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# Transmitting Information About Crime and Crime Prevention to Citizens: The Evanston Newsletter Quasi-Experiment

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In nearly every community across the United States, citizens do not have easy access to official information about the amount and type of crimes occurring in their own neighborhoods. In many instances, the police may assume that the public would not be interested in such information, and thus have never considered releasing it on a regular basis. Yet in many other municipalities, police chiefs, with the support of local government officials, have made a conscious attempt to regulate the crime information that is released to the general public. Thus, the public has had to rely on the media to "inform" them about crime. Through the media, most citizens are exposed only to annual police statistics (aggregated for the entire municipality) or to sensational incidents, selected by the media, that most often do not validly represent either the type or amount of crime occurring at the neighborhood level.

In many municipalities, the police department prepares a daily bulletin or listing of crime incidents that is "theoretically" available to the general public. However, most citizens are unaware of this listing. Furthermore, when citizens are aware ofsuch information, and it is readily accessible to them, it is not likely to be in a form that can be easily used by citizens.

We can speculate that there are many reasons why information about the nature and extent of local crime has been controlled by public officials. From a traditional police administrative standpoint, fighting crime has been seen as police work, and therefore it is argued that only the police need detailed information about crime. Following this reasoning, it is assumed that the citizenry should be satisfied with summary statistics (typically misused by the media) to assess the extent of local crime problems and, thus, evaluate police performance. Other "police" reasons for regulating crime information include the protection of victims' privacy and safeguarding ongoing investigations. However, these reasons would only justify information about specific victims and suspects.

The most dominant reasons for restricting the dissemination of crime information probably have to do

with local politics and with untested assumptions about citizens' perceptions of crime. Elected officials appear very sensitive to information that they assume will generate public outrage about a crime problem. More legitimately, there is genuine (yet unsubstantiated) concern that exposing citizens to detailed information about crime in their neighborhoods will generate excessive fear. Are these concerns justified? How *does* neighborhood-level crime information affect the general public? These are important questions that need to be answered.

At a time when the U.S. Department of Justice is marshalling a nationwide public service media campaign to alert citizens to their responsibility to prevent crime, it is paramount that we understand how citizens react to information about crime and crime prevention.[1] Unfortunately, most policy decisions in this topic area have been made on reasoned hunches and not on known facts (Waller 1979). This even includes the planning of the advertisements for the national media campaign.

We have recently conducted research in Evanston, Illinois, that begins to address the impact of releasing neighborhood level crime information to citizens within the context of community crime prevention programming. Before describing this research, though, we will discuss our thoughts about the importance of releasing to the citizenry specific information about neighborhood crime.

## Why Crime Information Should be Released to Citizens

It appears that we are entering a new era of crime control, with agreement among many criminal justice scholars and practitioners that effective crime prevention is primarily the product of citizens (especially neighborhood residents) working together to make their homes and neighborhoods safe (Curtis 1982; Lavrakas and Herz 1982; Rosenbaum 1981a, 1981b, 1982a, 1982b; Silberman 1978; Waller 1979; Yin 1979). However, this new community-focused preventive approach to crime control also emphasized the mutual dependency and cooperation that is necessary between citizens and police to "co-produce" public safety (Pennel 1978; Percy 1979; Lavrakas et al. 1981; Lavrakas in press).

Since the late 1960s, millions of dollars have been spent to promote community crime prevention. Much of this money came directly from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Retrospectively, it is easy to see that there was insufficient planning o» how to best spend this money. The funding went to support programs that merely "sounded good" (for example, Operation LD. and Neighborhood Watch) without adequate thought given to how to successfully implement them (Lavrakas in press). Yet with a decade of research and evaluation of community crime prevention programs behind us, we now know it is no easy task to get citizens to take (and maintain) anti-crime measures (Bickman and Lavrakas 1976; Girard et al. 1976; Heller et al. 1975; Yin et al. 1977). It is not enough to merely tell citizens that they should be the "eyes and ears" of the police and expect them to act accordingly.

