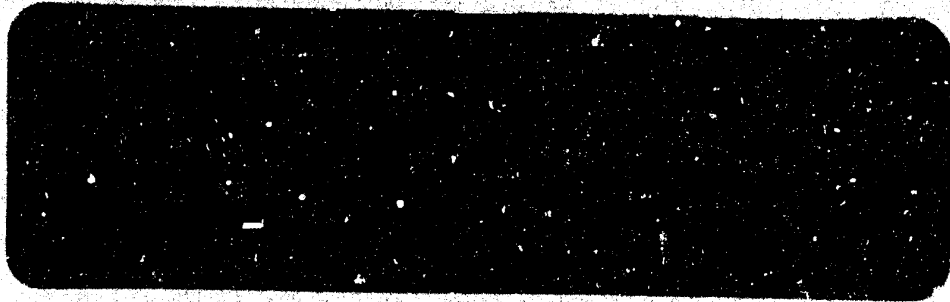
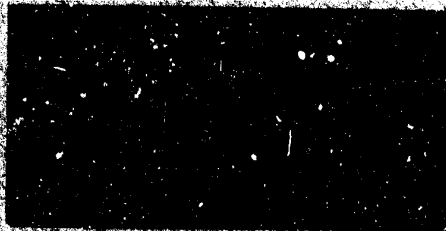


King County



DEPARTMENT OF
BUDGET AND PROGRAM PLANNING



25136

PRELIMINARY
EVALUATION REPORT ON GRANT #1122

King County (W1) -
BURGLARY PREVENTION PROJECT

Law and Justice
Planning Office

June 1974

INTRODUCTION

The King County Department of Public Safety received funding from a discretionary grant awarded by the Region X Office of LEAA on October 1, 1973, to test certain methods of combating residential burglary and related crimes. The purpose of this report is to present an evaluation of these methods so that the suburban police agencies of King County might benefit from the experience of the Department of Public Safety when designing similar programs.

Because provisions were made in the grant for an evaluation by project personnel, the collection of additional statistical information will be de-emphasized. Emphasis will be placed instead on a review of project methods and existing project data, collected by the Department of Public Safety, and on the development of some evaluation conclusions from which county police agencies might benefit.

There are certain limitations in the timing and in the conduct of this evaluation report. First, there is a possibility that the project has not fully matured, even though it is in its ninth month of operation at the time of this writing, and that the goals of the project might still be attained as the influence of the project activities spread over the target area. Second, due to a thirty-day lag in the processing of quarterly data by project personnel, the interim evaluation results for the third quarter of project operation have not been completed. Lastly, because the grant

did include an evaluation component, this report will accept without verification the statistical data collected by the program operators and base some evaluation conclusions on this information. These limitations notwithstanding, the advantages of reviewing the effectiveness of the project for consideration by the suburban cities of the county before these jurisdictions begin to prepare similar projects for inclusion in the FY 75 King County Regional Plan, outweigh the recognized disadvantages of performing this evaluation at this time and in this manner.

BACKGROUND

The project was conceived in 1973 to demonstrate to local county officials which kinds of police activity were effective in slowing the rate of increase in residential burglaries. The three primary activities proposed included the following: (1) increased emphasis on patrol activity by combing the target area with a special purpose enforcement team assigned to, among other things, perform surveillance on suspected burglars; (2) the operation of an intense public education program directed towards introducing established civic groups and organizations to crime prevention techniques; and (3) an evaluation component consisting of data collection and analysis for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of each program activity.

The primary effort of the special enforcement team has been to apply constant pressure on the criminal element of the target area. This is being accomplished through extensive surveillance of suspected burglars, strategic saturation patrol in selected high-risk sections of the target area, the planting of alarms in certain potential burglary targets, and the determination and closing of outlets for stolen property.

Identification of suspected burglars is performed through extensive field investigations and reports on the movement of suspicious persons in the target area. This information is compared and exchanged with information gathered by uniform patrol and crime investigation and is used to make certain judgments about which individuals in the area are likely burglary suspects.

