

U.S. Department of Justice
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Executive Summary

Informal Citizen Action and Crime Prevention at the Neighborhood Level

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- Reducing delay and improving the effectiveness of the adjudication process
- Providing better and more cost-effective methods for managing the criminal justice system
- Assessing the impact of probation and parole on subsequent criminal behavior
- Enhancing Federal, State, and local cooperation in crime control

James K. Stewart
Director

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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Executive Summary

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the importance of informal social control in neighborhood crime prevention has been recognized. These informal mechanisms range from the most spontaneous and subtle responses to undesirable behavior (such as a raised eyebrow, gossip or ridicule) to highly structured, organized activities of neighborhood groups (such as organizing a community crime prevention program). The purpose of this project was to examine the full range of informal control mechanisms and how they affect crime and fear of crime and to use this information in developing recommendations for improving community crime prevention efforts. To accomplish this purpose, a review of over 300 articles and books relating to informal social control and crime was completed, three existing data sets were analyzed and a workshop of practitioners was convened. The results of these efforts indicate that informal social control is related to fear of crime, and there is evidence, although not conclusive, that it is related to the rate of serious crime. The strength of informal social control, however, has been found to vary among neighborhoods differing in socioeconomic characteristics and ethnic homogeneity. Incivilities or nuisance crimes also appear to play an important role in establishing an area image that attracts crime. General purpose community organizations and the police were found to play an important role in encouraging informal social control where it does not exist and strengthening it where it does. Specific recommendations for improving community crime prevention programs are presented as well as a bibliography for further reading.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, we have begun to realize that the police by themselves are limited in their ability to reduce crime and that citizens must become involved to bring about significant reductions in crime rates. Much attention has been focused on community crime prevention programs of various types such as blockwatch, escort services, mobile patrol, property identification, and the like. Less attention has been paid, however, to the more spontaneous and subtle means by which citizens help to deter crime. These include informally agreeing to watch a neighbor's house while away, watching for suspicious-looking people, scolding children misbehaving in the neighborhood, intervening in a crime, and other citizen actions designed to establish and enforce local norms for appropriate behavior. These actions are sometimes referred to as informal social control. While many of these actions are encouraged by community crime prevention programs, they are also naturally present in many neighborhoods. Our concern is with the full range of citizen actions, whether they are a part of a formal program or not.

Types of citizen involvement can be seen as ranging from the most spontaneous actions (such as scolding children), to collective but not highly organized actions (such as watching a neighbor's house), to highly structured collective actions (such as community crime prevention programs sponsored by neighborhood organizations). To realize the full potential of citizen involvement in crime prevention, we must develop a better understanding of the entire range of possible citizen action. This should help us to support and better utilize informal social control where it exists, and to develop it where it does not.

A. Purpose and Approach

The purpose of the project summarized in this document was to examine the various means by which informal social control has been found to affect crime and fear of crime, either directly or indirectly. Because of the complexity and breadth of the task at hand, a multi-method approach was taken. This included: (1) a review and critique of the literature on the relationship between informal social control and neighborhood crime, (2) an

analysis of three neighborhood crime data sets, and (3) the convening of a workshop of practitioners and policymakers involved in neighborhood crime prevention. Our intent was to combine these three sources of information to develop a picture of what is currently known about the role of informal control in reducing crime and fear of crime and what can be done to improve the ability of citizens to deter crime.¹

The literature review included over 300 articles and books on various aspects of the relationship between informal control and crime. Volume I of the final report presents the complete literature review.

A number of questions emerged in the literature review which led to an analysis of existing data sets in search of answers. The three data sets were Crime, Fear of Crime, and the Deterioration of Urban Neighborhoods (Taub, Taylor, & Dunham, 1981), the Reactions to Crime household survey data (Maxfield & Hunter, 1980; Skogan & Maxfield, 1980), and the surveys of households and of community organizations in the Police Services Study (Ostrum, Parks & Whitaker, 1982).² The complete results of this analysis are presented in Volume II of the final report.

The third major activity of the project consisted of a workshop of practitioners and policy makers involved in community crime prevention. The purpose of the one-and-a-half day workshop was to develop recommendations for policy and practice on a variety of issues relating to the role of informal control in crime prevention and fear reduction. While the research of the first two phases provided much useful information, the actual experiences of practitioners in designing and implementing crime prevention strategies were believed essential in order to translate the research findings into recommendations for practice. Volume III of the final report contains panel papers provided to workshop participants and a list of participants. Volume IV presents the workshop proceedings.

B. Organization

Unlike most executive summaries, this is not intended to be a direct condensation of research results. Rather, our goal is to present the information gleaned in this project in a format that will be useful to policy oriented officials and researchers, practitioners, and the general public. The material in the literature review, data analysis, and workshop proceedings is summarized, but an attempt was made to highlight points and

to organize the material around topics believed to be most relevant to policy and practice. This document cannot be considered a handbook or "how-to" manual but, rather, an attempt to disseminate, in condensed form, what is currently known about the role of informal control in crime prevention.

The material is organized around five topics: the concept of informal social control, the observed effects of informal control on crime and fear, the effect of neighborhood context on the development of informal control, and the roles of neighborhood organizations and of the police in reinforcing and supporting informal control. Recommendations for improving community crime prevention programs are presented at the conclusion of each chapter. A bibliography containing selected writings on the topics covered in each chapter is presented.

II. THE CONCEPT OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL

What is informal social control and how is it different from other types of social control? Why is informal social control important to those interested in crime prevention? What are the conditions necessary for the development of informal social control? These are the questions addressed in this chapter.

A. What Is Informal Social Control?

In most general terms social control can be defined as the use of rewards or punishments to insure that members of a group--such as a family, organization, neighborhood or society--will obey the group's rules or norms. The function of social control is to assure that members of a group can carry out their essential activities (e.g., acquire food, shelter) without being constrained by the actions of others. Social control seeks to assure a minimum level of predictability in behavior and promote the well-being of the group as a whole. A central feature of informal social control is the development of social norms. Norms are prescriptions for proper behavior which develop in a social group. At the societal level, for example, norms include respecting the person and property of others. At the neighborhood level, they may include maintaining property, no public consumption of alcohol and the like.

Social control can take two basic forms: formal and informal. Formal social control is based on written rules or laws and prescribed punishments for breaking these rules or laws. In society, the police and courts are charged with maintaining formal social control. In contrast, informal social control is not based on laws or other written rules, but on custom or common agreement. Here it is citizens who enforce these norms, although the police may also be involved. The sanctions applied to violators are sometimes subtle such as verbal reprimand, rejection, embarrassment, or sometimes less subtle such as warnings and threats. This informal system may also invoke the formal system in dealing with security and quality of life issues in a neighborhood. As we shall see in Chapter IV, however, suspicion of external institutions inhibits some neighborhoods from invoking the aid of outside institutions.

Informal social control in the neighborhood context refers primarily to the enforcement of local rules for appropriate public behavior. As James Q. Wilson (1975) states, informal control is

the observance of standards of right and seemly conduct in the public places in which one lives and moves, those standards to be consistent with--and supportive of--the values and life styles of the particular neighborhood. (p.24)

Informal social control ranges on a continuum according to the formality of the organizational structure (see Figure 1). At the least formal end of the continuum is the individual acting alone or with the primary peer group. In this case, social control is exercised through direct confrontation or more subtle peer pressure such as a raised eyebrow, gossip, or ridicule. Roughly in the middle would be a group of neighbors getting together to address a specific problem, like a local teenager who is causing trouble in the neighborhood. The group does not have a name, does not really think of itself as a group or hold regular meetings, and has no purpose other than to address the problem immediately at hand. At the most formal end of the informal part of the continuum are neighborhood organizations. They typically have names, hold regular meetings, often have officers, and are usually formed to address a general (rather than a specific) problem, like crime, housing, or youth unemployment. Neighborhood organizations have the potential to exercise social control. Through various group activities, they can help to define and reinforce informal norms for acceptable public behavior. Clean-up and beautification programs, for example, set a certain standard for property maintenance. These organizations can also help to enforce formal laws by promoting citizen reporting of crimes to the police, lobbying public officials to improve protection, and hiring security personnel and private police (see Section V).