If citizens are to be expected to engage in (both individual and collective efforts (o prevent crime, is it sufficient to merely give them general directives (hat apply to all communities? Or do citizens need natore specific information to be fully motivated and effective in their fight against crime? The police *are* wery dependent on neighborhood-level crime information for internal planning and resource allocation, including directed patrols. Should the police be the only omes in a community who are allowed to respond to local crime in a knowledgeable and directed manner? We do not think so. Instead, we reason that citizens' amti-crime efforts will be most effective when they too are directly responsive to specific local crime problems (cf. Tyler in press).

Recognizing the desire of citizens 10 have meme information about crime, a few municipalities have started to release more detailed or localized crime statistics for large municipal areas (for example, Portland, Oregon; Los Angeles, California; a»d Montgomery County, Maryland). However, rarely is block-level crime data systematically released, and So our knowledge, never has it been simultaneously disseminated with crime prevention information.[2]

Thus, following the above reasoning, we maintain that citizens must be aware of specific local crinae

'The "Take a Bite Out of Crime" media campaign featuring McGmff, the crime prevention dog-detective, has been developed and implemented as a joint venture by the National Institute of Justice, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, and the Ad Council. A national survey in November 1981 found that half of all adult Americans have been exposed to McGruffs message, and further results indicate that the campaign is having an overall positive effect on the general public (O'Keefe 1982).

[2]Some community organizations and police departments " do have newsletters which contain crime prevention tips, t»t not specific local crime information. There are other iw-stances in which community news is consciously edited of crime-related issues in fear that housing prices will plummet.

information before they will respond in the scope and manner thai has been called for by criminal justice administrators over the past decade, and is currently being advocated in the national anti-crime media campaign. While we cannot be certain of the impact releasing specific crime information will have on the general public, we can form some reasoned judgments by reviewing the reactions-to-crime research of the 1970s.

## Hypothetical Effects of Releasing Crime Information to the General Public

Releasing specific information about the crimes occurring at the neighborhood level may have an emotional/attitudinal impact on individual citizens, which in turn may affect their behavior. Furstenberg (1971) was the first to distinguish between two primary independent emotional/attitudinal reactions to crime by citizens. He found that/rar *qf crime* was related to a person's anxiety over his own vulnerability of becoming a crime victim, while *concern for crime* was related to a person's opinion about the severity of the crime problem in some given locale (for example, neighborhood or city). This important distinction between fear and concern has been supported by a decade of subsequent research (Baumer and Rosenbaum 1982; Skogan and Maxfield 1981). Furthermore, these two emotional/attitudinal reactions to crime have been found to be related to very different behavioral reactions (Lavrakas et al. 1981): while/ear of crime seems to most often lead citizens to merely restrict their own behaviors, *concern* for crime is usually not manifested as behavioral restrictions, but instead appears related to the decision to deploy household-based anti-crime measures and/or to engage in neighborhood-based (that is, territorial) anti-crime strategies.

Given this range of possible citizen reactions to crime information, releasing such information to the public may increase *fear* of crime and/or may raise *concern* for crime as a problem in some given locale. If it leads to increased fear, it should cause people to restrict their behaviors more. If it leads to increased concern, it may cause people to engage in more household and/or neighborhood anti-crime measures. (This second outcome is clearly the preferred one.) Yet another possibility is that both fear and concern will be increased by exposure to specific information about neighborhood crime, with some resultant mixture of behavioral responses.[1] Which of these outcomes should be expected? Consistently, fear of crime has been found to correlate most strongly with the demographic characteristics of individual citizens. In the general population, the strongest determinant of fear is sex, with women being significantly more fearful than men (Baumer 1980). Other demographic characteristics (for example, age and race), experiential characteristics (for example, having been a victim or witness to a crime), and contextual factors (for example, living in a city vs. suburban area, or living in an area with a high proportion of poor residents) also correlate with fear of crime, but none of these accounts for fear to the same extent as sex (Lavrakas 1981; Lavrakas 1982). One could argue, therefore, that exposure to crime information may not have a sizable fear-arousal effect, since fear is primarily a function of demographiic characteristics, not of exposure to crime, especially through secondary sources such as crime statistics (cf. Tyler in press).

