

# REACTIONS REACTIONS TO CRIME

A Critical Review of the Literature

## Executive Summary

U. S. Department of Justice  
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration  
**National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice**



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U. S. Department of Justice  
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## ABSTRACT

This essay reviews published and unpublished research on individual perceptions of crime, and individual and collective behavioral reactions to crime. It provides a set of conceptions around which existing research findings can be organized and compared. Emphasis is given to the consistency or inconsistency of findings and to an identification of variables, areas of research, and methodologies which have received insufficient attention.

Findings on perceptions of crime studies are distinguished in terms of whether they deal with values, judgments, or emotions, and the characteristic contents of crime perceptions. Individual behavioral reactions are organized in a typology which includes avoidance, home and personal protective, insurance, communicative, and participative behaviors. Collective behavioral responses are discussed in terms of crime control, crime prevention, victim advocacy, and offender oriented activities. The factors affecting perceptions and behaviors including crime conditions, personal and vicarious victimization experiences, social integration, and area characteristics are discussed.

Finally, research on the effects of individual and collective responses to crime on crime rates, personal victimization, social integration and community organization are considered.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay is the final product of a set of activities begun in November, 1975.\* In the intervening time the efforts of a large number of people have assisted in its development. Since the set of issues assembled here relating to "reactions to crime" do not follow particular disciplinary lines, and because so much of the relevant research is unpublished, considerable energy was expended in literature searches and in correspondence with researchers and those responsible for developing crime programs.

Al Biderman opened his files from his earlier inventory of public opinion surveys and provided much needed encouragement at the outset. Diane Lloyd, at that time the urban affairs librarian at Northwestern, worked tirelessly to search all of the many literatures which we thought might be relevant. In the introduction to our annotated bibliography this search process is discussed in greater detail. Gail Kaplan took principal responsibility for coordinating the review and abstracting of articles. She was assisted by Paul Cassingham, Jolene Gallagher, Nancy Gaitskill, and Mike Andrykowski, Brad Berg, Marilyn Weber, Jim Brick, Paul Fainsod, Don Pilzer, Kim Baker, and Amy Hutner. Paul Lavrakas, Jerry Selig and Marcia Lipetz wrote mini-reviews of crime reporting, community studies, and crime waves respectively. Kent Hanson and Dave Conrads took over the abstracting process in its final stages.

Ed McCabe and Gail Kaplan wrote a first draft of a review essay. Working from the early draft, the abstracts, and a large number of sources that came

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\* In addition to this essay, we prepared an annotated bibliography. Copies of this bibliography are available on loan from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service; copies of the full report are available from the Government Printing Office.

to our attention too late to be abstracted, I reconceptualized and substantially enlarged the essay's scope. During this process the essay's length and number of references grew to five times their original size. Wes Skogan and Dan Lewis both read and gave valuable comments on Part I. Linda Englund and Heather Keppler helped summarize the survey results for Part II. A major resource in reviewing this literature was an index of major crime surveys developed with the assistance of Robert LeBailly, Heather Keppler, and Edward McCabe. Their work made the cross survey comparisons feasible.

The editing skills of Joy Charlton, Kate Legare, and Mary Graham add clarity and order throughout the text and executive summary. The task of typing the manuscript was handled with extreme care and diligence by Sue Klein, Anne Horne, Peggy Beaudet, Pat Morchat, Alice Murray, Lynne Nichols, Maggie Malley, Pamela Bennett, Ruth Levin, Gaye Haverkos and Virginia Donohue.

Finally, I'd like to express my thanks to my family who often wondered whether another member of the family, known as "the essay," had moved in.

For the assistance, nagging, support, and criticism, I thank you all.

Fred DuBow

Evanston, March 1979.



As crime rates rose and crime became a more central focus of national concern during the past 15 years, interest in the reactions of citizens to crime was added to more traditional criminological concerns for the nature of crime, criminal offenders, and the operation of the criminal justice system. This new interest led to a large number of studies that seek to understand what citizens think, feel, and do about crime. We refer to this new area of interest as "reactions to crime."

This essay is based on an extensive review of the published and unpublished literature carried out as part of a long term study of reactions to crime sponsored by NILECJ. The bulk of the material on these topics has been written in the past 10 years. We devoted many of our efforts to discovering unpublished and narrowly distributed reports which often contained the richest data and most innovative approaches.

Reactions to crime have both psychological and behavioral dimensions. We discuss the psychological dimension in Part I as "perceptions of crime," a wide range of phenomena including emotional responses, cognitive judgements or assessments of the nature of crime, and moral or political evaluations of the importance of crime problems. The behavioral dimension is discussed in Part II as individual behavioral responses to crime, and in Part III as collective behavioral responses to crime.

In each of the three parts of this review, we begin by developing a set of concepts to organize the discussion of research issues and findings. In a new area of inquiry such as reactions to crime there are few terminological conventions; the same words may be used to refer to different phenomena.



conversely, equivalent findings may be used to provide tools for common discussion of these topics. It is also important to understand the empirical measurements of these phenomena. In some areas researchers are refining measurement tools that have been in use for some time, while in other areas no one has yet found a way to measure some factors believed to be important.

Each part also discusses factors that are believed to affect the character of reactions to crime. Some factors -- such as the incidence of crime or social integration -- appear repeatedly as a factor relevant to understanding each type of reaction, while other factors relate to only one or two types of reactions.

Finally, the essay discusses the effects of reactions to crime. We consider crime perceptions primarily in terms of their contribution to understanding behavioral reactions. We examine behavioral reactions for what is known about their impact on crime and perceptions of crime. In the case of collective responses, we also consider their impact on local social integration and community organization.

The full essay describes in detail the relevant research findings and identifies areas of agreement and conflict. This summary highlights the central issues and findings. Readers interested in a fuller discussion and extensive references to the literature are urged to consult the full report.

## Part 1 -- Perceptions of Crime

### Types of Crime Perceptions

Terminology and concepts used to discuss crime perceptions lack consistency and specificity. To facilitate comparisons across studies and to help clarify

the myriad of statements made about the fear of crime, we find that perceptions of crime can be usefully distinguished in terms of values, judgments, and emotions. These in turn have a personal and general aspect.

Values involve assessments of the importance of crime either as a public issue in comparison with other public issues or as a personal matter in comparison with other concerns.

Judgments about crime involve perceptions of the objective character of crime. At a general level this means perceptions of crime rates while at the individual level it means perceived risks of personal victimization.

Emotions include perceptions that include fear and anger. More generalized level perceptions include fear for the safety of others. At the personal level this involves individual fears and anxieties about personal victimizations.

#### 1. Values

There is general agreement that crime has increased as a public issue in the past 15 years and that at various times within this period it has been the number one public concern. Despite this growing public concern about crime, there is considerable evidence that personal tolerance of some behavior labeled as criminal -- such as drug use, abortions, and homosexuality -- has increased. One result of this increased tolerance has been decriminalization of some types of behavior.

#### 2. Judgments

People are more likely to perceive crime rates as rising than declining. They generally see crime rates to be higher and to be increasing more in areas other than their own neighborhood. Crime is perceived more as other people's problem than one's own. This perception may be due to the

association of danger with unknown people and places or to the tendency to have a more realistic and reduced perception of crime where it is based on direct experiences.