Figure 1
Forms of Social Control

FORMAL	INFORMAL		
Police and courts enforce official laws	Neighborhood organization pressure to conform to norms	Informal ad hoc group pressure to conform to norms	Individual or peer group pressure to conform to norms

B. Why Is Informal Social Control Important to Crime Prevention?

National experience with crime prevention indicates that formal means of social control are limited in their ability to control crime by the manpower available and by the inability of the police to always be where the crimes are being committed. Informal social control by citizens may offer a means of supplementing formal social control and helping to reduce crime and fear in the neighborhood. Neighbors can go beyond simply reporting crimes they observe and can actually deter crime by establishing norms for behavior and enforcing them through the various mechanisms discussed above (e.g., gossip, scolding, surveillance). In essence, they are creating an atmosphere in which unruly or criminal behavior is not tolerated.

A second reason informal social control is important in crime prevention is that it underlies many of the more formal approaches to community crime prevention. Community Watch programs, for example, often promote informal social control through activities designed to acquaint neighbors with one another and to encourage intervention in suspected crimes. A better understanding of what informal social control is, and how it can be developed or supported, should help in the design of these programs.

Finally, a fuller understanding of informal social control should provide new ideas for and approaches to reducing crime. Since most of the attention has been focused on more organized means of social control, a close look at the less organized means may provide new approaches to crime reduction.

C. What Are the Conditions that Lead to Informal Social Control?

A central element of informal social control is that it involves groups of people establishing and enforcing norms. Both theory and research indicate that the more cohesive a group, the more effective it is in generating informal social control. This generally applies to the control of both group members and outsiders. The more committed a group member is, the more likely he or she will conform to group norms and be affected by group sanctions such as ridicule or rejection. Similarly, more cohesive groups are better able to respond to threats by outsiders. They are less likely to give up or disintegrate in the face of an external threat (e.g., crimes committed by outsiders) and more likely to adopt protective actions.³

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the formation of informal social groups and to their cohesiveness. The most basic appears to be the frequency of social contacts. The more contacts among individuals in a group, the more likely it is that an informal social group will form. Some similarity in beliefs, interests and/or social characteristics--such as ethnicity, race, religion, and economic status--is also necessary, however. Most neighbors share an interest in maintaining a safe neighborhood, but other similarities, such as socioeconomic status, may be necessary for informal groups to form.⁴ These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV.

Two other factors associated with group formation and cohesion are physical proximity and group size. Physical proximity and visual accessibility between neighbors has been found to be the basis for the development of social groups in residential settings. Moreover, for an informal group to remain cohesive, it must stay small. As it grows larger, the face-to-face interactions grow fewer, and the group tends to break apart or to evolve into a more formal organization with written rules and regulations.

D. Conclusion

The literature on informal social control leads us to several major conclusions. First, informal social control must be viewed as a continuum from primary peer group pressure to the activities of neighborhood organizations. Second, the activities of informal groups may have an important influence on the crime rate in the local area. (This will be explored further in the following chapter.) Third, informal social control depends on the existence of cohesive social groups, the strength of which depends upon the amount of social interaction, similarity of residents on socioeconomic attitudinal dimensions, physical and visual proximity, and group size.

E. Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested by this discussion.

1. Organize informal as well as formal neighborhood groups to increase group cohesion and reduce crime in residential areas.

In some areas (particularly some ethnic areas), informal social control appears to arise naturally. Where it does not, however, group formation and cohesion may be achieved by promoting local social activities (such as community dinners, block fairs and block parties) and establishing

new communication channels (such as local newspapers or newsletters). The activities of formal neighborhood groups can also affect the development of less formal groups. Neighborhood meetings and the sponsorship of programs such as Community Watch can help to develop informal groups and informal social control, though specific attention could be placed on organizing and supporting these more informal groups.

2. Organize sub-neighborhood or block level groups since smaller groups tend to be more cohesive and more likely to develop informal social control.

In areas where there is little informal social control, block level groups should be encouraged to establish and enforce local norms for behavior. By common consent, block groups may work out a code of behavior for block residents (e.g., no cursing in public, no drawing on buildings or public surfaces, no fighting) and then enforce the code through verbal reprimands, rejections and other means for informal social control. They may also work out procedures for handling specific types of problems (e.g., call parents, call a neighbor). For this to be most effective, residents should be encouraged to support the exercise of informal control by other group members. One person scolding a teenager for vandalism may be ineffective, but if several join in, the chances for success are much greater. Rules concerning loitering, public consumption of alcohol and the like can also be established and applied to outsiders in the area.

3. Encourage the police to provide support for the expression of informal social control.

There is some extra risk to residents who become involved in informal social control activities, particularly those that involve direct intervention. Police personnel must be available to support these activities. More will be said about this in Chapter VI.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL, CRIME AND FEAR

In Chapter II, both the definition and theory supporting the importance of informal social control in crime control were reviewed. In this chapter, evidence linking informal social control to the prevention of various types of crime and to fear of crime is reviewed. The questions addressed are: How and to what extent can informal social control deter serious crime? How and to what extent can informal social control deter nuisance crimes, and how are nuisance crimes related to more serious crimes? How and to what extent can informal social control affect fear of crime?

A. How May Informal Social Control Influence Serious Crimes?

Serious crimes refer to property and personal felony offenses that are classified by the FBI as Part I crimes. These include murder, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny-theft, auto theft, and arson. Clearly, informal social control cannot be expected to deter all types of serious crime. Crimes that take place behind closed doors or that result from uncontrollable rage--such as many murders--will not normally be affected by informal social control.

Although there is only limited evidence, it appears that the major influence of informal social control on crime is through its impact on the perceptions of potential offenders. Studies have found, for example, that visibility and the presence of potential witnesses discourage potential offenders from victimizing persons or destroying property. Furthermore, the practitioners at the workshop felt that informal social control has an indirect effect on serious crime. Participants believed that in areas where there are strong visible signs of control and mutual responsibility (e.g., well-kept yards, extensive social interaction among neighbors), potential offenders feel that they are more likely to be detected and reported to the police. Potential offenders, therefore, tend to look elsewhere to commit crimes or decide not to commit the crime at all. Particular areas may also develop a reputation for intolerance to crime which also serves as a deterrent.⁵

B. What Evidence Is There That Informal Social Control Affects Serious Crime?

Although there is some evidence that informal social control has an effect on rates of serious crime, it is not conclusive. To a large extent, this is because the measures of informal social control have been poor. Many researchers studying this topic have not actually measured informal social control but, rather, have measured the social or physical characteristics of neighborhoods that are believed to affect informal social control or the variables that are believed to encourage the exercise of informal social control such as local ties, neighborhood attachment, perceptions of control over the neighborhood or the ability to recognize strangers.