Regarding concern for crime, it appears only logical that exposure to specific local crime information should directly affect citizens' perceptions about the amount, and thus the severity, of the local crime problem. While Skogan and Maxfield (1981) suggest that citizens' concern for crime is determined by more than the mere frequency of local crime, the actual frequency of crime in a given community (at least as reflected by reported crime rates) is significantly related to the level of concern held by its citizens.[3]

Thus, a review of past research suggests that releasing specific information about local crime to citizens may have the following effects:

1. levels *of fear* of crime may increase, but not to any sizable extent,
2. levels of *concern* for crime as a-local problem should increase significantly, and
3. the extent to which citizens deploy anti-crime measures may increase.

Apart from these three major hypotheses, it is possible that exposure to specific information about crime prevention and local crime may have interaction effects with certain demographic subgroups of the population. For example, older long-term residents of a community may find such information especially threatening to their "idealized" image of their neighborhood (that is, "the good old days" syndrome); thus, their fear and/or concern may increase more than younger adults. In addition, it is possible that women

[3] Unpublished findings from a random telephone survey of 1,803 residents in 221 communities in the Chicago metropolitan area, conducted in 1979 by P. J. Lavrakas and Wesley G. Skogan, at the Center for Urban Affairs, Northwestern University.

will react differently than men; for example, levels of fear among women may be greatly increased while remaining stable in men.

### The Evanston Newsletter Quasi-Experiment

In 1981, the Evanston, Illinois, Police Department, in collaboration with a consortium of local citizen organizations (called the "Residential Crime Prevention Committee"), developed and distributed an experimental newsletter to Evanston residents that contained specific information about neighborhood crime and information about crime prevention techniques. An evaluation of this innovative approach to police-community interaction was conducted after 3 months of newsletter distribution to determine citizens' reactions to these kinds of information. In this paper we report the results of this research, which should be of special interest to police administrators and public officials concerned with how citizens may react to an open, comprehensive,""and systematic release of crime-related information within the context of community crime prevention programming.

## METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

### Development of an Anti-Crime Newsletter

In the spring of 1981, a random telephone survey of 574 residents of Evanston, Illinois, was conducted as part of the police department's "Police-Community Comprehensive Crime Prevention Program" (Kaminski, Rosenbaum, and Lavrakas 1983). The results of this survey served the basis for a series of recommendations about anti-crime programming in Evanston (Lavrakas, Herz, and Normoyle 1981; Normoyle and Lavrakas 1981). One of the key recommendations was to increase the communication flow from the police to the citizenry via a monthly newsletter. This recommendation was based on the survey findings that many Evanstonians wanted more direct contact with the police, including information about the nature and scope of crime in their neighborhoods.

Another recommendation was for the formation of a residential advisory board to help the police department plan the actual anti-crime programs that would be implemented. This advisory board was formed in August 198Tand was composed primarily of representatives from community organizations throughout the city. Since its formation, this board, which became known as the Residential Crime Prevention Committee, has met twice a month, with attendance averaging about 15 persons. A major strategy agreed upon by the advisory board and the police department was to develop a crime prevention newsletter. A decision was made to disseminate the newsletter on a limited and controlled basis until its impact could be assessed. Thus, with the consent and support of police administrators, approximately 1,500 copies (each) of 2 versions of the newsletter were disseminated to residents on a monthly basis for 3 consecutive months in 1982. The two versions of the crime prevention newsletter differed (as explained below in more detail) in that one contained a listing of most Index Offenses reported to the police during the previous month, while the other version did not contain crime listings.