The enforcement team, consisting of seven patrolmen and one supervisor, is an organizationally independent unit within the Department of Public Safety. Its work program is designed to supplement and support routine uniform patrol in the prevention of burglaries and related crimes and in the apprehension of criminals.

The crime prevention element entails the involvement and education of the citizenry in the target area in strategies to prevent and deter residential burglary. Public contact is made through scheduled presentations before organized community groups in the target area. The presentations include the use of films, locking device displays and the distribution of general crime prevention literature. Specific project services provided upon request include property identification

and home security inspections. Burglary prevention displays are also set up periodically in strategic locations within the target area.

The evaluation design consists of the selection of a target area in which to operate all of the program elements, the identification of an appropriate control area with similar socio-economic characteristics as the target area, record-keeping and data processing systems designed to collect and store data for purpose of analysis, and a data baseline for both the target and control areas against which to measure and evaluate the impact of the project.

PROJECT RESULTS TO DATE

In spite of information limitations, some conclusions can be reached at least about the efficiency, if not the effectiveness of the various program elements.

The community crime prevention program has been relatively inefficient as evidenced by the lack of community response to the project services. Only three neighborhood block watches are actively operating. This only includes a total of about 40-50 households. Between 35-40 residents requested that their valuable property be engraved with project purchased engraving equipment. Of the property which was marked, two items were stolen in two separate burglary incidents. Neither piece of property has been recovered. In addition, approximately 100 home security inspections have been conducted by

project personnel. Aside from the distribution of crime prevention literature at meetings of organized civic groups in the target area and the playing of spots on two local radio stations, little else has been accomplished in the area of citizen involvement and education.

In the area of enforcement, project operators have used strategic patrol tactics and surveillance techniques in an attempt to achieve a project goal of reducing reported residential burglaries by 30%. The baseline selected to measure this reduction was developed by computing a monthly average of the total number of reported burglaries in the target area during a 21-month period prior to the inception of the project. Seventy-eight reported burglaries per month represents the baseline against which the project was designed to be evaluated. From January through May of 1974, reported residential burglaries have averaged 68 per month or 13% less than the monthly average from the baseline period. However, in May reported burglaries increased back to the baseline level of 78.

According to project operators, because the community crime prevention methods elicited such a poor citizen response, the special purpose enforcement program probably accounted for the 13% five-month average reduction in reported residential burglaries. This conclusion is unverifiable, however, since the control area which was selected for comparison purposes because of its demographic similarity with the target area

has a dissimilar pattern of burglary incidence. If a statistically similar control area had been selected, a reduction in the number of burglaries in the target area, with the burglary level at least remaining stable in the control area, could possibly have been attributed at least partially to the enforcement strategy, particularly since the crime prevention element has generated so little community action. Yet without a statistically appropriate control area with which to compare the patterns of burglaries, other factors, besides the special enforcement strategy, could have accounted for this reduction.

Other goals of the project included an increase in the rate of recovery of stolen property from 5% to 25% and an increase in the burglary clearance rate from the Department's average of 12.7% to a 25% rate in the target area. Recovery of stolen property has fluctuated between 8% and 10%, far below the anticipated 25% rate. The failure to achieve the goal can be partially attributed to a lack of citizen response to the property identification program. Other reasons might include the enforcement team's failure to apprehend burglary suspects with stolen articles and the minimal success which project personnel have experienced in reducing the number of outlets for stolen goods. As of this writing, only one "fencing" operation has been closed. The burglary clearance rate has increased in the target area by approximately 6% over the departmental average. This statistic can be somewhat

misleading, however, since the base (number of reported burglary offenses) has been reduced by about 13%.

WEAKNESSES IN PROGRAM DESIGN AND OPERATION

There are a number of specific problems with the design of this project.