The findings of these studies indicate that having friends in the neighborhood, neighboring activities and the ability to recognize strangers are not related to crime rates. Emotional attachment to the neighborhood, perceived responsibility for and control over the neighborhood, the expressed willingness of a resident to intervene in a criminal event, and the belief that neighbors would also intervene in a criminal event are associated with low crime rates.⁶ Emotional attachment and perceptions of control, however, may be an effect of area crime rates and not a cause. That is, crime rates may not be lowered by a sense of commitment and control; rather, such feelings may be promoted by living in a low crime area.

Other evidence comes from studies of how social characteristics of neighborhoods are related to crime rates. High crime rates have been found to be associated with low economic status, a high proportion of minorities, ethnic and class heterogeneity, transience, and a high ratio of teens to adults.⁷ One common interpretation of these findings is that these areas are socially disorganized and lacking in social cohesion and, as a result, are unable to exercise informal social control over insiders or outsiders. Another interpretation of the high crime rates in these neighborhoods, however, is that the frustration caused by having few opportunities for high income, a steady job, prestige, and the like causes people to seek illegitimate means of acquiring money and possessions. In addition, since low-income transient neighborhoods usually have a fair amount of commercial activity (e.g., grocery stores, liquor stores, bars), there are also more opportunities for crime, particularly property crime. Thus there are other

explanations for crime in these neighborhoods, and we cannot safely conclude that the high crime rate is the result of a lack of informal social control.⁸

The defensible space literature also provides some evidence for the importance of informal social control. Defensible space is the popular term for the idea that certain design characteristics of buildings and neighborhoods can reinforce informal social control by encouraging people to adopt a sense of responsibility over the spaces around their homes. Defensible space designs typically include smaller buildings with fewer floors; entrance ways that serve a small number of units; hallway, stairway, and entranceway designs that allow easy surveillance; the use of markers to define and differentiate public and private areas; and other features designed to encourage informal social control and limit or discourage access by outsiders. The evidence supporting the relationship between informal control and physical design is mixed and, in general, studies have found that economic level and social homogeneity have a greater effect on the sense of informal social control and responsibility than do physical characteristics. This is not to say that physical design features are not related to crime, only that there is little clear evidence that they do so by affecting the strength of informal social control.⁹

The final source of evidence on the effect of informal social control on serious crime is research on actual intervention in crimes. The numerous newspaper accounts of bystanders intervening in crimes (or not intervening, as in the famous Kitty Genovese case where a woman was stabbed to death while 38 people looked on and took no action) has led researchers to study the conditions under which people come to the aid of others. Studies have found that witnesses are more likely to offer direct assistance or report the problem to the police if they know other witnesses or the victim, or if they are familiar with the place in which the event occurred.¹⁰ This suggests that if people know their neighbors and their neighborhoods, they are more likely to intervene in crimes, assist victims, or report the crime to the police. But, in fact, the opportunities for directly intervening in a crime or reporting it to the police are probably rare, and the degree to which these interventions have an effect on future crime rates in the area is uncertain.

In conclusion, although there is no totally convincing evidence that informal social control does have an influence on serious crime rates, most

of the evidence points in this direction. Furthermore, the practitioners at the workshop felt that strong visible signs of informal social control encouraged criminals to look elsewhere to commit serious crimes.

C. How May Informal Social Control Influence Nuisance Crimes?

Concern over what are termed nuisance crimes or incivilities has grown in recent years. In most cases, these problems are classified as misdemeanors; in other cases, they are not crimes at all. Nuisances or incivilities refer to vandalism, litter, abandoned buildings, graffiti, public drunkenness, harassment of passersby by teens or drunks, prostitution, open sale or use of drugs, and the like. It has been suggested that these problems represent overt signs of the decay of social control and indicate the inability of residents to enforce conventional standards of public order.

Several researchers have suggested the following progression of events leading to higher crime rates. First, there is a weakening of informal social control in an area. Several reasons account for this, including changes in the local population and changes in attitudes toward the neighborhood. This in turn leads to an increase in public nuisances, raising fear and, ultimately, higher crime. Wilson and Kelling (1982) provide a vivid description of this process.

A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed. Adults stop scolding rowdy children; the children, emboldened, become more rowdy. Families move out, unattached adults move in. Teenagers gather in front of the corner store. The merchant asks them to move: they refuse. Fights occur. Litter accumulates. People start drinking in front of the grocery; in time, an inebriate slumps to the sidewalk and is allowed to sleep it off. Pedestrians are approached by panhandlers.

At this point it is not inevitable that serious crime will flourish or violent attacks on strangers will occur. But many residents will think that crime, especially violent crime, is on the rise, and they will modify their behavior accordingly. They will use the streets less often, and when on the streets will stay apart from their fellows, moving with averted eyes, silent lips, and hurried steps. "Don't get involved."

Such an area is vulnerable to criminal invasion. Though it is not inevitable, it is more likely that here, rather than in places

where people are confident they can regulate public behavior by informal controls, drugs will change hands, prostitutes will solicit, and cars will be stripped. That the drunks will be robbed by boys who do it as a lark, and the prostitutes' customers will be robbed by men who do it purposefully and perhaps violently. That muggings will occur.... Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions. If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby, the thief may reason, it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place (pp. 31-34).

Presumably, this process can be reversed if residents, in conjunction with the police, begin to exert informal social control and remove the signs of disorder.

D. What Evidence Is There that Informal Social Control Affects Nuisance Crimes and that Nuisance Crimes Affect the Level of Serious Crime?

There is, in fact, no scientific evidence substantiating the connections between either informal social control and nuisance crimes or nuisance crimes and serious crimes. (The connection found between nuisance crimes and fear will be discussed in the next chapter.) Because the belief that nuisance crimes are important is relatively new, it has not been thoroughly studied.

Many practitioners, however, are convinced that nuisance crimes are related to informal social control and to more serious crime. Practitioners at the workshop stressed the importance of visible and well publicized actions to "announce" that certain behaviors would not be tolerated. A graffiti control project in Detroit, for example, was started to make such an announcement. The project involved neighborhood residents, including youths, in removing or painting over graffiti on public surfaces. Other actual expressions of informal social control might include keeping streets and vacant lots clean, maintaining housing and yards, and discouraging loitering. Programs are also needed, according to the practitioners, to train adults in how to intervene effectively when youths are causing problems in the neighborhood.

In conclusion, although there is no hard evidence to support the importance of nuisance crimes in the control of more serious crimes, the logic appears sound. In addition, practitioners seem to feel that the control of nuisance crimes should be an integral aspect of community-based crime prevention.

E. How May Informal Social Control Influence Fear of Crime?

Beyond its direct negative consequences, crime also increases fear levels among neighborhood residents. This fear can lead to the withdrawal of residents into fortified homes and to decisions to move to what are seen as safer areas. This in turn further weakens informal social controls. Research has shown, however, that fear levels do not always correspond with actual risk of being victimized. Hence, in crime control programs, it is important to address fear of crime as well as actual crime.

In the last few years, two explanations of fear have been developed: the victimization perspective and the social control perspective.¹¹ According to the victimization perspective, a high crime rate leads to high risk of victimization which, in turn, leads to a high level of fear. According to the social control perspective, fear is viewed as a response not only to crime but to the deterioration of social control in the community. This deterioration may be the result of a sense of general decline in the quality of community life, an absence of social support networks or organizational resources to deal with local problems, loss of confidence in the economic stability of the neighborhood, conflict between class or ethnic groups living in the same neighborhood, or concern that newcomers in the neighborhood are destroying the social fabric. The social control perspective puts more emphasis on the causes of crime than does the victimization perspective.