### 3. Emotions

The emotional dimension of responses to crime includes measures of "fear". Although there is more public discussion of the fear of crime than of other non-criminal risks, such as from automobiles and illness, the reasons are unclear. It may be explained by differences that are intrinsic to the phenomena or by political and cultural factors. At least one study suggests that, under some conditions, the fear of accidents may be equal to or greater than the fear of crime.

a. Fear for others Little attention has been paid to the fears that family members have for each other. Two studies suggest that family members are less afraid for themselves than for other family members who they perceive as more vulnerable. Behavioral reactions to crime may not be understandable unless the fear for others is taken into account. For example adults may change their behaviors to protect their children rather than themselves.

b. Fear related to specific crimes Most research on the fear of crime refers explicitly or implicitly to personal offenses in public places -- popularly known as "street crimes." More recent studies have asked questions about particular crimes within the "street crime" category so that fears of robberies, assaults, rapes, or other sexual assaults can be looked at individually. The relative salience of different crimes varies among individuals and locales; greater specificity in fear referents makes it possible to discover and understand these variations.

c. Trends in fear over time The repeated use of a few fear of crime

questions in national public opinion surveys since 1965 provides a limited amount of data with which changes in fear over time can be studied. Researchers agree that fear of walking alone in one's neighborhood at night, used as a measure of the fear of street crime, increased between 1965 and 1975, particularly among the elderly. Since 1975, the fear levels have remained constant or have declined.

d. Other emotions The existing research on emotions related to crime concentrates on fear. Other emotional reactions such as anger, outrage, frustration, violation, and helplessness are sometimes mentioned but are rarely given systematic attention.

#### 4. The Interrelationships of Perceptions of Crime

A few studies have examined the interrelationship between values, judgments, and emotions. Values have been less consistently found to be interrelated than are judgments (perceived risks) and emotions (fears). Much more work is needed to examine the consistency of these relationships.

#### 5. Aggregate Crime Perceptions

Most studies of crime perceptions consider the perceptions of individuals. However, when perceptions of individuals are aggregated, it is possible to provide measures of perception in particular geographic areas. This process can lead to characterization of locales in terms of a high or low level of fear, concern, or perceived risk. Aggregate crime perceptions are particularly important for evaluating efforts to reduce fear or perceived risks in targeted areas. Relatively little attention has been given to understanding aggregated areas as opposed to individual crime perceptions.

While we often talk about crime in general terms, we also need to understand the complexity and specificity of crime perceptions. People have specific ideas about the nature, origins, results, and location of crime.

### 1. Violent Crimes

Most research does not explicitly describe the type of crime being considered, but the implicit reference is usually to "street crimes". Considerable variation is found when the degree of fear of specific crimes is studied but crimes of violence are generally the most frightening.

### 2. Strangers

Crimes that involve strangers are more fear producing than those that involve non-strangers. Fear of crime is, in large measure, a fear of strangers. The link between strangers and crime may reflect a psychological mechanism which allows continued residence in environments where fear of one's neighbors would be intolerable. Alternatively, the equation of crime and strangers may be an aspect of intermingling of racial and crime fears. For white Americans fear of crime is frequently synonymous with fear of blacks.

### 3. Incivility

Inappropriate and disreputable behavior such as drunkenness or obscene phone calling may violate an individual's sense of social order. Since people are more likely to encounter such behaviors than they are to be the victims of serious crimes, incivil behavior -- when interpreted as a sign of larger social disorder -- may have a significant effect on crime perceptions. Studies have linked such behaviors to feelings of unease but, to date, we

have little understanding of how perceptions of incivility relate to perceptions of other types of crimes.

#### 4. The Location of Crimes

Crimes may also be perceived as occurring in particular times and places. It has been consistently reported that people believe more crime occurs at night and in neighborhoods other than their own. Subways, downtown areas, parks, school, and other places where youth hang out have been identified as particularly dangerous places. Techniques for mapping people's perceptions of crime risks are beginning to be used and may provide more detailed understanding of people's crime topographies.

### Factors Influencing Perceptions of Crime

#### 1. Crime Conditions

a. The Geographic Distribution of Crime The incidence of crime in particular areas is generally believed to influence perceptions. Higher crime rates should be related to higher perceptions of risk and higher levels of fear. A number of studies support this belief. However, there are a significant number of other studies in which these relationships were not consistently found. Even when the relationship between area crime rates and perceptions is found, the strength of associations is modest. It would not be accurate to assume that most residents of high crime areas have high levels of fear or conversely that most residents of low crime areas have low fear levels. Some of the inconsistencies in the findings reported here may be due to the inadequacies of the crime measures.

b. Changes in crime rates over time Some studies suggest that rapid changes in the crime rate may be more fear producing than high but stable

crime rates. This relationship is at the heart of "crime waves", periods of dramatic increases in crime. Research on crime waves also suggests that perceptions of large increases in crime rates may be influenced by factors other than actual changes in the incidence of crime.

The effect of changes in the crime rate over longer historical periods is the opposite of the effect of short term changes. Whereas short term increases often produce increases in fear, the longer term studies describe increases in fear and concern while violent crime rates are in fact decreasing.

c. Absolute levels of crime The effect of absolute levels of crime on perceptions may be equal to or greater than that of crime rates. Large cities like New York and Chicago have bad reputations for crime even though they have lower crime rates than some medium sized cities with better crime reputations. The large cities have a substantially higher absolute number of crimes which provides a more constant flow of material for media and interpersonal communications which thereby establishes the reputation. A systematic test of this relationship has yet to be undertaken.

d. Key crimes Considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that fears are increased by particularly dramatic crimes, but little systematic study of the extent or longevity of these effects has been done.

e. Victimization rates A major development in the past twelve years has been the use of sample surveys to study victimization. Such studies generate estimates of victimization rates for different demographic categories. Since most victim surveys also include questions on crime perceptions, they provide considerable data on the relationships between victimization rates and perceptions.

The most significant finding of these inquiries has been that



victimization rates and levels of fear are inversely related for age and sex. Women are less victimized but more afraid than men. Victimization rates generally decline with age but fear increases.

The relationship between race and income and victimization rates varies more across studies, but blacks tend to have higher victimization rates than whites. Blacks are also found to be as or more afraid than whites. Income tends to be inversely related to violent crime victimizations but positively related to property crime victimizations.

When the relationship of victimization rates for various demographic categories is related to types of crime perceptions other than fear, the results are inconclusive.

## 2. The Appropriateness of Fear Levels

What levels of fear are appropriate for given levels of crime risk? Are the fear levels of females and the elderly higher than the objective conditions warrant? There is considerable disagreement in the literature on the answers to these questions. One position is that fear of crime in general is too high and hence the lower fear levels of males and younger persons are more appropriate. The greater risks of injury from accidents and the low levels of fear associated with these risks are cited to support this position.

A second position is that since women and the elderly are more vulnerable and less able to defend themselves their higher levels of fear are appropriate. Underlying this idea is the judgment that crime victimization is significantly different from other sources of personal injury. These differences make greater fear of crime understandable.

A third position is that the levels of fear for women and the elderly are appropriate because their risk of victimization, when rates of exposure

are taken into account, are higher than for other demographic categories. Difficulties in measuring exposure rates have prevented an adequate test of this interpretation.

### 3. Victimization Experiences

Considerable research has been conducted on the impact of victimization experiences on crime perception. Most of these inquiries are based on data from victimization surveys, but the value of such surveys for studying these relationships is limited in two respects. First, anyone only victimized prior to the six month or one year recall period used in most surveys is considered a "non-victim" in such analyses. Second, victimization surveys provide only cross sectional data; the effects of victimization on longitudinal phenomena must be inferred. A more appropriate design would be to measure crime perceptions before and after victimizations.

Generally speaking, few crime perception differences are found when all types of victims are compared with non-victims. Differences in fear and perceived risk have been more frequently found when comparisons are made between the victims of contact or violent crimes and other respondents. However, though statistically significant, the differences are not large. The methodological limitations described above and the variety of situations included in a crime category such as robbery may be masking stronger effects of violent crime victimizations at the hands of a stranger. There is also limited evidence that being victimized more than once, at least within a one year recall period, increases fears as much as contact crime victimization.