### Design and Content of the Newsletter

The design (appearance) and content of the newsletter were carefully planned by the police staff and advisory board members. The objective was to develop a newsletter that would be visually attractive and at the same time address the specific crime prevention needs of residents.

The design objective was to have a clear, concise, appealing format which was easy to read. With this in mind, several decisions were made: the newsletter was printed on both sides of 8'/2" x 11" heavy stock paper, soft beige in color with black ink. The print was typeset along with graphics. The finished product was intended to have a professional appearance, in part to reinforce the seriousness of the newsletter to residents, and to enhance its readability.

The choice of a title for the newsletter was also deemed important. The police and the advisory board felt the title should symbolize the anti-crime message they were promoting. Thus, after lengthy discussion, "ALERT" was chosen to catch residents' attention, and as the acronym for the basic message the newsletter would try to communicate: "Action, Lookout: Evanston Residents Together."

Regarding content, the intent was to provide helpful crime prevention information to residents and to reinforce these concepts through actual examples of success. Following these guidelines, several types of articles were written. In "Protect Your Home," residents were given simple (that is, easy to implement) ways to protect homes against burglaries, primarily aimed at target-hardening of doors and windows. In "Citizens Fight Back," true examples were given of recent successful anti-crime actions by local citizens (identifying the resident by first name and last initial only). Each issue also had a main feature article dealing with "Neighborhood Watch," "Burglaries Take Time," and "Evanston Police Week." Finally, the newsletter described ongoing community activities and pub-

licized community meetings.

Because of the controversial nature of releasing. crime information directly to the public, care was taken to explain the purpose of this endeavor via the following preface, which appeared before the actual crime listings:[4]

> Las! May (1981). a survey was conducted of Evanston residents' attitudes about crime and public safety. A number of residents who were surveyed said that they wished the police would provide the community with more information aboul the amount and types of crime that occurred in their neighborhoods.
>
> This attachment to your copy of ALERT is an attempt to provide you with such information. It tells you the number and types of crimes thai were reported from your area to the Evanston Police Department during a recent one-month period.
>
> The amount of crime that occurred in your area of Evanston should not necessarily surprise you. Nationally, about 14 percent of all households are victimized by the crimes of burglary, assault, robbery, motor vehicle theft, and/or rape. Since your area of Evanston contains about 5,000 households, you could expect. based on these national averages, that about 20-25 of these crimes would be reported to have occurred in your area each month.[5] But since Evanston lies near a major city, this "expected" rate of crime could be much higher.
>
> The purpose of providing this type of information to you. as a resident is to give you a better idea of what's happening in your neighborhood. We hope this will allow you and your neighbors to decide if you need to become more actively involved in looking out for each other's well-being. Remember, "by themselves, the police can only react to crime: they need an involved citizenry to prevent it!"

For this version of the newsletter, a printed sheet (same size, stock, color, and ink) containing the crime information was stapled to the rest of the newsletter. The actual listing of crimes was preceded by the preface listed above, and was presented in column form showing "type of crime," "date of occurrence." and "location by city block." So as to target specific information about crime in a particular neighborhood, three different forms of this crime attachment were prepared. One form listed reported crimes for east Evanston, another form for west Evanston, and the third form for northwest Evanston. Table 1 shows the number of "serious crimes" that residents in these

[4]This preface appeared only in the version of the newsletter thai contained the crime listings.