1. Because all of the program activities have been operationalized in one target area, it is impossible to determine which activity effected the reduction in the number of reports of a specific crime. The minimal response which the community prevention activities have registered would suggest that the methods used in the project to inform the citizenry of the risk of and prevention techniques for burglaries and related crimes was of little value. However, this assumption cannot be verified other than from an efficiency standpoint (e.g., number of citizens contacted and number implementing security recommendations) because other program activities were operating during the same time period and in the same target area.

The implications of this for the design of similar projects should be to separate program components and operate each in an independent target area so that the operation and effectiveness of each project activity can be examined and compared to a control area and contrasted with performance of other activities. There are a number of disadvantages to this approach, the primary one being the added cost of spreading project personnel over a number of target areas and the

difficulty in finding target and control areas of similar statistical and demographic characteristics. Although problems do exist with designing a program in this manner, it is critical that project evaluators have some basis for concluding which of the project's activities accounted for a real reduction in rate of a specific crime. Without the benefit of examining each activity independent of the others, no objective statement of effectiveness can be made of any activity. At the time of this writing, residential burglaries have been reduced by an average of about 13%, yet because of the weakness in project's design no one activity, either partially or wholly, can be attributed to this reduction.

Certain other considerations should also be noted.

While program operators contend that the enforcement strategy is responsible for the 13% decline in residential burglaries, other factors unrelated to police activity could have accounted for this reduction. There are some strong indications, however, particularly from a recently completed study in Kansas City, that various kinds of patrol strategies, including a proactive type such as what this project is using, are of little value in both reducing crime and apprehending criminals. Although this project's patrol strategy might be more appropriately labeled "strategic" rather than proactive in the sense that patrol attention is concentrated on a specific set of like criminal incidences, the conclusion of the Kansas City study might be applicable to this type of enforcement strategy,

which could suggest that some factor other than the enforcement strategy accounted for the 13% reduction. This hypothesis cannot be tested without a control area which is similar in crime trends and demographic characteristics and without strict control over each of the experimental techniques of the project.

The selection of a control area with the same demographic characteristics (e.g., average age of population, racial mix, median income, etc.) as the target area reduces the possibility that a statistically similar pattern of reported burglaries for the two areas was merely the result of chance. Adequate control over each project activity would preclude the operation of more than one experimental project technique in a target area in order to preserve a proper evaluation method at project conclusion.

2. The second major weakness pertains to the acquisition of six burglar alarms purchased with project funds. To date, there is no record of this equipment contributing to the apprehension of a criminal, the purpose for which the alarms were procured. Unless the use of this equipment can be linked with a sophisticated prediction model, identifying the probability of a break-in occurring at a specific structure, then the value of only six alarms is questionable. Currently these alarms are placed in structures on a random basis with little ability to forecast the site of a potential burglary. Thus the likelihood of a successful apprehension in six residences out of a possible 22,000 estimated residences in the target area is extremely remote. Given such a low probability of apprehension, the cost of this strategy seems to be unacceptably

high in light of other enforcement alternatives.

3. A third major weakness concerns the reasons underlying the poor response of the citizenry in the targeted area to the community relations activity. Although project operators have indicated that those who attended the civic meetings were generally enthusiastic about the security measures presented, the response to the followup sheets which indicates the citizen preference for such project services as property identification and home security inspections has been dismally low at only about 5% of total attendance. One reason for the lack of community interest in crime prevention techniques when offered through civic clubs or organizations might be the result of the need for stronger neighborhood ties among those attending meetings of civic organizations. Another reason might be that victims of a recently committed burglary or larceny are more responsive to security recommendations offered by field officers investigating the crime than the general citizenry is to crime prevention publicity disseminated through mass media and civic organizations.