### 4. Witnessing Crimes

There is little research on the effects of witnessing a crime on crime perceptions. Social psychological studies of witness reactions to staged crime focus on immediate behavioral responses rather than longer term

changes in perception. Questions about witnessing crimes added to victimization surveys would make it possible to study its effects on perceptions.

#### 5. Vicarious Crime Experiences

People are exposed to more information about crime vicariously from mass media and interpersonal communications than from personal experience. The gap is especially wide between vicarious and direct experience with violent crime. The finding that people are less afraid in their own neighborhoods where they can rely more on direct experiences for crime information than in other places where they must rely on vicarious information has been interpreted as suggesting that vicarious experiences, in general, generate higher levels of fear.

a. Interpersonal Communications A person's social interaction and integration in his community may be of significance in shaping concerns and fears. Greater interaction and integration is likely to lead to more information about local crime, but there is contradicting evidence as to whether this greater information increases or decreases fears and perceptions of risks. Research on interpersonal communication has dealt with crime information only tangentially; almost all the key questions remain to be studied.

b. Mass Communication There is a widespread belief that the media treatments of crime influence people to believe that there is more crime and more risk of victimization than there actually is. However, none of the research provides much evidence either for or against this belief. Some studies demonstrate distortions in media coverage of various aspects of the crime situation, including the portrayal of "crime waves" when the crime data show no or only small increases in the crime rates, but evidence on how these distortions affect individual crime perceptions is limited and contradictory.

## 6. Police and Other Institutions

A large number of other organizations and actors regularly present information and opinions about crime to the public. The most important of these are law enforcement agencies, which transmit information and judgments through everyday interactions and special programs. We know very little about the content and variations in the crime messages which accompany routine police-citizen encounters, although recent studies have looked at variations in police organization and patrol behavior and found little if any effects on crime perceptions.

Special police education and crime prevention programs try to change public perceptions as well as behaviors. There is some evidence that such efforts increase awareness and concern, but at least one study suggests the possibility that crime awareness programs may increase citizen fears.

## 7. Politics

Crime, from time to time, emerges as a political issue. The rhetoric of crime in electoral politics can paint a stark picture of the problems. If these campaigns influence people's crime perceptions, they are likely to increase fear and perceptions of the prevalence and seriousness of crime. The journalistic accounts of "law and order" campaigns do not address the question of their impact on crime perceptions. No social science research on this question could be identified.

## 8. Social Integration

Social integration may affect perceptions of crime. At the individual level, persons who are more socially isolated are more likely to be fearful. This is particularly true among the elderly who live alone.

One of the most influential ideas in recent community crime prevention

efforts is that areas with higher social interaction and integration will have more natural surveillance to informally control the incidence of crime and lower the fear of crime. The evidence to support this idea is limited. Studies have not found a relationship between the degree of social integration and crime perceptions; but as yet this relationship has received only a small amount of attention in empirical studies.

#### 9. The Culture of Crime

Individual crime perceptions may also be affected by the culture of crime of an area. People living in areas where there is heightened anxiety are more likely to become worried than individuals living in areas characterized by low levels of fear, regardless of the objective crime conditions. Relationships of this kind have been suggested by a number of writers but have yet to be tested.

#### 10. Interrelationship of Factors Influencing Crime Perceptions

We have discussed separately a number of factors which are believed to affect perceptions of crime. However, an adequate explanation of crime perceptions requires an analysis that incorporates these factors into a single model and determines their relative contributions and interaction effects. Those few attempts to develop a comprehensive model have not been adequately tested because they include variables that cannot be measured by the survey data bases from which the authors began. A comprehensive explanation of crime perceptions is likely to require multimethod data collection.

#### Summary

We have given considerable attention in Part I to distinguishing three types of crime perceptions: values, judgments, and emotions. This makes it possible to organize large numbers of findings which may use "fear of crime" to refer to different phenomena. The research on factors affecting crime

perceptions reveals complexities and incomplete understandings, but it is clear that changes in or levels of crime rates alone do not account for changes in or levels of fear and perceived risk. In addition, recent victimizations have only modest effects on crime perceptions even when they involved contact and violence.

We have little direct evidence on how individuals obtain and interpret information about crime. Some evidence suggests that people rely on the mass media, but the more consistently reported sources of information are personal experience and interpersonal communication. These latter factors are more relevant to perceptions of one's own neighborhood, and people consistently report their own neighborhood as safer than other areas. For other areas, people must rely on more indirect sources of information.

A central theme in research on crime perceptions is whether people's perceptions are appropriate or rational. The answer to this issue involves more than empirical inquiry, but people clearly are more afraid of crime victimization than of other dangers which are equally or more likely to occur.

The major task ahead is to understand how perceptions of crime are shaped and changed over time.

## Part II -- Individual Behavioral Reactions to Crime

### Introduction

It is widely believed that increasing crime rates have led many people to change their behaviors. We describe research findings on individual and collective behavioral responses to crime in the next two parts of this essay. Individual and collective behaviors are empirically intertwined, but it is

useful to separate them for analytic purposes. We discuss findings where the individual is the unit of analysis in this part of the essay; in the final part, we discuss studies where the unit of analysis is a collectivity -- a neighborhood, community organization or some other social group.

### Types of Individual Behaviors

#### 1. What Is An Individual Behavioral Reaction to Crime?

A behavioral reaction to crime is an action (or set of actions) which is undertaken to a significant extent because of the perceived existence of crime risks. Often studies describe behaviors but provide no direct evidence that the actors had crime in mind. Where there is evidence that the actors were in fact taking crime into account, studies are discussed here as part of the reactions to crime literature. Studies of the former type will be included only if the behavior in question has been argued or shown in other studies to be related to perception of crime. Behaviors frequently involve a number of motivations other than crime and it will be necessary to discuss ways of determining if, in a particular instance, an orientation towards crime is involved. For example, dogs and guns are bought either for recreational or protection purposes or with both reasons in mind. Only when protection is an aspect of the decision can ownership be considered a reaction to crime.

As with crime perceptions, we begin by developing definitions for different behavioral types. These definitions provide a set of concepts around which to organize our discussions and clarify a welter of inconsistent and overlapping terminologies.



## 2. Types of Individual Behavioral Reactions

a. Avoidance refers to an action which seeks to decrease exposure to crime risks by removing oneself from or increasing the distance from situations in which the risk of criminal victimization is believed to be high. The situations being avoided may be characterized in terms of location, time, or people.

b. Personal and home protective behavior is an action taken to increase resistance to victimization. Actions to decrease a home's vulnerability include purchasing a device such as a lock or a burglar alarm, or acting differently by leaving lights or radios on when leaving the home. Personal protective behavior refers to actions taken outside the home to reduce vulnerability when encountering threatening situations, actions such as carrying a weapon or looking unafraid.

Protective measures have been characterized as incurring greater expenses than avoidance. The purchase of devices for home protection are obvious expenses, but it is conceivable that the costs of avoidance are as great or greater. Too little is known about the actual costs to individuals of either type of behavior.

c. Insurance behavior is an action to minimize the costs of victimization without reducing exposure or increasing resistance to victimization. This can mean the purchase of insurance to compensate the victim of a crime as well as carrying little cash or keeping valuables in a safe deposit box to reduce the potential loss when victimized.

d. Communicative behavior is an action which involves the sharing of information and emotions related to crime with others. People often spend considerable time and energy talking about crime, but take no other concrete actions.

e. Participatory behavior is an action taken with others which is motivated by a particular crime or by crime in general. Participation can take several forms and may be informally or formally organized. We discuss informal participation, crime reporting, voting and collective participation.