[5]While not explained in ihe newsletter attachment, these '"estimates" were based on the notion that many of these crimes go unreported, and thus could not be listed in the newsletter.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF REPORTED PART I CRIMES LISTED IN NEWSLETTER ATTACHMENT BY MONTH AND AREA

| | Reported Number of Crimes[3] | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | March | | | April | | | May | | |
| Type of Crime | E | W | NW | E | W | NW | E | W | NW |
| Murder | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rape | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Aggravated Assault | 0 | 4 | 0 | I | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Personal Robbery | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | t | 0 | I | 2 | 0 |
| Commercial Robbery | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Commercial Burglary | 0 | 1 | 0 | **2** | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| Residential Burglary | 9 | 8 | 11 | 12 | 14 | 4 | 8 | 12 | 19 |
| Motor Vehicle Theft | 5 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| Burglary to Auto | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Theft to Auto Access | 8 | 15 | I | 8 | 10 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 2 |

"These are only summary figures. The actual version with the crime attachment listed each of these incidents by city block and by date of occurence.

areas were shown to have reportedly occurred in each month prior to the dissemination of the newsletter

### Evaluation/Research Design

As mentioned above, the City of Evanston was divided into different neighborhood regions (northwest, northeast, west, central, east, and south) in order to test the impact of the different versions of the newsletter using a quasi-experimental evaluation design. In each of three regions (NW, W, and E), 500 households received a version of the ALERT newsletter with a listing of all reported burglaries, assaults (including rape), robberies, and auto vehicle crimes that were reported to have occurred in the past month in their part of Evanston. (That is, three different forms of this crime attachment were produced, each for a particular region of the city.) In each of the other 3 regions of the city (NE, C, and S), 500 households received the newsletter without any crime listing attachment. (Because^of-budget constraints, the police department could only pay for the printing of 3,000 newsletters per month, and relied on the community organizations that were active on the advisory board to disseminate the newsletters in the areas of the city they served. Fortunately, these organizations represented areas throughout the city, thus assuring a geographic balance to the dissemination of the newsletter.)

After the newsletter had been sent out for 3 months, a telephone interview was conducted with 1 adult in each of 169 households that indicated having received ALERT. These households were randomly selected from the mailing lists used by the community organizations to disseminate the 3,000 copies.

At the same time that these newsletter interviews were conducted, another set of telephone interviews was completed with a random sample of Evanston residents as part of a 1981-82 panel study. As it turned out, most of the households in the panel sample (90 percent) were not exposed to the ALERT newsletter, and thus could serve as an unexposed "'control" group. As a result, the evaluation design included three groups for comparison purposes: (1) a random sample of residents who did not receive any version of the newsletter (n = 322), (2) a random sample of residents who received the version of the newsletter without the neighborhood crime attachment (n = 73), and (3) a random sample of residents who received the version of the newsletter with the neighborhood crime attachment (n = 96).

### Survey Questionnaire

All persons who were interviewed were asked standard questions about their concern for and fear of neighborhood crime (Baumer and Rosenbaum 1982; Lavrakas, Baumer, and Skogan 1978; Furstenberg 1971), about anti-crime measures they employed (Lavrakas et al. 1981), and about demographic characteristics. In addition to these items, a 23-item sequence of closed-ended and open-ended questions about the newsletter was included. This sequence branched to various items depending on whether the respondent received the newsletter, had read the newsletter, and had received the version with the crime attachment.

## RESULTS

The analyses reported here are based on a comparison of the following groups: 62 persons who received the version of the newsletter without the crime attachment, 84 persons who received the newsletter with the crime attachment, and 322 persons who did not receive either version of the newsletter. (For 23 of the 169 interviewed persons who received the newsletter, a check on which version they claimed to have read did not correspond with our records on which version they purportedly received. Because of this inconsistency, these 23 respondents were not included in the following analyses.)[6]

### Fear/Concern Hypotheses

Our primary research questions concerned the impact of the different versions of the newsletter on residents' own feelings of safety and on their attitudes/knowledge about crime in their neighborhoods. One could hypothesize that the distribution of a newsletter that contains crime prevention tips may be a signal that "crime must be a problem, or else we wouldn't need these tips." If so, then we might expect that mere exposure to the newsletter (regardless of version) would correlate with an increased perception of the amount of neighborhood crime (that is, more *concern* about crime) and increased feelings of personal vulnerability to crime (that is, more/ear of crime). If this reasoning were accurate, then we would expect that residents who received the version of the newsletter

[6]A possible criticism of this research design would be to argue that the three areas of the city that received the version with crime listings were not "equivalent" with the other three areas that received the newsletter without the crime attachment. Yet a check on "area differences" using the 1982 citywide random sample (n = 377) found no significant differences in fear or concern between NW, W, and E Evanston vs. NE, C, and S Evanston.

with the crime attachment would show the most concern and/or fear.

