devising new approaches for combating drug dealing. The strategies include enlisting the support of community groups, seizing assets of both sellers and users, and cracking down on street sales.

The National Institute of Justice has begun to take a look at some of these new strategies. This article shares some preliminary information gathered in discussions with metropolitan police departments, and it concludes with questions that need to be answered concerning the impact of these approaches.

Public concern mounts

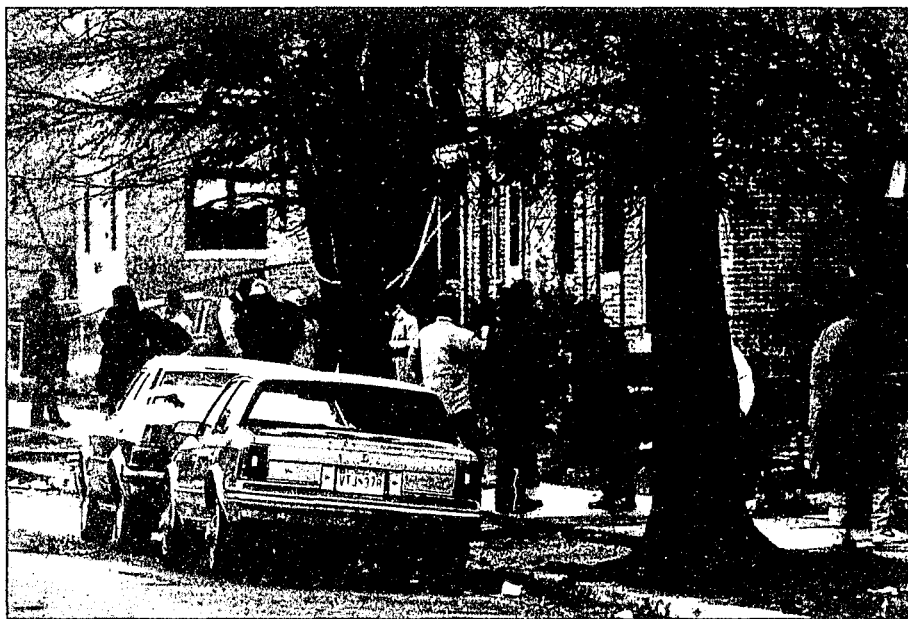
The magnitude of drug dealing activity has increased public pressure for police to take stronger action. A May 1988 *New York Times*-CBS News Survey found that 16 percent of respondents considered drugs to be the Nation's number one problem.¹ That is in sharp

contrast to a 1985 Gallup Poll in which only 2 percent said drug abuse was number one.²

Police share the public's concern. They are especially worried about the rise in cocaine use, particularly in its most potent form known as "crack" or "rock." In many jurisdictions police report that crack has become the street drug of choice.

Crack's popularity is relatively new but has been building for several years. NIJ Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) tests have shown significant increases in cocaine use among arrestees in a number of major cities over a 3-year period.³ In Washington, D.C., cocaine use more than tripled.⁴

Crack is considered highly addictive. It is also readily available, trafficked in the open, of high quality (not signifi-



Street enforcement strategies target locations where drug sales are likely to occur. Such locations are frequently public places where the presence of bystanders lends cover to dealers' operations.

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Local-level drug enforcement: New strategies

cantly cut), and cheap. Crack users come from all social strata, and many turn to both property and street crime to finance their habits.

Police and other experts think that rising crime is linked to crack sales. Indeed, threatened and actual violence by drug dealers is a growing concern. Homicides associated with the control of drug markets are up in many cities, with residents of high-crime drug-sales areas living in constant fear. In some places, community residents are afraid to call the police because of threatened retaliation by drug dealers. Some drug dealers are reported to have forced public housing residents out of their homes so they could use the vacated apartments for temporary drug distribution or consumption.

The importation and distribution of illegal drugs appear to be well organized and to follow a basic four-step process. Producers of illegal drugs, or "kingpins," funnel narcotics to midlevel distributors. These in turn pass the drugs to lower level distributors who control street sellers.

Actually, the entire importation and distribution process is far more complex. Many individuals are involved as drugs move from stage to stage in a series of complicated relationships that vary according to geographical location and type of drug distributed. In many cities, gangs control street sales, like the "Bloods" and the "Crips" of the West Coast, or Jamaican "posses" and other ethnic minority gangs in other areas.