### The Extent of Individual Behavioral Reactions

We will now review what is known about the frequency and distribution of individual behavioral reactions. These data come largely from the same crime oriented surveys used in Part I to discuss crime perceptions. A second source of data are studies of particular types of behavior such as the use of public transportation, gun ownership, or decisions to relocate residences.

#### 1. General Behavioral Change

In surveys which ask respondents whether their behavior has been changed or limited in the last few years because of crime, less than half the respondents report such changes. However, people are much more likely to perceive that people who live elsewhere have made more changes. The further away the respondents are from the referents, the more likely they are to perceive people have changed their behavior. This pattern of responses gives further weight to the argument discussed earlier that crime is generally perceived as a greater problem for other people.

The frequencies with which particular types of behavioral responses are mentioned are much lower where probes are used after general questioning than when people are asked directly about specific behaviors in closed-ended questions. The great divergence in frequencies generated by open and closed question formats raises questions about the salience of these behaviors. Further insight into these questions could be gained if more surveys followed

## 2. Avoidance

Avoidance often involves the omission of an act in response to the perceived risk of crime victimization. For example, a person may decide not to go out at night or not to engage in some activity. Difficult problems arise, however, when trying to measure the extensiveness of actions which might have, but did not, occur. This problem is analogous to the one faced by deterrence researchers who would like to know how many crimes did not occur because of the threat of punishment, although it is less threatening to ask people directly about avoided actions than about crimes not committed.

a. Spatial and Temporal Avoidance A significant number of people report that they do not go to some parts of their cities and neighborhoods because of the risk of victimization. The proportion of persons who report such behavior varies widely from survey to survey and with different question formats. In many cases these replies may exaggerate actual behavior if people include places they perceive as dangerous but where they never have had the need to go. The reported frequencies are substantially reduced when the factor of need is added to questions about avoidance.

Several studies mention that people often avoid certain types of locations. These include public parks, downtown areas of large central cities, rapid transit stations and youth hang-outs. Crime data indicates that these locales do not have as high or higher crime rates as the areas around them; however, they all represent places where informal social control is likely to be weak.

An extremely restrictive form of avoidance is staying at home. Such behavior conjures up images of persons who are captives in their own home. This image is particularly associated with the elderly who on the whole rarely

venture forth at night. However, some studies find that only about one-third of the elderly give crime as the reason for their lack of mobility. Once again we encounter the possibility of exaggeration of the degree of avoidance if the questioning is too general.

b. Situational avoidance The situations people most often report seeking to avoid are ones where they encounter strangers and/or groups of young people. Again a wide range of frequencies of such behavior is reported in surveys.

c. Activity specific avoidance The popular understanding of avoidance includes the expectation that crime has caused declining attendance at nighttime meetings, reduced entertainment and dining outings, and decreased the frequency of socializing. The frequency of such changes and their links to crime have rarely been documented. When researchers compare such behaviors among the elderly with the general population, they most often find that the elderly's behaviors are less restricted than is often thought. Even when restricted, crime is generally not the most important reason.

d. Indirect avoidance: the supervision of youth Youth are important sources of neighborhood crime information for their families and may also be the focus of their family's crime responses. Parents may try to decrease the exposure of their children to crime risks by establishing rules about where, when, and with whom they can play, visit and work. Although few studies have examined these family dynamics, the most comprehensive study indicates considerable effort on the part of adults to have teenage boys avoid certain dangerous places. This study dealt with inner city youth and may not be generalizable to families in other settings.

Considerable insight could be gained if in future studies of reactions

to crime more than one family member are interviewed and 11 family interactions about crime are made a principle focus of inquiry.

e. Transportation choices There is little doubt that some people choose modes of transportation with crime risks in mind. The issue is the extent to which crime is a factor. Few public transportation riders indicate that personal safety is a major factor in their decisions to use public transportation. Among those who are afraid, their need to get around often overrides their fears but sometimes leads to selective usage. Much higher proportions of residents living near public transportation routes express concern for their safety on buses and rapid transit lines. When probed further, however, many of these people have no need to use public transportation. Their lack of usage can not easily be classified as avoidance. Based on existing studies, it is difficult to conclude that ridership rates are strongly influenced by crime.

There are no studies which consider the full range of transportation alternatives including cars, taxis, and walking to determine possible interconnections of usage as it might relate to crime.

f. Relocation decisions Relocation is an extreme form of avoidance. As with transportation choices, the interesting question is not whether people consider safety in their residential location decisions, but how frequently safety plays a major role. Contrary to popular beliefs, the preponderance of evidence is that safety is infrequently a major factor in actual relocations. The strongest method of gathering data on relocation is to interview people before and after they move. Two studies which used this technique both found that crime is only a minor consideration in moving decisions.

Additionally, many more people report a desire to move than actually do so, although safety considerations are likely to loom larger for the poor and blacks who may want to move but are unable.

g. Social distribution of avoidance behavior By almost any measure women and older persons report more avoidance. This pattern may be a consequence of less active social roles as well as greater fear. Women and the elderly who must go to work report lower levels of avoidance, again underscoring the relevance of necessity to avoidance.

The association of avoidance with racial, income, and educational characteristics is less consistent and, where it has been found, is weaker than relationships found for age and sex. Several authors stress the importance of the respondent's place of residence to the associations of race and income with avoidance: blacks and low income people avoid more because they live in higher crime areas.

### 3. Protective Behavior

Protective behavior is what people do to deal with perceived risks when they cannot or will not physically avoid them. It includes symbols of resistance, which increase the appearance that resistance will take place. Protection by such symbols could involve walking with a large dog (even though the dog is timid) or applying a sticker to announce the existence of an alarm system (even though no alarm system was installed). Symbols of resistance, if believed by others, can be effective means of protection but we know of no direct tests of the efficacy of protective symbols by themselves. Large physical size and being male might be considered surrogate measures since both are very general signs in our society that greater resistance against physical attack will occur. Used as an indirect test,

maleness appears to be an ineffective symbol: victimization surveys show that males are victimized at higher rates than females, although exposure rates are not controlled for.

a. Home Protection Addition of security devices and increased home defense activities are both home protection behaviors. Across a large number of surveys about 40 percent of the respondents report having installed some security device "in the past few years". In almost all surveys, door locks are the most common device purchased; no other type of purchase or installation is reported by more than 10 percent of the respondents. The purchase of a security device, a dog or a weapon are infrequent "one time" events. Hence, when people are asked whether they have installed a device in the past year, a negative response does not necessarily mean that their home is less protected since such devices may already be in place.

Gun ownership has received the most attention from researchers. Guns and other weapons, if carried on the person, can be both home and self-protective devices. Depending on whether the purpose of protection is specified in the question, surveys report firearms ownership at rates of 10 to 50 percent, varying by city. The major purchasers of handguns are people who already own long guns, so that the large number of handgun sales in the late 1960's and early 1970's has led to a much smaller increase in the proportion of families owning guns.

Home defense activities involve the use of existing devices in the home such as locking doors and leaving lights on when leaving at night. They are often part of everyday routines in contrast to the infrequent purchases of security devices. A very high proportion of people report taking some home defense precautions, most commonly keeping homes locked at night and when going out.



people do to deter or resist victimization when they go outside their homes and may complement or replace avoidance. Going out with another person is the only self-protective behavior taken by more than 10 to 15 percent of the population; fewer carry weapons. If these frequencies are used as indirect measures of crime concerns, then people are as concerned with protecting their homes as they are with avoiding danger in public places.

c. Demographic correlates of protective behavior The demographic correlates are somewhat different for the two forms of home protective behaviors, and both are quite unlike what is found for self-protective behavior. Women, people with higher incomes and more education, home owners, and longer term residents are more likely to have purchased or installed security devices. By far, the largest difference is between women and men.