On the other hand, if the alternative reasoning we advanced earlier was accurate—namely, that tear of crime is most directly linked to persona! characteristics, such as sex, and not to information about the neighborhood environment, such as crime rates—then we might expect an increase only in *concern* (especially among residents who received the version that listed local crimes) and not in *fear.*

Looking at table 2. it is the latter of these two hypotheses that is supported by the overall pattern of results. That is. while residents" perceptions about the amount and severity of crime in their neighborhoods were greaier for those who received the newsletter (regardless of version), their own tear of crime was not significantly greater than those residents who were not exposed to the newsletter. Six items measured residents' fears for street crime and household crime. None of the differences across groups for these items is significant (see table 2)- That is. regardless of whether they received the version with the crime attachment, the version without the crime attachment, or no newsletter, residents (as a group) perceived themselves as no more personally vulnerable to crime than did the other groups.

In contrast, the percentages shown in table 2 under the heading. General Crime Items, provide consistent support for the hypothesis that exposure to the newsletter increased perceptions about the amount of crime in one's neighborhood, especially among residents who received the version with the crime listings. The group that read the newsletter with the crime attachment was: (1) most likely to feel that the amount of crime in their neighborhood had increased in the past year. (2) most likely to regard burglary as a '"big" problem in their neighborhood, and (3) most likely to know of a burglary and/or street crime victim in their neighborhood. These differences are statistically significant ($p<.05$).

TABLE 2

CRIME-RELATED ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS BY TYPE *OV* INFORMATION RECEIVED

| | Percentage Responding | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal Safety items | No Newsletter | Newsletter No Crimes | Newsletter Crime List |
| Feel "not al all safe" inNBHDat night | II | 13 | 16 |
| Feel less safe in NBHD since last year | 15 | IK | 16 |
| Avoid going out in NBHD alone al night | 13 | 15 | 13 |
| Worried about break-in al home when gone | 19 | 19 | 25 |
| Worried about break-in al home while at home | 8 | 5 | 8 |
| Feel more worried about break-in since last year | 27 | 31 | 24 |
| General Crime Items | | | |
| Perceived incr. in NBHD crime since last year | 25 | 30 | 42 |
| Perceive burglary to be '"big" problem in NBHD | 16 | 19 | 35 |
| Know of burglary victim in NBHD | 33 | 50 | 67 |
| Perceive assault to be "big" problem in NBHD | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Perceive robbery to be "big" problem in NBHD | 6 | 2 | 6 |
| Know of street crime victim in NBHD | 15 | 23 | 32 |

These results support the reasoning that the newsletter—especially the version with the crime listings-served an ••information-transmission" function *without* an accompanied "fear-arousal" effect. While preliminary in nature, we believe these results are very important. As Lavrakas et al. (1981) found, fear-arousal appears most strongly correlated with restricting one's behavior rather than taking proactive anti-L'rime measures (for example, engraving one's valuables or joining blockwatch). In contrast, if the saliency of local crime problems increases, the public seems more likely to engage in collective anti-crime actions as part of their participation in local voluntary organizations (Lavrakas and Herz 1982). Thus, if the newsletter with the crime attachment can raise the public's concern for crime without increasing fear at the same time, one could expect exposure to the newsletter to contribute to the public's propensity to engage in proactive, rather than restrictive, anti-crime responses.