F. What Evidence Is There that Informal Social Control Affects Fear?

Research findings support both the victimization and the social control perspective. Supporting the victimization perspective is the finding that levels of fear generally correspond with neighborhood crime rates, and victimization (of either oneself or someone else in the household) increases fear. Yet, other crime-related factors have been found to be much more important than area crime levels or victimization in explaining fear. Women and the elderly, two groups with the lowest risk of most types of victimization, express the highest levels of fear.¹² Fear among these groups appears to lead to greater protective behavior, such as staying in at night, which reduces victimization. Vicariously experiencing the victimization of others in the neighborhood has also been found to increase fear.¹³

Supporting the social control perspective are studies that have found that the greater the sense of responsibility and control over what goes on in the neighborhood, the lower the level of fear.¹⁴ By the same token, the greater the number of nuisance problems perceived in the neighborhood (e.g., litter, vacant lots, teens hanging out on corners) and the weaker the confidence in the economic future of the neighborhood, the higher the fear.¹⁵ People who believe that their neighborhood is a good investment and who are satisfied with the quality of housing tend to express low fear, even in neighborhoods with relatively high crime rates. People who lack confidence in the economic viability of the neighborhood may feel vulnerable to various problems that are believed to be beyond their control: one such problem may be victimization. These findings indicate that neighborhood characteristics that are not directly related to crime, such as the physical condition of housing, are relevant to fear.

In an analysis of data on eight Chicago neighborhoods, we found that residents of blocks that showed signs of housing deterioration and which had a high proportion of multiunit dwellings, perceived more neighborhood problems, had less confidence in the economic future of the neighborhood and were more fearful than were residents of blocks with better housing and more single-family dwellings. Neighborhood crime increased fear indirectly by increasing perceptions of neighborhood problems.¹⁶

Evaluations of crime prevention programs have also found a link between informal social control and fear. A follow-up evaluation of a community crime prevention demonstration project in Hartford found that fear decreased after the project was in place, despite the fact that, after an initial decline, the crime rate eventually increased. Fear seemed to decline in response to the activities of a crime prevention and neighborhood improvement organization.¹⁷

Workshop participants agreed with many of these research findings. They identified physical deterioration, signs of social disorder, poor relations among neighbors, lack of perceived help in the neighborhood, and incomplete or inaccurate information about local crime as contributing to fear.

Finally, a number of studies have found that the perceived availability of helping resources in the neighborhood (i.e., that neighbors will offer assistance) has the effect of reducing fear, particularly among those

living in a threatening environment (i.e., culturally heterogeneous, urban, low-income, and high crime).¹⁸ The perception that assistance is available from neighbors when needed may act as a buffer between the individual and the environment. These resources do not appear to be as critical in a more homogeneous, stable environment where fear levels are generally lower.

These findings suggest that the appearance of order and control in public areas, whether occurring spontaneously without organizational intervention or as a result of the activities of community associations, enhances feelings of safety. While fear is affected by crime levels, it also seems to be affected by the level of social order and by nuisance crimes.

G. Conclusions

Although there is little conclusive evidence that informal social control influences serious crime, evidence from a number of different sources points in this direction. Based on the strength of both the statistical evidence and the observations of practitioners, we believe that attempts to strengthen informal social control should be a part of comprehensive crime prevention strategies. We would not recommend, however, that this be the only approach adopted. Furthermore, we know that the greater the familiarity with the place and the people involved, the more likely people are to intervene in a crime. Neighborhood Watch and other citizen-based crime prevention can do much to establish familiarity, when this is set as a specific goal of the program. If programs are designed to encourage intervention, however, guidelines for determining the nature of the intervention (e.g., reporting, verbal involvement, physical involvement) should be established to help protect residents.

The research findings further highlight the importance of local physical conditions and nuisance crimes in portraying an image of a lack of informal social control and safety. Although there is no evidence that nuisance crimes are related to more serious crimes, they have been associated with higher fear levels. Addressing these nuisance crimes should also be a part of a comprehensive crime prevention program. Neighborhood organizations can do much to address these problems by sponsoring neighborhood improvement activities and lobbying city officials to enforce vagrancy laws, increase police presence, and improve public facilities in the area. These groups can also strengthen the image of informal social control by erecting

physical or symbolic barriers, organizing citizen patrols and developing a reputation for not tolerating criminal activities.

Research suggests that programs to reduce fear should approach the task by (1) instituting programs designed to reduce actual crime levels and (2) instituting programs designed to increase informal social control and helping networks. It is important to employ both strategies to avoid developing the false sense of security among residents which may occur if fear reduction programs were developed without crime reduction strategies.

H. Recommendations

The following recommendations for community crime prevention are suggested by the above discussion.

1. Adopt a dual strategy of crime reduction and fear reduction in community crime prevention programs.

The effect of each strategy will be augmented by the other. Crime reduction strategies should lessen fear, and fear reduction strategies should encourage informal social control and a more stable area which ultimately may lead to less crime. Workshop participants identified a number of community-based activities that were believed to reduce fear of crime in neighborhoods. These include developing informal social networks where people watch out for each other, undertaking general neighborhood improvement efforts, organizing direct action against crime-related problems, educating residents about the nature of the neighborhood crime problem, developing ongoing relationships with city departments and other external institutions whose actions influence the physical and social quality of the neighborhood, and coordinating police and community activities.

2. Develop programs that familiarize local residents with each other and with the neighborhood to help encourage intervention and to reduce fear.

Community organizations can do much to familiarize residents with the people and places in the neighborhood. Block meetings, "get to know your neighbor" programs, and neighborhood tours can be organized. Often Community Watch programs emphasize these types of activities. Where surveillance and intervention are actively encouraged, clear guidelines for the nature of the intervention should be developed.

3. Address physical problems and nuisance crimes as part of a comprehensive crime reduction strategy and strengthen signs of caring and proprietary attitudes over neighborhood areas.

To restore a sense of order, local neighborhood groups, with the support of the police and city planners, should be encouraged to identify physical problems and nuisances and take action to address these problems. To be successful, the support of the police and other city departments is essential. Beyond simply addressing problems, actions which define territories and demonstrate a caring attitude are important. These might involve individuals and neighborhood organizations in erecting signs identifying their neighborhood, fencing or otherwise enclosing interior spaces, and undertaking community beautification programs.

4. Provide up-to-date information on local crime rates to local individuals and groups.

The availability of accurate information on crime will guard against exaggerated levels of fear and aid local residents and organizations in determining the best type of crime prevention strategy. This information could also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of community crime prevention efforts. A monthly report to neighborhood organizations would do much to keep neighborhoods involved in crime prevention activities and informed of their impact.

IV. THE NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT: SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT AND STRENGTH OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL

In Chapter II we discussed the importance of social interaction and the formation of social groups with shared norms in the development of informal social control. In this chapter we explore the social and physical conditions in neighborhoods which influence social interaction, group formation and, ultimately, informal social control. We will be addressing the questions: What social factors influence the conditions necessary for the development of informal social control? What physical factors influence the conditions necessary for the development of informal social control? How should the approach to crime prevention differ, depending on the social and physical conditions of neighborhoods?

A. What Social Factors Affect the Conditions Necessary for the Development of Informal Social Control?

A basic assumption of crime prevention programs with a neighborhood orientation is that their success depends on collective citizen involvement. It is assumed that neighbors already know one another or would like to get to know one another; are willing to cooperate with each other in such activities as watching each others' houses and intervening in crimes; and, most importantly, have shared norms for appropriate public behavior. Many of the activities of community crime prevention programs depend upon mutual trust and a willingness to take responsibility for each others' safety. However, there are some neighborhoods where these assumptions do not apply, where mutual distrust and hostility prevail.