Street sales of powdered cocaine and crack follow several patterns. One of the most common means of distribution is through "crack houses." Typically, these are abandoned houses, some highly fortified against police intrusion and easily identified by both police and local citizens. In "open" crack houses, users can purchase and consume crack or other drugs on the premises. Hotels, motels, and apartments in rental

buildings or public housing projects form yet another distribution avenue. On-the-corner street sales are also commonplace.

Because of the high volume and high visibility of illegal drug sales, police in many jurisdictions have been besieged with complaints from residents of neighborhoods where drug dealers and "dope houses" operate. In addition, there has been significant political and media pressure for metropolitan police departments and Federal law enforcement agencies to "do something" about drug sales in U.S. cities.

In response, Congress has recently stiffened the penalties for those who traffic in or use drugs, and it has committed greater resources to aid the war against drugs. The 1988 Anti-Drug Bill signed into law on November 18, 1988, provides Federal assistance to communities for treatment, prevention, education, and drug enforcement programs.

Law enforcement responds

At all levels, law enforcement agencies are stepping up their activities. They are joining hands with schools to help children resist drugs in prevention efforts such as Project DARE. Local law enforcement agencies are cooperating with each other in the fight. The International Association of Chiefs of Police recently reported, for example, that approximately 72 percent of the departments they surveyed participated in multijurisdictional drug enforcement task forces.⁵

A number of police departments, particularly in large metropolitan areas, are using new approaches in conjunction with more traditional ones. They are targeting alternative strategies against street sales and users and retaining traditional strategies for enforcement efforts against the kingpins and producers.

Control of drug supplies is generally a Federal responsibility, but Federal law enforcement agencies regularly receive help from State and local personnel through regional, statewide, or citywide task forces. Supply control efforts at the Federal level include source crop eradication, shipment interdiction, asset seizure and forfeiture, and investigations into organized crime and money laundering. These strategies are often interrelated.

In dealing with midlevel distribution, local law enforcement agencies use some of these same traditional approaches. They form task forces and employ interdiction strategies. They also use the traditional undercover and surveillance techniques that lead to search and arrest warrants against midlevel distributors. Where midlevel distribution is controlled by gangs, police emphasize gang enforcement investigations.

Street sales enforcement is almost exclusively a local responsibility. Among such traditional tactics are undercover surveillance and "buy busts," in which undercover officers buy drugs on the street and then arrest the sellers. Arresting drug dealers for possession and for possession with intent to distribute is another strategy traditionally employed at this stage.

Finally, at the end of the distribution chain, police arrest individual users for possession.

New strategies join the old

A number of new approaches are being tried against street sales and users, primarily by larger metropolitan police departments under funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the National Institute of Justice. The newer approaches are not necessarily discrete; some departments combine several to mount a comprehensive attack on drug sales.

Nor are all of the "new" techniques entirely new. Some, like crackdowns and civil abatement procedures, are refinements of techniques police have long been using to deal with prostitution, for instance. The innovation is their application to combating drug sales. The new approaches, like the old ones, are designed to disrupt drug distribution through incapacitation and deterrence, with the ultimate goal of reducing drug consumption, street and property crime, and violence.

At the street-sales level, the new efforts can be roughly categorized as street enforcement, crack enforcement, problem-oriented policing, and citizen-oriented enforcement. Asset seizure and forfeiture also play a role, most often as integral parts of these other strategies. Figure 1 presents a summary of both traditional and innovative strategies for local enforcement of drug laws.

Street and crack enforcement

Both street enforcement and crack enforcement are street-sales oriented; street programs deal with all types of drug sales, and crack programs focus on sales of this increasingly popular drug. These programs target drug sales locations and the street distributors themselves. Police use surveillance, informants, and information from drug hotlines to locate street sales and identify sellers.

Undertaking street enforcement and crack enforcement programs means increasing police personnel hours for narcotics control. Narcotics staff or tactical squads may work overtime, or patrol officers may be assigned to street-sales enforcement duty.