Table 3 shows that this reasoning is also supported by the survey results. That is. those residents who received the newsletter—again, especially those who

received the version with the crime attachment—were most likely to report taking a variety of proactive anti-crime measures. Furthermore, when asked if they had "done anything or considered doing anything about crime" since reading the newsletter, those who received the version with the crime listings were most likely to report being motivated by the newsletter.

Finally, as also shown in table 3, residents who received the newsletter with the crime attachment were more likely to attribute responsibility for preventing crime to citizens rather than to the police. That is, when asked "who" was more responsible for neighborhood crime prevention (the police or the residents?), only 8 percent of those who received the version that listed local crimes attributed sole responsibility to the police, compared with more than 25 percent of the residents who received the other version or no newsletter at all.

TABLE 3

RESIDENTS' ANTI-CRIME MEASURES BY TYPE OF INFORMATION RECEIVED

| | Percentage Responding | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Anti-Crime Measure | No Newsletter | Newsletter No Crimes | Newsletter Crime List |
| Use timer at home | 54 | 53 | 71 |
| Use special locks at home | 51 | 53 | 63 |
| Use special lights at home | 22 | 26 | 51 |
| Ask neighbors to watch home when away | 77 | 86 | 85 |
| Attend NBHD crime prevention meeting | 4 | 27 | 29 |
| Motivated by ALERT to take anti-crime action | N/A | 33 | 43 |
| Attribute sole responsibility to police for crime prevention | 27 | 28 | 8 |

## Additional Effects of the Newsletter

Apart from the major hypotheses explored by this research, there are additional results that help to clarify the effects of the newsletter.

*Length of Residence and Exposure to the Newsletter.* As mentioned earlier, the newsletter may have different effects on different types of citizens. For example, long-time residents may have their perceptions of their neighborhood "threatened" by the newsletter, especially the version that lists local crime. However, as shown in table 4, there is no indication that this happened, apart from the significant correlation between years of residence and a perceived in-

TABLE4

PARTIAL CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CRIME-RELATED PERCEPTIONS AND LENGTH OF RESIDENCE, CONTROLLING FOR ACE AND SEX, WITHIN EACH GROUP

| | Partial Correlations with Length of Residence | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crime Perceptions | No Newsletter Group | Newsletter No Crimes Group | Newsletter Crime List Group |
| Perceived change in NBHD crime in past year | .026 | .193* | .003 |
| Satisfaction with NBHD | .035 | .018 | .141 |
| Own fear in NBHD | -.042 | -.087 | -.368*** |
| Own avoidance in NBHD | .001 | -.025 | -.114 |
| Worry about break-in while gone | .047 | .137 | .060 |
| Worry about break-in while at home | .215*** | .045 | -.013 |

*p<.10, **p<.05,***p<.01

crease in neighborhood crime in the past year, for those who received the newsletter without the crime listings. In fact, contrary to what might have been expected, it was found that length of residence was significantly correlated with *less fear* of crime in one's neighborhood (that is. greater feelings of safety) for those who received the version with the crime attachment. While we can only guess at an explanation for this result, we have heard from some residents who received the version with the crime attachment, that they had always thought—based on reading the local town newspaper for years—that there was more crime in their neighborhood than the newsletter indicated.

*Residents' Assessments of the Newsletter.* As part of the telephone surveys, residents who received the newsletter were asked a number of questions about their likes and dislikes of the newsletter. Regardless of which version they received, over 80 percent stated that they would like to continue receiving the newsletter. Furthermore, of those who received the version with the crime attachment, 83 percent said the listing of local crimes should be continued in subsequent newsletters, with the other 17 percent split between saying (he listing of crime "should slop" or saying that they were "uncertain-"

Residents were also asked to rate "how informative." "how interesting," and "how attractive" they found the newsletter. As shown in table 5. residents who received the version with the crime attachment rated the newsletter as significantly more informative and more interesting than those who received the version without the crime attachment. Women, regardless of version, rated the newsletter as significantly more informative and more interesting than men. And older adults, regardless of version, were significantly more positive in each of these ratings than younger adults. Finally, less educated adults, regardless of version, found the newsletter more interesting than did adults with relatively more education.