The social characteristics of people who are more likely to take home defense actions are closer to those of the people who are more likely to engage in avoidance activities -- women, blacks, the poor, the elderly, and the less educated.

The social characteristics associated with greater self-protective behavior other than going out with another person -- males, younger people, and to a lesser extent blacks-- are in marked contrast to all other forms of protective behavior.

Gun ownership patterns have received the heaviest attention. Contrary to popular belief, gun ownership is more characteristic of middle and upper income people than it is of the lower or working class. Also, males are much more likely to own guns than females.

#### 4. Insuring Behavior

Almost all people either have or want insurance to compensate them for

thefts. The pervasiveness of insurance against crime losses is sometimes obscured when studies report the proportion of people who recently obtained or increased their insurance which, as is the case with home protections devices, misses people who already had insurance. Low income people may not be able to afford insurance or are denied insurance because they are high risks. The issue of unfair "redlining"--when insurance underwriting practices deny insurance to whole areas--has increasingly become the concern of numerous neighborhood organizations.

Insuring behavior also includes a variety of other loss minimizing practices. People may not take a wallet, carry less money, or not buy an item for fear it will be stolen.

#### 5. Communicative Behavior: Talking About Crime

No studies concentrate on interpersonal communications about crime. We include "talking about crime" here to sensitize researchers to its potential importance and to increase the possibility that it becomes a topic of inquiry. Talk about crime is generally interpreted as an indication of a person's perceptions or of potential behaviors. In addition, talking about crime can be conceived of as a behavioral response itself. While it may not lead to any other action, it may provide a source of tension release, promote a sense of solidarity, and be an important source of crime information. We are certain that talk performs all these functions; future reserachers will have to determine its frequency, salience and content.

#### 6. Participatory Behavior

We consider a behavioral reaction to be participatory when it is done in concert with others. Most frequently such behaviors are part of formally organized activities, although participation may involve only a few other people who act together without a formal organization.

Participation is the individual aspect of organized collective responses to crime. The difference between an analysis of collective participation and an analysis of collective responses is one of perspective. Collective participation uses the individual as the unit of analysis. Individual level explanations involve individual perceptions, experiences, and demographic characteristics; typical collective response explanations involve characteristics of neighborhoods, or organizations, their resources, leadership and programs.

We discuss five types of participatory behavior -- informal, crime reporting, voting, programmatic, and organizational.

a. Informal participation Informal participation involves informal social control activities in situations where there are either violations of the law or norms closely related to illegal behaviors. Informal social control encompasses all informal means of regulating behaviors. The literature on informal participation deals primarily with reactions to the behavior of strangers. Two elements of this type of behavior are surveillance and intervention.

Surveillance refers to the observation of a home or of people on the street. The most conscious informal surveillance is the arrangement made between neighbors to watch each others homes when one or the other is away. Two surveys found this to be a common practice, particularly when people were away for more than a day.

Few surveys have asked people whether they regularly observe street activity. Based on very limited data it appears that a majority of people encounter what they perceive to be suspicious behavior several times each year. At least one study found that many people have difficulty

differentiating stranger from residents of their neighborhoods and this difficulty limits the effectiveness of surveillance.

Surveillance has particular importance when followed up by an intervention. Jane Jacobs in The Life and Death of American Cities presented a discussion of informal participation that influenced subsequent writing and crime prevention policies. She argued that informal social control is highly effective in multi-use urban neighborhoods where there is a large volume of round-the-clock street activity. The presence of people on the streets, combined with the incentive they provide for others to watch, leads to "natural surveillance." She believed that under such circumstances people would also be willing to intervene to deal with trouble or suspicious behavior.

Oscar Newman, in his equally influential book Defensible Space, suggests factors that change the use and definition of space to promote safety and the feeling of security. He reasons that people will be more likely to intervene if they perceive that the area where an activity is taking place "belongs" to them. No research has followed up on Jacob's work, but there have been limited attempts to test Newman's ideas in a more systematic way. Some evidence suggests that the factors Newman mentions may affect the willingness to intervene, but that the willingness is still quite low. People ignore most suspicious strangers and activities. Social psychological laboratory and field experiments indicate that people often do not define even unambiguous crime situations as requiring intervention. Much more effort is needed to develop ways to measure how helpful or interventionist people actually are.

Sociologists and criminologists often refer to the close connection of social integration and informal social control. They frequently assume the existence of informal control if they find social integration, but the

implications of different levels and types of social integration for the prevalence of surveillance and intervention are rarely examined. It is too important a relationship in current discussions of crime prevention to be left unstudied.

b. Crime reporting Crime reporting has received considerable attention as a result of the development of victim surveys and the extension of social psychological research on bystander intervention. According to most victim surveys, half or more of the victimizations were not reported. The most common reasons given by victims for not reporting are that the matter was too unimportant to warrant the time and that police could probably not do anything for them. Researchers generally agree that the more serious crimes are more likely to be reported, but the proportion of even serious crimes reported is low.

Some research describes alternative actions that victims may take other than reporting to the police. As yet, we do not know how prevalent or important these alternative actions are, but they suggest that not reporting to the police is not the equivalent to inaction. It would be helpful if surveys were to ask victims about other steps they may have taken before or instead of reporting a crime to the police. This may become a new source of data on behavioral reactions to crime.

The behavior of witnesses has been studied almost exclusively in social psychological laboratory and field experiments. The likelihood that witnesses will report varies with situational factors from almost 0 to 75 percent. The dominant theory is that the presence of others diffuses a witness's sense of responsibility for reporting. The extrapolation from such studies to real life situations is problematic for a large

number of methodological reasons, including the types of subjects and crimes used in experiments.

c. Voting There are no in-depth studies of "law and order" elections, or of the degree to which concern for crime has influenced voting patterns.

d. Collective participation refers to taking part in the activities of formal organizations and agencies which have programs designed to address the crime problem. Programmatic participation entails being the recipient of a program: the individual receives messages or resources, but has little influence or effect on the program's character. Organizational participation means active involvement and/or membership in some group: the individual is a part of the development and implementation of the program. Organizational participants are more likely to conceive of anti-crime programs as their own.

Few studies include data on the extensiveness of either type of collective participation. The most useful survey data on programmatic participation comes from evaluations of specific community crime prevention programs. There are also a number of case studies of particular collective efforts that describe both types of collective participation. These studies provide some sense of the content and rates of participation in particular programs, but we found few instances in which individuals were the units of analysis and where the variety of collective responses was considered. One Chicago study found as many as 17 percent of the population surveyed were involved with a group that had done something about crime but, since Chicago is exceptional in the strength of its neighborhood organizations, most other populations probably have lower rates of participation.

In most areas of human endeavor there is an inverse relationship between the intensity of effort and the number of people who take part;

fewer people are willing to commit larger amounts of time and effort. This relationship is found with regard to collective participation: the more demanding activities have fewer participants.

Full participation in voluntary activities is rare, and when used as a standard by which to assess collective participation, it can obscure important differences in organizational and programmatic participation rates. The appropriate participation goal will depend on the nature of the activity. Even one percent participation in an intensive activity like a citizen patrol would be quite an accomplishment, while much higher rates can be expected for surveillance and crime prevention education programs.

e. The social distribution of participation Except for collective participation, studies either fail to consider the demographic correlates or the findings are that participation does not vary with different demographic characteristics.

For collective participation, blacks and females have higher rates. The pattern is mixed for income, with higher income associated with participation in anti-burglary programs but no consistent findings for participation in neighborhood groups. Home ownership, residence in a single family dwelling, longevity of residence in the neighborhood, and married status all are positively correlated with collective participation. These latter four findings taken together give a picture of the more stable elements of neighborhoods forming the core of collective efforts.