Specific police strategies depend on the nature of the drug problem. In cities where distribution takes place primarily through fortified crack houses, tactical or narcotics squads use search and arrest warrants, sometimes gaining

entry by using heavy construction equipment. Where street sales are commonplace, the police may conduct saturation patrols or periodic large-scale arrests of suspected dealers in drug hot spots. These are frequently referred to as "sweeps" or "roundups."

Civil enforcement procedures are gaining acceptance as well, and police are relying more and more on asset seizure at this distribution level. For example, if a house is being used as a crack house, the police typically notify the owner—through the public works department or the city attorney's office—that the property is being used for illegal drug sales. If the owner fails to take action, civil seizure of the property takes place and the house may be forfeited or even destroyed.

Street and crack enforcement strategies make use of building and fire code enforcement, along with tenant eviction if the property is rented. In jurisdictions where public housing projects are the center of drug sales, the police and public housing authorities cooperate in securing tenant evictions and enforcing lease conditions.

Many innovative street enforcement programs focus on the purchaser and user of illegal narcotics. Police keep drug sales hotspots under surveillance and arrest both purchasers and sellers. Where it is permitted, police seize user assets, such as automobiles.

Another innovative approach is the "reverse sting," in which undercover police pose as drug dealers and arrest users who ask to buy narcotics or actually engage in what they assume is a drug transaction. User arrests may take place at the time of the sale or later in large-scale roundups of suspects, depending on the users' transience. This strategy is not as common as some of the others because of legal and operational concerns about police posing as dealers and engaging in what look like actual drug sales.

Some 17 cities across the United States are using street and crack enforcement programs administered by the Institute for Law and Justice and funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance through its Narcotics Control Technical Assistance Program.

Problem-oriented policing

Problem-oriented approaches apply the model successfully developed in Newport News, Virginia.⁶ Under this approach, police collect and analyze data on individuals, incidents, and police responses to crimes as the first step in developing particular prevention or enforcement strategies. The Police Executive Research Forum is currently managing the implementation of this approach in five cities with funds from the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Instead of relying on subjective or anecdotal assessments of their local drug problem, police departments employing problem-oriented policing techniques collect and analyze objective data like crime statistics and citizen surveys. By looking at drug-arrest data, police in some cities have found that young adults are the group most actively involved in the drug trade; in other cities they have found juveniles to be the more heavily involved group.

Problem analysis often shows that many conditions that are not the responsibility of the police—such as the presence of abandoned buildings and the lack of recreational facilities—contribute to a city's drug problem.⁷

Citizen-oriented policing

The premise of the citizen-oriented model of policing is that the police cannot solve the drug problem alone but must join with the community in controlling crime and ensuring public safety. The National Institute of Justice is evaluating implementation of the citizen-oriented approach to fighting drugs in several jurisdictions.

Local-level drug enforcement: New strategies

Local citizens establish community groups to eliminate the conditions that contribute to neighborhood drug sales. In Seattle, for example, citizens have set up their own drug hotline. Pressure the legislature for new abatement laws and jail space, and conducted neighborhood cleanup projects.⁸ The distinctive feature of this approach is that a major responsibility for breaking the drug distribution chain rests not just with the police but also with neighborhood groups who work hand in hand with the police.

Evaluating the strategies

While research in the 1970's examined conventional narcotics enforcement in selected jurisdictions,⁹ little is known about the effect of more recent police innovations. A number of primarily descriptive assessments of the evolution or implementation of particular programs exist,¹⁰ but scientific and professional law enforcement literature contains only limited quantitative evidence on program effects.

Reports of program outputs (actions of police) rather than program outcomes (reduction in crime) have been published. Some authors report that local enforcement efforts have resulted in more drug confiscation, seizures, and arrests.¹¹ These findings are not surprising. When greater resources are focused on a problem, higher program output can be expected.

Yet recent evaluations of some specific programs in several cities indicate that innovative law enforcement may indeed be affecting drug distribution. In Lynn, Massachusetts, a vigorous street-level enforcement program attacked an open, active heroin trade in the city.