A large number of studies have found that shared norms for public behavior are less likely to develop in low income, culturally heterogeneous neighborhoods than they are in low income, homogeneous neighborhoods, or in middle class neighborhoods. Residents of low income, culturally heterogeneous neighborhoods tend to be more suspicious of each other, to perceive less commonality with each other, and to feel less control over their neighborhood than do residents of more homogeneous neighborhoods.¹⁹ One explanation for this finding is that low income, particularly minority neighborhoods, are less stable. Some suggest that abandonment of these neighborhoods by mortgage lending institutions and private industry has made it difficult for many of the residents to develop long-term ties to

the neighborhood. Another explanation is that poor people tend to accept the views of the larger society that they are not trustworthy and will prey on each other at any opportunity. As a result, poor people are more likely to rely on the police instead of neighbors for dispute resolution and crime control. Even though they may resent and fear the police, they believe that they cannot trust or count on their neighbors for help and that their neighbors are, in fact, responsible for committing many crimes.

Low income neighborhoods that do develop strong informal control tend to be characterized by the dominance of one ethnic group--Italian, Polish, Irish, or the like--but this does not necessarily mean a majority of the population is of a single ethnic group. In several old Italian neighborhoods that have been studied, for example, Italians made up only 30-40 percent of the neighborhood. However, the neighborhoods had the reputation of being controlled culturally and politically by Italians.²⁰ In addition, there was a perception that rules for behavior were firmly established and enforced by one group. In these neighborhoods, norms for public behavior were enforced through a series of groups based on common age, sex, ethnicity, and place of residence. The social activities of residents were organized within these homogeneous groups, but groups were connected with one another through family membership, neighboring relations, church, etc. This type of overlapping group structure appears to be particularly conducive to the development of informal social control.

The research also suggests that the cultural dominance of one group is more important than is residential stability. A recent study was done of a residentially stable housing project where over half of the residents were Chinese.²¹ The Chinese, however, were isolated and alienated from other residents and their social ties were with each other or with Chinese living outside the project. The Chinese, even though they were in the majority and had lived in the project for a number of years, were fearful of other residents, particularly teenagers. Black, white, and Hispanic residents of the project also viewed each other with suspicion. No single group in the project exercised authority or had the reputation of being able to establish and maintain control. The author of this study states, "...the social order in a neighborhood depends on the presence of a dominant group that

perceives itself as responsible for public order" (Merry, S., 1981a, pp.230-231). Because of the absence of such a group, the project was characterized by fear and hostility, and the police and courts were typically used to deal with disputes and maintain order.

Some inner city black neighborhoods suffer from similar problems. Though homogeneously black, the neighborhoods are made up of a mix of classes and lifestyles.²² It is difficult to establish agreed-upon norms for public behavior in these areas because different classes, lifestyles, and family types have different conceptions of the appropriate use of public space. One consequence of this situation is that people living in the same neighborhood may have different definitions of undesirable behavior. Teenagers hanging out on corners or playing in the park may be viewed by some as normal behavior. Others (the elderly or social isolates, for example) may be made to feel uncomfortable and fearful and may view this type of behavior as the source of crime in the neighborhood. In neighborhoods where different classes and ethnic groups live, each group may view the other as the cause of the crime problem.

A second consequence of neighborhoods with a mix of classes and lifestyles may be that, due to limited communication between social subgroups, individuals do not know that others share their intolerance for certain behaviors, including crime. They may not be aware of the willingness of other residents to respond collectively to their mutual concerns. Individuals in these neighborhoods may simply assume that others do not share similar concerns and desires for action. Neighborhood groups that seek to highlight mutual concerns and to provide a mechanism for responsible forms of collective action may do much to generate informal social control in these areas.

The situation is typically very different in predominantly white, middle class neighborhoods. Because whites have a greater choice of residential location than do blacks, predominantly white neighborhoods tend to be homogeneous in class and family type. As a result, the residents already share many assumptions about appropriate public behavior, upkeep of property, control of children, and the like. These assumptions can be made even in the absence of frequent interaction and personal knowledge of others' backgrounds. One study of a white, suburban neighborhood documented the rapidity and ease with which neighborhood norms developed.²³ Gossip was an

effective means of sanctioning people who violated norms because of the importance of maintaining the family's reputation in the community. In contrast, gossip has been found to be a relatively weak means of social control in heterogeneous, low income neighborhoods where people do not necessarily care as much about what their neighbors think.

The research results suggest that it may be difficult to establish and maintain collective problem solving activities in low income, culturally heterogeneous areas. Our re-analysis of survey data from 60 neighborhoods in three cities found that community crime prevention programs that require frequent contact and cooperation among neighbors, such as neighborhood watch, were less likely to be found in racially or economically heterogeneous areas. Instead, these neighborhoods were more likely to have information dissemination programs, designed to teach people how to protect their person and their homes, and police-community relations programs. This suggests that special strategies may be required to organize successful crime prevention programs in low income, heterogeneous neighborhoods.

B. What Physical Factors Affect the Conditions Necessary for the Development of Informal Social Control?

A number of physical characteristics have been found to be associated with preconditions for the development of informal social control. Building type and design, for example, have been found to influence the amount of local social interaction and friendship formation. In particular, high-rise buildings and buildings with many units on one entrance appear to discourage social interaction and the expression of informal social control.²⁴

The traffic level on streets has also been found to influence local interaction patterns. Heavily trafficked streets have been found to discourage local social interaction and increase the fear of crime.²⁵

Residential density has also been found to influence social interaction, but its effects appear to differ, depending on other conditions in the area. Higher residential densities have been found to increase interaction if public open space is available and to decrease interaction if it is not available.²⁶

The presence of public and commercial facilities in an area has been found to affect interaction. Public facilities, such as parks and community centers, tend to increase interaction, particularly if they are located in the interior as opposed to the periphery of the neighborhood. Commercial

facilities, however, have been found to discourage social interaction and increase the fear of crime. Commercial facilities, it is argued, bring outsiders into the area and this discourages local interaction and increases fear.²⁷

Although it is difficult to change some physical features such as building type or land use type, other features are amenable to change. In some instances, traffic levels can be reduced by redesigning streets and using traffic diverters, and residential density levels can be changed by providing more public open space. An analysis of the physical impediments to the development of informal social control would seem to be an important activity in crime prevention programs.

C. How Should the Approach to Crime Prevention Differ Depending on the Social and Physical Conditions of Neighborhoods?

The results reviewed above indicate that informal social control, and community crime prevention programs that rely on it, will be more difficult to develop in low-income, culturally heterogeneous areas and in areas where the physical setting is not conducive to social interaction. The practitioners were generally convinced, however, that informal social control could be achieved in these areas with proper effort. They emphasized, the importance of careful planning and a concentrated effort. In areas where suspicion and distrust are high, it may be wise to initially organize around other problems and introduce crime prevention once greater trust develops. Crime prevention strategies that do not require a lot of trust, such as police-community relations and information dissemination, could be introduced first, followed by programs that require more trust and cooperation, such as Community Watch, as conditions improve. Practitioners also stressed the importance of analyzing neighborhood characteristics and problems and then tailoring a program to fit the specific situation.

D. Recommendations

1. Match the type of community crime prevention program to the characteristics of the neighborhood.

The results discussed above lead to the conclusion that programs that require mutual trust, such as community watch, are less likely to be immediately successful in low-income, culturally heterogeneous areas. Programs requiring less interaction and trust may be better suited to these areas.

The choice of program to adopt, however, should be based on an analysis of the area's social condition and the perceived as well as the actual crime problem in the neighborhood (see Gardiner, 1978).