### Crime Perceptions and Individual Behaviors

In this section we examine what is known about the correlates of individual behavioral reactions with crime perceptions. Since we



discussed three types of perceptions and six types of individual behaviors, many of which have subtypes, a large number of relationships could be examined. Not all of these have actually been studied to date. Hence, we discuss these relationships of perceptions to four types of behaviors: general behavioral change, avoidance, protective behavior and participation.

### 1. General Behavioral Change

Having changed or limited one's behavior is found to be strongly associated with fear of street crime, and moderately correlated with perceived risks of robbery and assault and perceived trends in neighborhood crime rates.

### 2. Avoidance

Spatial and temporal avoidance is positively associated with fear of street crime, perceived risk of victimization, and neighborhood crime rates.

### 3. Protective Behavior

Most studies find no relationship of protective behavior to fear, perceptions of risk, or crime rate. Several authors note that the extensiveness of protective behavior is quite low when compared with high levels of fear and perceived risk.

Gun owners consistently have lower levels of fear. Some suggested that owning a gun reduces fear, but further analysis shows that the association is spurious. Gun owners are more likely to live in a rural area and to be male, and both of these characteristics are associated with lower fear levels regardless of gun ownership. When, for example, the level of fear of male owners and nonowners who live in the same locale are compared, the relationship disappears. Gun ownership is then unrelated to fear as are other protective behaviors.

#### 4. Participation

Participants of all types generally have higher fear levels. In addition, collective participation -- whether it involves getting together informally with neighbors, attending a crime prevention meeting, or organizational activism -- is also associated with higher perceived risks.

The research on crime reporting has not concentrated on the relationship between reporting and perceptions of crime, but focuses instead on non-reporting. Most of the reasons for non-reporting are judgments about police efficacy or the nature of the crime. The most frequently mentioned reason was that police could not or would not do anything about the case. Some research suggests that this victim judgment is reasonably correct for the crimes mentioned.

#### 5. Perceived Efficacy of Behavioral Responses

A rational model of behavior would assume that people are more likely to engage in behaviors if they believe them to be effective. Several surveys, however, show a high degree of pessimism in people's judgments about their ability to protect themselves. An important exception to this view is the pervasive belief that neighbors can do something about crime together. Wherever this pattern of efficacy judgments is found, the public is likely to be more receptive to appeals for collective participation than for increased protective behavior.

#### 6. Conceptualizing Crime Perception/Behavioral Reaction Relationships

Our understanding of the relationships between individual behavioral reactions and crime perceptions is still at a rudimentary stage. Most studies report bi- and tri-variate relationships and lack a conceptual framework. One promising model from research on precautionary health behavior incorporates the readiness to act and the perceived efficacy of a

proposed course of action. Readiness to act involves perceived susceptibility or risk and the perceived seriousness of the health threat. Perceived effectiveness of particular actions are based on assessments of benefits and costs. When such a model was tested with longitudinal data, perceived risk but not perceived seriousness and efficacy were related to subsequent behavior.

Analogous variables for reactions to crime might be conceptualized and tested. The above model from the health field underscores our lack of knowledge about their perceived costs and benefits of protective and avoidance behavior. It also points to the need for longitudinal data to begin to move beyond correlational inferences.

Relationships between perceptions and behavior analogous to reactions to crime have also been analyzed in psychological studies of stress. They find that people may cope through direct action or by changing their definitions of the situation. The latter may be particularly likely when the prospects for behavioral coping are poor. These studies describe feedback processes between behavior and perceptions, but similar interpretations of crime perceptions have yet to be investigated.

#### Non-Perceptual Factors and Individual Behavior

Here we discuss the correlates of individual behaviors with non-perceptual factors. Although many variables could be included, we focus on the four which dominates the literature: other behaviors, crime risks, victimizations, and social integration.

##### 1. The Interplay of Individual Behaviors

Several studies examine the interplay of different types of behavioral

reactions. Avoidance and home protective purchases have no relationship; people who did one were no more or less likely to do the other. Programmatic participation (in an anti-burglary block club meeting) is strongly correlated with mutual house surveillance, home protection, insurance, and displaying operation identification stickers. These correlations may mean that attendance at crime prevention block meetings stimulates other behavioral reactions, or it may mean that people who are already trying other behaviors are more likely to attend block club meetings. Studies of participants in citizen patrols report an inverse relationship between this organizational participation and other behavioral responses.

## 2. Crime Rates and Individual Behaviors

With the exception of home protection purchases, most behavioral responses are higher where crime is higher. However, it is important to remember that even in the highest crime areas, as many as half of the residents may not engage in the behavior.

## 3. Victimization and Individual Behaviors

Researchers are more likely to find effects of victimization if they distinguish the victims of contact and property crimes from other victims. Only when contact crime victimizations are examined do studies find an effect on avoidance. Burglary victimizations have the only effect on home protection. All studies of self-protection behavior show effects of contact victimizations. There is also less systematic evidence that collective participants may have often been victimized prior to deciding to participate.

## 4. Social Integration and Individual Behaviors

Community crime prevention literature assumes that areas with higher social integration have more informal social control. This idea has yet to be adequately tested.

## Effects of Behavior

Here we look at the same relationships discussed in the previous section, but now consider the possible effects of certain behaviors on individual victimization rates, crime perceptions, and crime rates. In many cases we are reinterpreting correlational studies in which the authors interpreted their data as explaining behavior. Since the temporal ordering of the variables is unknown in many of these studies our reversal of the causal ordering is at least arguable.

### 1. Individual Victimization Rates

Causal inference is a problem with the bulk of the available data. Most studies are cross-sectional and correlational, which means that causal ordering may only be inferred. By inference, victimizations are usually explained to affect behavioral reactions. But since the causal ordering is unknown, we could instead infer that behaviors affected victimizations. Viewed from that perspective, many studies support the conclusion that individual behavioral reactions increase victimizations!

Several studies do show that participants in property marking programs have lower victimization rates. The only longitudinal study of the effects of any type of individual behavior found that programmatic participation (displaying window stickers given out by an anti-burglary program) reduced victimization for recent victims (when compared with subsequent rates for recent victims who did not participate). Studies of this latter form are particularly valuable.

There is considerable concern for possible victimization displacement from people who take various protective measures to people who do not. To date, this possibility has been untested.

## 2. Individual Behavior and Crime Perceptions

As we did with victimization rates in the previous section, we examine correlational studies that reverse the interpretation of causal ordering. Individual avoidance is associated with increases in fear. Informal surveillance increase fear of property crime, but home protective purchases have no effects on crime perceptions. These relationships are provocative and suggest lines of analysis that could easily be pursued in a number of other data sets.

## 3. Crime Rates

Aggregated behaviors of individuals, even if unorganized, could affect area crime rates. A pattern of high or low avoidance, protection, or participation in an area might affect the crime rates, but to date studies have only discussed these relations theoretically. They suggest that avoidance and protective behavior may decrease social interaction and informal social control which in turn could increase crime.

## Summary

We have covered a great many issues and findings in Part II. In this summary, we highlight some themes that cut across the topics discussed.

1. Research on behavioral reactions is very fragmented; studies deal with one or a few such behaviors at a time. Future studies which consider the range of options and strategies individuals utilize would be particularly useful. Such studies should increase our understanding of how these behaviors fit together and what patterns are associated with people living in certain locales.

2. Considerable evidence indicates that behavior is less affected by crime perceptions than often thought. For example, crime risks are minor

considerations in decisions about transportation usage, home relocation, recreational patterns, and going out at night (for the elderly).

3. Our understanding of avoidance behaviors would be enhanced if the perceived necessity to engage in certain behaviors is taken into account. Its importance is suggested by the finding that women and the elderly who work outside the home are less likely to engage in avoidance than those who do not.