The lack of success registered by this program activity would suggest a reevaluation of the methods presently being used to generate community support. If citizens are made aware of the benefits to be gained through small neighborhood group crime prevention efforts and if different methods are used to organize these groups, community-based crime prevention might yet prove to be of some success. As suggested, a starting point might be the contact which the field officer has with

the victim of a crime. For example, one security recommendation which could be offered to the victim might pertain to the need for a closer watch of the premises by the surrounding neighbors. A suggestion might then be made for the scheduling of a meeting of interested neighbors to discuss this and other community crime prevention methods. If citizens in the area are concerned about increases in crime in their neighborhood and such a meeting does generate community support, then it would be a valuable use of the officer's time to attend this meeting and recommend the development of some type of a "block watch" organization. This would also be the best opportunity to promote other community crime prevention services such as residential home security inspections and a property identification program. Community interest could be maintained by scheduling similar meetings whenever a burglary occurs in a residence of a member of the neighborhood. The advantage of this approach is that neighborhood residents are made to feel a part of an organization seeking the attainment of a common goal and thus the responsibility for crime reduction is shared by those in the neighborhood. The poor response of the target area residents to the publicity techniques used to solicit support for the project's community crime prevention methods suggests that merely to communicate these techniques to citizens is of limited value.

Some method of transforming crime prevention education programs into citizen action is required before a conclusion

can be reached about the effectiveness of community crime prevention.

CONCLUSIONS

The weaknesses in design of the project make the evaluation inconclusive. Since the project's purpose was to demonstrate to local officials police-related activities which would make substantial contribution towards reducing the rising rate of residential burglary and similar crimes, this is most unfortunate. If the project had been more carefully designed, more conclusive statements could be made about the impact of each project activity.

Based on the poor rate of response to the citizen crime prevention program, this activity, as presently designed, would probably be judged a failure. Police community relations should not be dismissed, however, as an unproductive activity, for with different methods of delivering crime prevention services to the public coupled with a full commitment on the part of program operators to provide these services, community crime prevention might yet prove to be an effective crime deterrent. The results of the methods used to date indicate that the citizenry is not responsive to the "mass media/presentations before civic group" approach and that alternative methods should be tried.

Information on the special enforcement strategy suggests that it is basically proactive patrol in the target area with a residential burglary and related crimes emphasis.

The effect that this activity has made in the achievement of project goals is again difficult to measure without a control area for comparison. However, the methods used to identify burglary suspects are very similar to those normally used in routine patrol activity with the major differences being that project personnel dress in plain clothes and concentrate on specific crimes. So far the evidence indicates that this element of the project has only increased the number of police in the target area and has failed to test the value of untried enforcement or apprehension techniques, even those for which provisions were made in the grant (e.g., automobile tracking device purchased with the grant has not yet been used). If the number of reported burglaries continues to hover at the baseline level, as it did in the month of May, the value of a proactive type of patrol strategy in King County would be placed in serious question and tend to support what the Kansas City proactive-reactive patrol deployment experiment has already suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUBURBAN POLICE AGENCIES

We anticipate that suburban police agencies contemplating similar demonstration projects could profit from the experience of the Department of Public Safety and avoid certain pitfalls in the design of crime reduction programs. General recommendations include the following:

1. Select a manageable target area for each project activity with a statistically similar pattern of burglaries

in a control area for comparison purposes. If possible, choose a control area with similar demographic characteristics to reduce if not eliminate the possibility that the crime pattern similarity was the result of chance.

2. Avoid operating more than one project activity in the same area in order to allow a proper evaluation of each activity.

3. Consider other methods for improving police operations against a specific crime besides proactive patrol strategies. These might include an emphasis on investigative strategies such as improved crime scene processing, latent fingerprint files, suspect identification files, etc.

4. Direct community crime prevention programs at small neighborhood groups developed from police contact with victims of the target crimes and use mass-media only as a supportive element of the program.

5. Avoid the purchase and use of burglary alarms unless coupled to a statistical model predicting the probability of a burglary occurring at a specific site.

6. Select only those police officers interested and with some degree of aptitude or skill in community relations kinds of activity.

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