2. Pay special attention to developing informal social control in low income, culturally heterogeneous areas, since it is less likely to develop spontaneously there.

This must be approached in a cautious manner, being careful not to force interaction before the residents are ready. Common concerns and objectives should be explored in initial meetings of community residents. Fostering more informal social activities may come later in the process.

3. Analyze the physical characteristics of a neighborhood to determine if they impede the development of conditions necessary for informal social control, and if so, in what ways.

This analysis should focus on the influence of building type and design, traffic levels, residential densities, and local facilities. Strategies for addressing these problems can then be developed. Gardiner (1978), Newman (1972), and Wallis and Ford (1980), provide guidance in how to approach this analysis. It basically involves identifying the types, locations, victims and perpetrators of crime in an area and then identifying physical features of high crime locations which attract potential victims or perpetrators, or which inhibit surveillance and a sense of propriety among local residents. The managerial and administrative policies or procedures governing the use of various physical settings should also be considered in this analysis. Simply changing the hours of operation of certain facilities, providing supervision of activities involving youth or developing activities that involve local residents' use of certain settings (e.g., malls, parks) can also help to create conditions that foster informal social control.

V. NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS AND INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL

In previous chapters we referred to the role that neighborhood organizations can play in sponsoring crime prevention activities. Here we will look more closely at their potential influence on neighborhood crime. The questions addressed are: How can neighborhood organizations influence informal social control and neighborhood crime? Who participates in neighborhood organizations and community crime prevention programs? What factors lead to effective neighborhood organizations and community crime prevention programs?

A. How Can Neighborhood Organizations Influence Informal Social Control and Neighborhood Crime?

Neighborhood organizations can affect crime directly and indirectly. Direct influences involve the sponsorship of activities specifically aimed at crime reduction. Indirect influences refer to the effect of neighborhood organizations on various dimensions of informal control which are believed to affect crime and/or fear.

Studies of neighborhood crime prevention activities have found that they are most often carried out by multi-issue neighborhood groups originally formed to address other problems. These groups appear to be better able to sustain crime prevention activities and to adopt more comprehensive approaches to crime prevention than special-purpose groups.²⁸

On the issue of effectiveness, a number of evaluations of crime prevention programs have found that participating individuals or areas have victimization or reported crime rates that are substantially lower than are those of nonparticipating individuals or areas, or that participating areas experience greater decreases in crime over time than do comparison areas. For the most part, programs evaluated in these studies adopted a comprehensive approach involving a number of specific strategies including a combination of educational campaigns, target hardening, neighbor recognition, escort services and the like.²⁹ Programs focusing on single crime prevention strategies appear to have less impact on crime. This suggests that a comprehensive approach to crime prevention is the best way to have a significant influence on crime.

Community organizations may also have indirect effects on crime. First, evidence indicates that participation in neighborhood organizations increases informal interaction (e.g., neighboring, friendship formation) which leads to greater familiarity among neighbors, more information exchange, and a greater sense of community.³⁰ These, in turn, are believed to reduce levels of crime and fear in the neighborhood yet, as discussed in Chapter III, the evidence on this relationship between social interaction and serious crime rates is still weak.

Second, neighborhood organizations may influence local crime by integrating individuals into the community and making them less alienated and, therefore, less likely to victimize neighbors.³¹ Participants at the crime prevention workshop stressed that this function was particularly useful for newcomers into the neighborhood. They emphasized that this is a particularly important function in renter or two wage-earner neighborhoods where spontaneous mechanisms for intergration are often weak or missing. There is, however, little empirical evidence that this aspect of community organizations is effective in reducing crime.

Third, some argue that neighborhood organizations help to establish and enforce local norms for behavior.³² Organizations can pressure residents or landlords who are not adequately maintaining property and sponsor clean-up campaigns and other activities that serve as public, highly visible demonstrations of local norms and local solidarity. As discussed earlier, such neighborhood improvement activities may also reduce fear of crime by reducing visual signs of the deterioration of social control (e.g., graffiti, litter, abandoned or neglected buildings).

Finally, neighborhood organizations may indirectly influence local crime by putting pressure on the police to improve services. Improved services such as increased patrols may directly reduce crime and may also support informal citizen action by making residents more confident that the police will back them up if problems arise.

Workshop participants also identified several other indirect means by which community organizations could affect crime. They can provide a forum for dispute mediation by facilitating discussion between individuals, groups, or cultures that are in conflict. This is likely to be particularly important in neighborhoods where there is a diversity of cultures and norms. When differences exist between cultural norms and the law, the

organization can mediate between the group engaging in the particular behavior, other residents, and the police. In order to be effective in this function, local organizations must be sensitive to variations in norms that may exist within the same neighborhood. These organizations can also help to identify and train local leaders who could address neighborhood problems. The problem-solving approaches of a neighborhood leader are more likely to be tailored to the characteristics of the neighborhood than the approach posed by an external resource. Too, local leaders can link the community and external agencies. An example was given of citizen inspectors in Baltimore who were trained to inspect houses for code violations and to issue summons. Training local leaders was believed to lead to community improvement and enhance informal social control.

B. Who Participates in Neighborhood Organizations and Community Crime Prevention Programs?

For neighborhood organizations to influence crime, neighborhood residents must participate in the activities sponsored by these organizations. Studies indicate that overall participation rates vary between 7 and 20 percent of community residents. Research on participation in both community organizations and community crime prevention programs indicates that participants are more likely to have higher incomes and be males and younger adults. Blacks are also more likely to participate than their white counterparts of similar income. Participation in community crime prevention programs has also been found to be higher among those who perceive local crime rates to be higher, but lower among those who are fearful of crime. Thus, awareness of the local crime problem encourages participation, as long as the individual is not paralyzed by fear.³³

Participation in neighborhood organizations has also been shown to be related to neighborhood characteristics, being higher in neighborhoods with loosely knit social networks than in neighborhoods with tightly knit social networks. Tightly knit local networks--people whose friends are also friends with each other--appear to provide a powerful means of spontaneous informal social control but discourage participation in formal community organizations. In addition, participation tends to be low in low income, culturally heterogeneous neighborhoods. Immediate financial need, a lower sense of efficacy, and greater suspicion of formal organizations among lower income individuals contribute to lower participation rates.³⁴

C. What Factors Lead to Effective Neighborhood Organizations and Community Crime Prevention Programs?

Given that neighborhood organizations play an important role in community crime prevention, it is important to consider the factors which contribute to their effectiveness. Linkages between the local organization and organizations in the larger community (e.g., city departments, foundations, umbrella organizations) have been identified as an element of success. These linkages are important in obtaining funding and technical assistance to support neighborhood group activities.³⁵

Effective leadership is a second characteristic of successful neighborhood organizations. Some researchers have emphasized the importance of paid staff who are committed to neighborhood improvement.³⁶

Broad representation and participation have also been linked to successful neighborhood organizations. These are important in maintaining the legitimacy of the organization and in recruiting volunteers to assist in improvement projects.³⁷

Others emphasize the importance of professional management and financial accounting in the success of neighborhood organizations. Furthermore, because there is a tendency for too few people to try to do too many tasks, controlled work levels for key staff in these organizations are recommended.³⁸

Program maintenance activities, such as training programs for volunteers, public recognition of volunteer efforts, block parties and other highly visible activities, may also help to improve the effectiveness of community crime prevention programs. Several studies found that program effects tend to wane after 18-24 months.³⁹ One reason may be difficulty in maintaining the initial sense of purpose and enthusiasm among participants. Activities aimed at rekindling this enthusiasm can help to lengthen the lifespan of programs.