4. People are already engaged in many of the relatively undemanding behaviors such as home defense, avoidance, and installing locks. An expansion of their home protective behaviors may mean a major increase in effort. At present, people generally do not perceive crime as a major personal problem and they are not optimistic about the effectiveness of additional protective and avoidance behaviors. There is evidence that some types of individual behaviors under certain conditions can reduce risks and fears, but these effects are not consistently shown.

5. Significantly increased avoidance behaviors may be unnecessary as well as counterproductive. Such behaviors are often based on stereotypes only loosely related to actual risks. Further, such behaviors may increase fears and, by lessening social interactions in public places, increase crime rates.

6. Higher area crime rates and greater levels of fear are consistently reported to be related to more avoidance, general behavioral changes and participation. Home protective purchases and self-protective behaviors, however, are related to a different set of factors and dynamics than the other types of behavioral reactions.

7. A relationship between social integration and informal participation (social control) is widely assumed and consistently linked to crime rates, but

the amount of direct evidence supporting this relationship is small.

### Part III -- Collective Behavioral Reactions to Crime

#### Introduction

Collective responses, as we define them, are efforts of private citizens to deal with crime by acting through collectivities such as neighborhood groups, community organizations, and programs. In this review, we concentrate on organized responses at the local level. Research on these phenomena is particularly scarce and as a consequence this part of the essay is less a review of the research and more a presentation of the authors' ideas than either of the first two parts.

We begin with a discussion of the sources of data on collective responses. Then we provide an historical overview of the role of collective responses to crime, summarize explanations for the increase in collective responses in the past 10 to 15 years, discuss several dimensions along which responses differ, and then consider specific conditions related to the emergence and/or stability of particular responses. Finally, we review the criteria and the available evidence on the effects of collective responses.

#### Sources of Data on Collective Crime Responses

Five principle sources contain ideas and information on collective responses to crime: a) evaluations of government-funded crime programs, b) reviews of a large number of programs and responses which present a minimal amount of original data, c) studies of a number of different types of responses using original data, d) in-depth case studies of a particular response.



or type of response, e) studies of various reactions to crime in one community or neighborhood, f) surveys of participation in formal or informal collective responses.

### Collective Responses to Crime: The Historical Context

Prior to 1830, the local community and its citizens had direct responsibility for defining and maintaining law. On a day-to-day basis, private citizens were routinely involved in the process of defining acceptable order and responding to breaches of that order. The development of the state was generally accompanied by the development of professionals to enforce, formulate, and adjudicate the law. The rise of professional law enforcement agencies and changes in scale and mobility within an industrializing and urbanizing society both undermined the sense of public responsibility for law enforcement.

Among the most prominent collective responses in the period of transition were vigilantes. The earliest form of vigilante activity operated where state institutions were absent or weak. Such frontier vigilantism usually upheld the substance if not the procedures of the law. A second, more violent form emerged in the middle of the 19th century to control racial and ethnic minorities. It functioned outside, but often with the approval of, established law enforcement agencies.

We should emphasize that other less dramatic forms of collective responses to crime occurred before, during, and since the period of peak vigilante activity. Despite the general trend away from lay involvement in law enforcement, a number of conditions work against its disappearance. First, citizens exert considerable control over what activities come to the attention of officials through their decisions to report or not report crimes.

Second, some groups are motivated to monitor criminal justice practices which they oppose. Third, collective action is stimulated when rising crime rates lead citizens to perceive the criminal justice system as limited or ineffective.

### General Causes of Contemporary Collective Responses

Recent writings suggest four factors account for the society-wide increase in collective responses in the past 10 years:

1. Rising levels of crime and fear,
2. A sense of the limits of the criminal justice system,
3. Encouragement of citizen involvement by the criminal justice system.
4. The development of community groups since the early sixties through which citizens can collectively respond to crime.

### Dimensions of Collective Responses

1. Orientation Toward The Problem of Crime: Crime Control, Crime Prevention and Victim Advocacy

Citizens address different issues when they seek to deal with crime. One dimension of collective response, then, is what part of the problem they choose to focus on. We identify three major aspects: crime control, crime prevention, and victim advocacy.

- a. Crime control Among the most frequently studied collective crime responses are those which stress surveillance of homes and streets and reporting of crimes and suspicious behavior. Other responses of this type concentrate on educating people about protecting themselves on the streets.

All of the above activities augment law enforcement functions. Some responses try to pressure criminal justice organizations to be more responsive to local problems. Meetings, demonstrations, court and jail monitoring are tactics which have been used to accomplish this goal.

Most studies of collective responses focus on formal organizations, and consequently miss informal control activities that function in many locales. Gerald Suttles in The Social Order of the Slum and the Social Construction of Communities describes how citizens in a low income area obtained a secure environment. An important aspect of this security was provided by youth gangs and, to a lesser extent, organized crime. They protected the area against "outsiders."

There are few other such studies and we do not know whether other neighborhoods have similar or other social arrangements to deal with outsiders or to deal with the misbehavior of family members. Are, for example, such patterns of informal social control found only in low income areas, in ethnic enclaves, or in areas with a high degree of social integration? Comparative ethnographic studies are likely to be the most appropriate approach for answering these and related questions.

b. Crime prevention Crime prevention activities can cover the whole range of factors which people believe cause crime. One of the most common practices is residential "target hardening." Residential anti-burglary activities stress educating people about protection measures they can take to make their homes more secure, and often include engraving valuable possessions. Such responses often have the support of the police and other criminal justice agencies.

Other groups have identified youth unemployment, drugs, deteriorating or abandoned buildings, unlit streets, neighborhood bars, prostitution, and adult

bookstores as targets of collective responses. Activities around these issues are less often studied as responses to crime because they are generally not funded by criminal justice agencies, are not carried out by local organizations primarily concerned with crime problems, or may not be labeled as responses to crime. Research which excludes these types of activities misses much of what people think of as collective responses to crime.

c. Victim advocacy and services While victim/witness services are most often provided by government agencies, citizen groups have pressured the police, courts, and prosecutors to be even more responsive to victim concerns. Some local groups also have provided services, particularly to rape victims and battered wives.

## 2. Particular Crime vs. General Crime Focus

Collective responses may deal with one type of crime or a range of crimes. Crime program planners commonly believe that a program which focuses on a particular crime rather than crime in general is more likely to succeed. The typical single focus is burglary or robbery.

## 3. Ad Hoc vs. Organized Response

Almost all studies of collective responses describe the activities of organized groups. Organized **responses** are larger in scale, have greater longevity, stability, and visibility. An ad hoc response may be a relatively spontaneous joint action of neighbors which is generally short-lived. These responses are difficult to identify, to sample, and to research. Their temporary qualities, however, do not mean that they cannot be effective in meeting local specific crime problems. Such possibilities cannot be evaluated without studies which focus on these phenomena.

## 4. Agency vs. Local Initiation

Collective responses may be initiated by a government agency or by a

local group. Locally initiated programs allow for more resident input in the planning of the response (organizational participation) and as a result are likely to be better tailored to the characteristics of the locale. Agency-initiated programs tend to apply ideas found effective elsewhere to several locales. They are likely to have greater resources and more full-time staffs.

The degree to which these tendencies operate or are salient requires systematic comparisons. At present these two types of collective responses are not included in the same studies.

#### 5. Crime vs. Multi-Issue Orientation

Groups responsible for a particular collective response may focus only on crime issues or may also have programs in a number of other issue areas. Collective crime responses are more often carried out by multi-issue organizations. In such settings crime must compete with other concerns for the organization's resources, but multi-issue organizations may be more likely to sustain membership as neighborhood concerns change. More research in the collective responses of these multi-issue organizations is needed before judgments about their success compared to crime-focused groups can be assessed.