Six State troopers and a detective from the Lynn Police Department were assigned to a drug task force to crack down on street sales by making such transactions more difficult. By using undercover operations, surveillance, and information gathered from a drug

hotline, police made more arrests and executed more search warrants in the targeted area. Following this crack-down, heroin consumption appeared to decline, robberies and burglaries decreased sharply, and the very visible street sales traffic disappeared with no evidence of displacement into substitute markets in the city.¹²

New York City implemented Operation Pressure Point—a vigorous street-level enforcement program in Manhattan.¹³ During the operation's initial phase, narcotics enforcement was strengthened and a highly visible saturation patrol was initiated, leading to a substantial increase in narcotics and misdemeanor arrests. Traffic and parking enforcement efforts in the area were also stepped up. The results resembled Lynn's: many open markets were closed and crime was reduced. It was

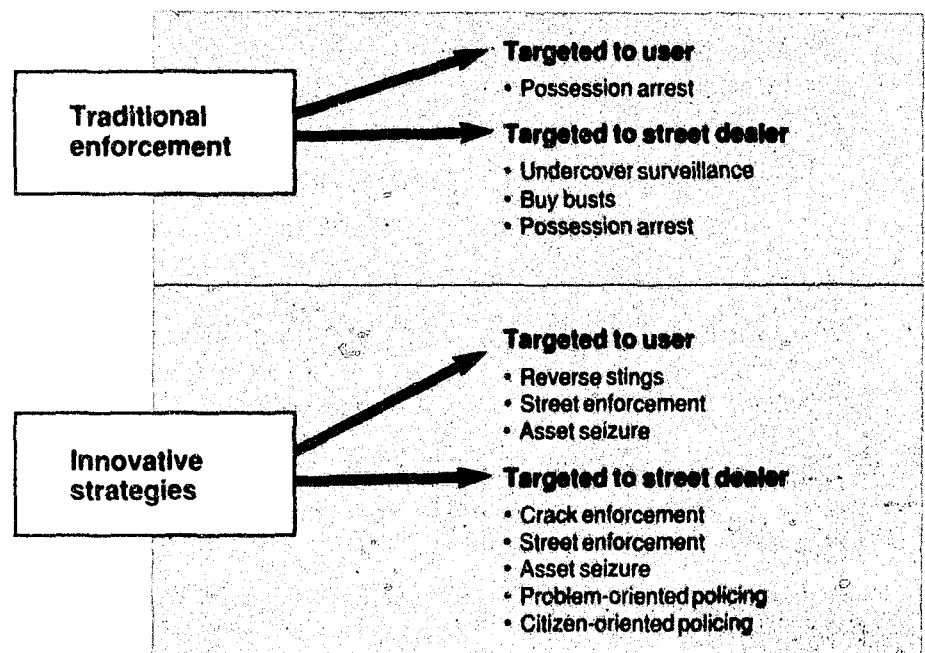
unclear, however, if displacement of the markets occurred.¹⁴

Evaluations of other street-level efforts, however, showed different outcomes. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, for example, a program similar to Lynn's did not seem to affect robbery and burglary rates, and alternative street markets in neighboring jurisdictions appeared to draw purchasers away from Lawrence so that the trade did not decline in real terms.¹⁵

While the research conducted thus far is limited and the findings mixed, evaluations currently under way hold promise of useful findings. The Police Foundation, under a National Institute of Justice grant, is assessing the effects of community-oriented street-level enforcement in Birmingham, Alabama, and Oakland, California.¹⁶

Figure 1.

Local law enforcement strategies against drugs



More and more, local law enforcement agencies are diversifying their strategies for combating drugs, variably targeting users and street sellers, and combining traditional techniques with newer approaches.

In both these cities, research is measuring the effects of street enforcement and police-community contact on crime, on citizens' perceptions and fears of crime, and on other attitudes. In one area of Oakland, police implemented a door-to-door campaign to stimulate police-citizen interaction. In a second area they implemented a rapid under-cover response to drug hotline calls, and in a third they used both strategies. The effects in these areas are being compared to those in a control area.

In Seattle, a study is evaluating the implementation of the citizen-oriented policing strategy. The research will examine the problems incurred and the reactions of the public, the police, and other agencies.

Questions for future study

Upcoming research must address a number of issues so that sound conclusions can be drawn about the utility of the innovative approaches discussed in this article. Answers to the following questions will aid informed policy choices:

- What is the exact nature and extent of the drug problem in our cities? Many departments implementing new strategies lack baseline data or the analysis capability to assess the problem.
- What is the link between drug use and crime and what is meant by drug-related crime?
- To what extent is implementation of innovative strategies coopted in favor of "tried and true" traditional methods?
- Some of the new approaches call for quite different police responses from the reactive ones developed over the past few decades. Are there particular organizational or management factors that contribute to the potential success or failure of these new approaches?
- What are the long-term consequences, if any, of these new programs?