Studies of community crime prevention programs indicate several other factors related to success. These include conducting leadership training, maintaining a broad agenda, promoting and publicizing activities, and police endorsement and cooperation.⁴⁰

D. Conclusions

The findings reviewed above indicate that community organizations may affect crime in many ways. They can have a direct effect when they adopt comprehensive community crime prevention programs and an indirect effect by

strengthening informal social control. Community organizations provide local residents with a reason to come together and a framework for taking collective action. Participation in these groups, however, varies based on individual social characteristics and neighborhood conditions. Special efforts will be required to develop neighborhood-wide organizations in areas where fear of crime is high, suspicion of outside organizations is high, and cultural heterogeneity is pervasive.

E. Recommendations

1. Develop community crime prevention programs within general purpose rather than crime-specific neighborhood organizations.

Multi-issue neighborhood organizations have a number of advantages over single issue crime prevention organizations. They are more likely to adopt a broad view of the causes of crime and a comprehensive approach to crime prevention. They are also better able to sustain efforts since the organization is involved in overall neighborhood improvement. They are more likely to have more community support and more likely to have developed the expertise and organizational capacity that are necessary to run an effective program.

2. Provide technical assistance to aid neighborhood groups in the design of crime prevention efforts and more general community improvement efforts.

Technical assistance may take the form of leadership training, personnel management, fundraising, financial accounting, and program planning and design. Municipal planning and police departments would be the most logical groups to provide such assistance.

3. Encourage neighborhood organizations to develop comprehensive rather than narrow, single program approaches to crime prevention.

A comprehensive approach might include some combination of neighborhood watch or citizen patrols, informational programs on security and reporting, dispute mediation, youth programs, general neighborhood improvement activities and advocacy to improve police services and the performance of the courts. Funding should be provided to help support these activities, particularly in low income areas.

VI. INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL AND THE POLICE

What is the relationship between informal and formal social control? What factors influence individual reliance on informal or formal social control? What can the police do to encourage or support informal social control? These are the questions addressed in this chapter.

A. What Is the Relationship Between Informal Social Control and Formal Social Control?

It has been argued that as societies become larger and more complex, formal institutions of control (such as the police) develop, and informal sources of social control weaken.⁴¹ As a result, according to this view, communities lose the ability to exercise control over their own members.

Studies of neighborhood informal/formal control, however, have identified three patterns of relationships which indicate that formal and informal social control are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In culturally homogeneous, working class neighborhoods, powerful means of controlling the behavior of residents have been found. There is, however, a deep sense of distrust and hostility toward external organizations, such as the police, and their help is avoided.⁴² Residents of culturally heterogeneous, low income neighborhoods share these feelings of distrust and hostility toward outside authority, but they lack the internal resources of the other groups to alleviate neighborhood problems.⁴³ Thus, in spite of their distrust, residents must rely on the police for even relatively minor problems or else simply ignore them. Residents of homogeneous, middle class neighborhoods tend to rely on informal intervention for relatively minor neighborhood problems. But these neighborhoods typically also have strong links to and greater trust in external institutions and rely on formal means of control for more serious problems.⁴⁴ Thus, in these neighborhoods formal and informal control are not mutually exclusive; they are, rather, complementary.

B. What Factors Influence Individual Reliance on Informal or Formal Social Control?

Our own analysis of the factors associated with reliance on informal or formal social control indicates that the greater the perceived crime rate and other neighborhood problems, the more likely an individual is to rely on the police rather than on informal social control. Furthermore, people who believed that neighbors would be indifferent if they witnessed a

break-in and who had less contact with their neighbors relied on the police more when they had a problem.⁴⁵ These findings support the idea that a positive image of the neighborhood and its residents is essential for the development of informal social control.

The literature on community dispute resolution further illustrates the conditions giving rise to formal versus informal means of intervention. These studies suggest that informal means of intervention are relied upon and are effective in situations where there are agreed-upon norms for behavior and where group members are socially, politically, or economically interdependent. When these characteristics are weak or absent, other alternatives--such as involving the police or courts, or ignoring the problem--are used.⁴⁶

C. What Can the Police Do to Encourage or Support Informal Social Control?

Police functions can be divided into two categories--law enforcement and peace-keeping.⁴⁷ Law enforcement refers to all activities directly related to making arrests, while peace-keeping refers to the large number and variety of activities with no clear legal referent. Peacekeeping typically involves rousting vagrants or loiterers, admonishing children who are being a nuisance, sanctioning litterers, and intervening in other actions which are considered by local residents to be inappropriate public behavior. It has been argued that this peace-keeping role is vital in maintaining a sense of local order and security among residents.

Many policemen do not come from low-income or minority neighborhoods and, thus, have difficulty understanding the local problems and norms of residents of these areas. As a result, police tend to maintain a law enforcement role in these neighborhoods, invoking the full force of the law in situations that they deal with in a more informal, conciliatory manner in other neighborhoods. It has been argued that when the police act as law enforcers, the capacity of a neighborhood to regulate its own members is destroyed.⁴⁸

Team policing and foot patrols have been recommended as a means of decreasing the social distance between police and low-income populations. While these strategies have been found to have little effect on neighborhood crime, it has been suggested that the police do become familiar with local norms, learn to distinguish troublemakers from law-abiding citizens, reduce community fear, and improve their attitude toward the community.⁴⁹

This, in turn, may act to strengthen informal social control by providing support for residents who attempt to enforce local norms for behavior.

One of the major themes that emerged from the crime prevention workshop was that police are very important in community crime prevention, but in ways that have little to do with traditional policing. Activities that were stressed include controlling incivilities; providing complete, accurate, and ongoing information on the local crime problem to community groups; providing a sense among citizens that help is available when needed; enhancing trust of external institutions; and assisting in the mediation of intergroup conflicts. It was believed that these activities would have several primarily indirect effects on crime. They were thought to help reduce fear and enhance citizens' sense of control over their community, increase the likelihood that citizens will utilize a range of external institutions for assistance with local problems, encourage citizens to provide more and better information that the police can use for patrol and investigation activities and, in general, enhance the community's capacity to prevent crime.

A number of specific suggestions were made in the workshop to enhance police contributions to community crime prevention. First, the term of assignment of police to communities should be lengthened in order to increase mutual familiarity and trust. Second, public relations activities should be concentrated in minority neighborhoods where distrust of police is often greatest. Third, police departments should give community involvement priority to achieve a better balance of proactive and reactive approaches to crime problems. This reorientation should include specialized training in community crime prevention, preferably with the participation of representatives of community organizations. This training should include not only public relations and target hardening (e.g., security devices) but also the potential and limits of citizen activities and the importance of supporting informal social control. It was also suggested that police departments reward officers for community involvement in the same way that they receive credit for tickets and arrests. Some larger police departments may also want to consider assigning special patrol cars to respond to incivilities and other quality of life complaints, as is currently being done in New York City.

The recommended role for police is more comprehensive than current community relations programs. The new role involves commitment at all organizational levels to community-based crime prevention, specialized training, and restructuring the reward system. Workshop participants emphasized, though, that the new role should apply not only to police but to a wide range of external institutions that affect communities, e.g., the housing authority, sanitation department, mortgage lending institutions, and courts.

D. Conclusions

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that informal and formal social control are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In fact the two forms of control can be mutually enhancing and complementary. Local residents can handle minor problems and report more serious ones to the police. The police, for their part, can help support the informal social control exercised by residents by learning local norms and acting to maintain them. The police will need support, however, from both their superiors and from the community if they are to expand their role in peace-keeping.

E. Recommendations

1. Develop programs that familiarize the police with local norms for acceptable behavior and encourage them to help to uphold these norms.