#### 6. Four General Types of Collective Responses

Although the above dimensions can be combined in a great number of ways, three clusters of attributes are most frequently described in the research literature: 1) government initiated and funded responses which stimulate local collective efforts and emphasize programmatic participation, 2) locally initiated crime responses by multi-issue organizations which may or may not have funds specifically for their crime responses, 3) locally initiated crime specific organizations.

## Correlates of Collective Responses

We first discuss what is known about the emergence of collective responses and then consider their operation and stability.

### 1. The Emergence of Collective Responses

Here we only discuss the conditions under which locally initiated responses emerge since the introduction of agency-initiated programs involve decisions at the city and national level. Our own research suggests that some form of collective response is present in most urban areas. The key issues are not why these responses are present or absent, but why they are more or less extensive and intensive and why they take on a particular content.

a. Crime patterns There is little evidence to indicate whether collective crime responses are more likely in areas that have a particular level or type of crime. We do know that citizen patrols exist in neighborhoods with all levels of crime rates. Since voluntary organization participation is often associated with higher incomes and crime rates are generally higher in lower income areas, it is likely that crime rates and the prevalence of viable collective responses could be inversely related.

b. Aggregate perceptions of crime Localities can be characterized by their aggregate levels and patterns of fear or other crime perceptions. These characterizations are collective level variables that can be linked to collective responses and studied just as the relationship of individual perceptions and behaviors is studied. Existing studies provide no basis on which to discuss what levels of fear or perceived risk are more or less conducive to collective action. Most social science community studies have not found crime to be a frequent or urgent issue. A possibility derived from studies of other types of fear is that the relationship is curvilinear, i.e., there

are fewer collective actions when there are very high and very low fear levels.

c. Social integration Sociologists have long posited an inverse relationship between the strength of informal social controls and the emergence of formal ones: as informal controls weaken, formal ones emerge. Within this general process, the role of local collective responses is not specified. Such responses are somewhat in the middle range; more formal than informal controls, they are less formal than the official enforcement agencies. They may be responses to the weakening of formal institutions on the one hand, or to the weakening of informal controls on the other. There is a small amount of evidence to suggest that collective responses may be most active in locales that are at neither extreme of social integration and informal social control, but no systematic studies of this relationship are available.

d. Demographic characteristics of locales Areas with higher income and education have more voluntary associations. This finding has yet to be examined specifically for collective crime responses, but if a large proportion of crime responses occur within general neighborhood voluntary groups, then it is likely that a similar relationship will be found.

A somewhat contrary finding has received some empirical support. Blacks tend to participate in collective responses to crime more than whites, so there may be more collective activities in predominantly black urban areas.

## 2. The Stability of Collective Responses

Most voluntary organizations have a problem sustaining their efforts over time. Stability is often assumed to be a measure of success for organizations and collective responses; where sustained efforts are needed, stability

may be crucial. However, the identification of stability as one measure of success precludes the possibility that, under some circumstances, discontinuation may occur because the problem was solved or because the collective response was found to be ineffective.

The major studies of citizen patrols all note the difficulties sustaining a consistent level of effort. They note a number of conditions which enhance stability. These include: a) a continuing perception of crisis, b) charismatic leadership, c) a formal organization with financial support, d) rewards for the members so they feel effective and appreciated.

Descriptions of on-going responses rarely include information on a response's origins and they never describe a response's demise. Full natural histories of on-going and discontinued responses, when available, can serve as the basis for more data-based discussions of both emergence and stability.

### Effects of Collective Responses

There are few systematic evaluations of collective responses. The more careful the evaluation, the less likely it is to find clear evidence of an impact.

#### 1. Crime Impact

Lowering crime rates are often a major goal of collective responses. Such reductions are claimed to have occurred but rarely can such claims be thoroughly substantiated. At this point research findings are inconclusive.

#### 2. Crime Perceptions

Participants in collective responses perceive crime rates to have been reduced. Such judgments may reduce fear. There is no evidence to assess the impact of collective responses on fear, but three less obvious dynamics may occur: a) fear may be reduced whether or not there is a measurable



change in the crime rate, b) fear may be increased by the increase in information about crime which a collective response brings to people's attention, c) fears and perceived risks may be realigned with existing realities when provided with information by a collective crime response.

### 3. Crime Displacement

The possibility of crime displacement must be considered when collective responses have reduced crime in an area because such reductions may have resulted in crime shifting to another time or place. The absence of evidence for crime reduction makes this possibility primarily a design and theoretical interest at present.

Perceived displacement, regardless of the actual incidence of crime, is also a possibility. One locale may perceive that crime has increased as the result of changes in an adjoining area. Future studies of collective responses might collect data on what residents of adjoining areas thought about the collective response and its impact on crime in their area.

### 4. Social Integration

Two aspects of the impact of collective responses on social integration need investigation. First, do successful (in terms of crime and/or fear reduction) collective responses to crime increase social integration under some conditions? And, second, does the strategy of fighting crime by organizing a community into block clubs and/or neighborhood associations increase social integration while it reduces crime?

There is reason to doubt whether the efforts of local organizations can substantially affect social integration in the short run. Active participants are likely to become more individually integrated, but an overall community change is likely to be more illusive.

## 5. Community Organization

An important unanswered question is whether, and under what conditions, collective responses to crime strengthen community organizations. Several studies interpret such collective responses primarily as political and symbolic acts which signify disaffection from and resistance to the existing law enforcement apparatus. Political and symbolic collective responses strengthen organizational identity and provide a target for actions. A more radical formulation argues that collective responses reflect a need to demonstrate neighborhood groups' ability to define and handle troublesome behavior on their own.

The issue of community control once was a central concern but has now been replaced by other issues in most communities. The treatment of crime problems within community organizations can take many forms and is likely to reflect the group's general style and stance toward other major institutions. These variations, strains, and changes await future researchers' attention

### Summary

Because there are so few findings to report, we have provided a set of key variables, described some lines of inquiry, and indicated what our own research suggested. What appears at first as a fair amount of research on community crime prevention turns out to be primarily studies of programs run by the police and other agencies to impact on citizens. Relatively few studies consider the collective actions of citizens in organizations at the local level.

Although there are no quantitative studies to support it, there is widespread belief that the number of collective responses to crime has greatly increased over the past 10 to 15 years. These responses have either emphasized

crime control (surveillance and reporting) or crime prevention (residential target hardening or efforts to deal with the causes of crime). Responses dealing with causes have received much less attention than crime control responses.

Two highly relevant types of responses which also need to be included in collective crime response research are informal social control and ad hoc responses. These phenomena are difficult to study but provide an important part of the context in which more formal responses operate.

Comparative studies which consider the histories of on-going and discontinued responses provide a framework in which many of the questions about how responses emerge, develop, succeed, or fail can best be understood. For many other issues, such as the relationship between informal and formal collective responses, in-depth studies of all collective responses within specific locales are needed.

Perhaps the single most important set of relationships which need study involve collective responses to crime and the degree of social integration. A major assumption shared by researchers and policy makers is that collective crime responses can help increase the sense of community which, at the same time, will support informal social control processes and then will reduce the incidence of crime. Though appealing, these relationships have not yet been substantially studied nor confirmed.

#### Final Remarks

We have sought to accomplish several interrelated tasks in this essay. We have described a set of issues and relevant literatures in a field of inquiry called "Reactions to Crime." We have reviewed studies that address relevant topics, commented on issues where such findings were lacking, and

suggested a range of topics and research strategies for further work in this field. Whether or not the reader is convinced that there are a set of unifying questions in this topical area, the essay provides a vocabulary for talking about comparable data across studies which have too often been encumbered by conceptual confusion.

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