- How do these programs compare in cost and effectiveness with other approaches, such as education, interdiction, and traditional narcotics investigation techniques?

- Do the programs reduce drug sales? Or do they just disperse them to other locations?

NIJ promotes information sharing

The foregoing summary describes some of the innovations in drug-law enforcement now taking place. Other new approaches, such as information system development and cooperative programs with prosecutors' offices, are also currently being tried.

The National Institute is planning to study some of the more innovative programs in a number of cities. The effort will begin with visits to several jurisdictions to discuss new drug enforcement efforts with police officials and operational personnel and observe some of these approaches in operation. By comparing these programs and their effects with traditional strategies, the Institute can give useful information to local agencies considering such innovations.

Agencies planning or currently implementing additional innovative approaches to drug enforcement are invited to share information. Contact David Hayeslip at the National Institute of Justice, 633 Indiana Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20531, telephone 1-202-724-2962.

Notes

1. *Time*, May 30, 1988. "Thinking the Unthinkable," p. 14.
2. George Gallup, Jr., 1985. *The Gallup Report*, Report No. 235. Princeton, New Jersey, The Gallup Poll, pp. 20-21.
3. National Institute of Justice, 1988. "Attorney General Announces NIJ Drug

Use Forecasting System," *NIJ Reports*, No. 208, March/April 1988. Washington, D.C., NIJ, p. 8.

4. *Ibid.*

5. International Association of Chiefs of Police, June 1988. *Reducing Crime by Reducing Drug Abuse: A Manual for Police Chiefs and Sheriffs*. Gaithersburg, Maryland, IACP, p. 65.

6. William Spelman and John E. Eck, 1987. "Newport News Tests Problem-Oriented Policing," *NIJ Reports*, No. 201, January/February 1987. Washington, D.C., NIJ, p. 2.

7. Tia Clark, 1988. "Cuyler: A Joint Effort," *Problem Solving Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, p. 4.

8. For additional information concerning the South Seattle Crime Reduction Project, contact George D. Shollenberger, Program Manager, Public Safety and Security, National Institute of Justice, 1-202-724-2596.

9. See for example: L.B. DeFleur, 1975, "Biasing Influences on Drug Arrest Records: Implications for Deviance Research," *American Sociological Review*, 40, pp. 88-103; P. Manning, 1980, *The Narc's Game: Organizational and Informational Limits on Drug Law Enforcement*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press; W.F. McDonald, 1973, "Administratively Choosing the Drug Criminal: Police Discretion in the Enforcement of Drug Laws," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Spring, pp. 123-124; M. Moore, 1977, *Buy and Bust: The Effective Regulation of an Illicit Market in Heroin*, Lexington, Massachusetts, D.C. Heath; J. Skolnick, 1975, *Justice Without Trial*, New York, John Wiley and Sons; and J. Williams et al., 1979, *Police Narcotics Control: Patterns and Strategies*, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office.

10. For example, Jack Crowley, 1986. "A Community Helps Put a 'CAP' on Drug Pushers," *Law and Order*, December, pp. 136-139.

11. For example, Institute for Law and Justice, 1988, "Crack Enforcement Program: Minneapolis," *Narcotics Control Technical Assistance Program Newsletter*, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 1.

12. Mark Kleiman, *Bringing Back Street-Level Heroin Enforcement*, summarized in

Local-level drug enforcement: New strategies

NIJ Reports, No. 202, March/April 1987,
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13. Bocklet, Richard, 1987. "Operation
Pressure Point," *Law and Order*, February,
pp. 48-52.

14. Mark Kleiman, 1988. "Crackdowns:
The Effects of Intensive Enforcement on

Retail Heroin Dealing" in *Street Level Drug
Enforcement: Examining the Issues*, Marcia
Chaiken (ed.), Washington, NIJ.

15. Ibid.

16. For additional information, contact Dr.
Craig Uchida, National Institute of Justice,
1-202-724-2959.

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