Becoming more familiar with local norms can be accomplished by more foot patrols, meetings with residents, and longer assignments to local neighborhoods. Enforcement of these norms would involve a greater focus on incivilities and nuisance crimes, conflict mediation, providing a sense that help is at hand, and providing accurate, ongoing information on local crime.

2. Training should be given and rewards provided to police personnel for greater community involvement.

Training programs should place considerable emphasis on public relations, target hardening techniques, and strategies for involving the community in crime prevention efforts. Community involvement should not be delegated to a special unit but should be considered the responsibility of all officers. For this to happen, however, more direct incentives must be provided for this type of activity, particularly in light of the heavy time pressures under which most police operate.

VII. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

A number of major ideas have emerged from this project. Informal social control has been found to be related to fear of crime; although not conclusive, there is evidence that it is related to the rate of serious crime. Based on these findings, we believe the strengthening of informal control should be a major goal of crime prevention programs. To accomplish this goal, activities that are designed to help create or maintain formal and informal social groups are essential.

Incivilities or nuisance crimes also appear to play an important role in establishing an area image that attracts crime. Thus, community crime prevention programs should be certain to address these problems as part of a comprehensive approach to crime prevention. Furthermore, the physical characteristics of the neighborhood that impede the development of informal social control should be identified and, if possible, changed.

Special attention should be focused on low-income, culturally heterogeneous areas since it is in these areas that informal social control will be the hardest to develop. With careful analysis and the proper choice of programs, a successful attack on crime can be launched.

General purpose community organizations were found to play an important role in community crime prevention. They can have both a direct effect by sponsoring formal community crime prevention programs--such as neighborhood watch--and an indirect effect by increasing social interaction in the area. General purpose community organizations are often better sponsors of community crime prevention programs than single purpose organizations. This led us to recommend that support be provided to these organizations.

Finally, strong formal social control and informal social control do not seem to be mutually exclusive. Residents can do much to aid the police in formal control, and the police can do much to help residents in informal social control. The police, we concluded, should expand their role of peacekeepers and pay more attention to incivilities and other local problems. Incentives and support will be needed before police personnel can be expected to expand their role in these activities. The full set of policy and program recommendations is reviewed below.

A. Summary of Policy and Program Recommendations

1. Organize informal as well as formal neighborhood groups to increase group cohesion and reduce crime in residential areas.
2. Organize sub-neighborhood or block level groups since smaller groups tend to be more cohesive and more likely to develop informal social control.
3. Encourage the police to provide support for the expression of informal social control.
4. Adopt a dual strategy of crime reduction and fear reduction in community crime prevention programs.
5. Develop programs that familiarize local residents with each other and with the neighborhood to help encourage intervention and to reduce fear.
6. Address physical problems and nuisance crimes as part of a comprehensive crime reduction strategy and strengthen signs of caring and proprietary attitudes over neighborhood areas.
7. Provide up-to-date information on local crime rates to local individuals and groups.
8. Match the type of community crime prevention program to the characteristics of the neighborhood.
9. Pay special attention to developing informal social control in low income, culturally heterogeneous areas, since it is less likely to develop spontaneously there.
10. Analyze the physical characteristics of a neighborhood to determine if they impede the development of conditions necessary for informal social control, and if so, in what ways.

11. Develop community crime prevention programs within general purpose rather than crime-specific neighborhood organizations.
12. Provide technical assistance to aid neighborhood groups in the design of crime prevention efforts and more general community improvement efforts.
13. Encourage neighborhood organizations to develop comprehensive rather than narrow, single program approaches to crime prevention.
14. Develop programs that familiarize the police with local norms for acceptable behavior and encourage them to uphold these norms.
15. Training should be given and rewards should be provided to police personnel for greater community involvement.

B. Recommendations for Future Research

Although we have learned much about the role of informal social control in crime prevention, there is still much we need to know. Future research should focus on the issues of when, where, and by whom informal social control is actually exercised, and with what effect. A more detailed, behaviorally oriented process analysis of the actual expression of informal social control, and the surrounding context, is needed. This should be done in neighborhoods which vary by social class, homogeneity and other important social variables that have been identified in this report.

Most of our information on informal social control has come from survey research which is limited in its ability to describe the development and expression of informal social control, to provide detailed information on the process of actual events, and to assess the impact of informal social control on behavior, criminal or otherwise. Traditional survey techniques also make it difficult to measure group norms or control-oriented behavior. Surveys ask individuals about themselves, their experiences, and their perceptions of their surroundings which provide static portraits of social action and environments. However, surveys are not well suited to

capturing the dynamics of group processes which foster the development and exercise of informal social control. Research techniques which are better suited to uncovering the process leading up to the expression of informal social control are qualitative or ethnographic research techniques. These approaches are highly complementary to research efforts. Qualitative techniques can explore intricate social processes, the findings of which can inform and better focus survey research efforts.

Research is needed on the nature of the interactions between the offender, the victim and the witness. We need a better understanding of the process by which the potential offender and target or victim are brought into contact, and on the role of the witness in discouraging criminal activities. How does an offender select a victim? What factors influence the response of the witness?

The relationship between levels of informal social control in neighborhoods and offender perceptions should also be a fruitful area of study. Questions need to be addressed such as: Do visible signs of use, territoriality, and caring by residents influence potential offenders' perceptions of the risk of being apprehended in an area? Do homogeneity in social characteristics and other social factors influence the decisions of offenders? How does the existence of a neighborhood organization or community crime prevention program affect the decisions of potential offenders?

The role of community organizations in helping to establish and maintain local norms and integrate people into the neighborhood also needs further study. What role can neighborhood groups play in establishing local norms? Does an individual have to belong to the organization in order to be influenced by the activities of the organization? How do neighborhood organizations act to enforce local norms?

Finally, demonstration projects similar to the Hartford study are needed to see how successful we can be in creating informal social control in areas where it is weak. This might involve testing a program designed to organize a heterogeneous neighborhood, establish local norms, and involve residents in the more subtle forms of informal social control as well as more traditional crime prevention activities. Tests of actual programs are important if we are to improve our ability to design and implement successful crime prevention programs.

C. Conclusions

The overall conclusion of this study is that informal social control can do much to influence crime and the fear of crime. In some neighborhoods the stability and similarity of residents leads to the natural development of informal social control; in other neighborhoods it must be consciously created. General purpose neighborhood organizations appear to be essential in the development of informal social control where it does not naturally exist. These organizations sponsor community crime prevention programs, address local physical and social conditions related to crime (incivilities) and increase social interaction in local neighborhoods. Citizens and government officials should develop active and open organizations in all parts of the city.

The police have also been found to play an important role in the development and maintenance of informal social control. Their order maintenance activities can help to support local norms and local expressions of informal social control. The development of an ongoing relationship between the police and both neighborhood organizations and individual citizens appears essential for an effective crime prevention and fear reduction strategy. It is through these relationships that the local norms for behavior are communicated to the police and formal laws, policing procedures, and crime prevention techniques are communicated to local residents. It is through this type of collaboration that successful crime prevention strategies will emerge.

NOTES

1. Volumes I through IV of the full report are available on microfiche or can be borrowed from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850 (301/251-5500). Volume I is subtitled Synthesis and Assessment of the Research. Volume II is subtitled Secondary Analysis of the Relationship Between Responses to Crime and Informal Social Control. Volume III is subtitled Workshop on the Role of Informal Social Control and Neighborhood Crime Prevention: What, Where and How? Volume IV is subtitled Workshop Proceedings: Informal Social and Neighborhood Crime Prevention: What, Where and How?
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