## DISCUSSION

!n this era of increased acknowledgment of the public's "right to know" through freedom of information laws, the research described in this paper is quite timely. Furthermore, it comes at a time of increasing recognition of the limits of criminal justice system agencies in the fight against crime. With an ongoing national media campaign calling on citizens to "take a bite out of crime," this research addresses some existing knowledge gaps on how best to motivate citizens to "co-produce" public safety.

We are the first to acknowledge that the results presented here are of a preliminary nature, that is, we cannot be certain of their generalizability. But they do represent an important first step in what could be an extremely useful approach to involving citizens in the crime prevention process. To our knowledge, this quasi-experimental dissemination of an anti-crime newsletter in Evanston, Illinois, is the first time that specific information about neighborhood crime has been released to the public in a controlled, and thus testable, fashion.

Our results indicate that releasing carefully planned communications about crime prevention, which include the listing of all "serious" local crimes, cannot automatically be expected to scare citizens. Instead, the observed effect of such a newsletter, as described here, was almost "ideal." That is, citizens' *concern* for crime as a local problem was raised, but their own feelings of vulnerability were not. Compatible with these findings is past research which suggests that it is

TABLE 5

CORRELATIONS OF RESIDENTS' ASSESSMENTS OF THE NEWSLETTER WITH VERSION, SEX. AGE. AND EDUCATION

| | Correlations with: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Informative | Interesting | Attractive |
| Version (no crimes = 0, list crimes = 1) | .218*** | .246*** | .085 |
| Sex (males = 0, females = 1) | .180** | .171** | .065 |
| Age | .136* | .177** | .204** |
| Education | -.063 | -.131* | .065 |

***p<.10,**p<.05.***p<.01**

the saliency of the local crime problem that should be raised if we want the public to engage in more proactive anti-crime activities (Lavrakas et al. 1981).

Furthermore, we found support for the notion that citizens *want* specific information about crime in their neighborhoods, and that they are more positively disposed to a newsletter that includes such information. This too is important, because for information to have its desired impact, citizens must first pay attention to it. As shown by the results, citizens were most positively affected by the version of the newsletter that included the crime attachment. Not only were they most likely to find it interesting and informative, but they appeared to be more motivated to adopt anti-crime responses than did the group that received a newsletter without the crime listings.

### Qualifications on this Research

As we stated above, the findings presented here must be treated as preliminary. Thus, we are not suggesting that evAy police department should now begin providing specific information about local crime to residents in its jurisdiction. The dissemination of the anti-crime newsletter described here was part of a larger crime prevention process that began with a careful documentation of local crime problems through a random survey of residents' perceptions and desires (Kaminski et al. 1983). That survey indicated that the target population (the residents of Evanston) wanted more direct contact with their police department, including statistics about the nature and magnitude of serious crime in their neighborhood. As described here, the development and dissemination of the ALERT newsletter was a direct response to those findings. Furthermore, circumstances that allowed the newsletter to be developed may not be present in all communities: in Evanston. we had a willing cadre of community groups to help the police department develop and disseminate the newsletter Also, the department willingly freed up the personnel time necessary to aggregate the monthly crime reports for each area of the city. However, neither of these assets should be difficult to reproduce in other municipalities, assuming those in authority want to replicate the Evanston experience.

One word of caution, though, must be given to another " limitation" of this research. While the neighborhoods in which ALERT was distributed are by no means "crime-free." we do not know if the release of such a newsletter would raise concern for crime without raising fear of crime in neighborhoods with much more severe crime problems (for example, inner-city neighborhoods). It is possible that there is a threshold effect concerning the "amount" of specific crime information the public can "know" about before their fear will escalate. Evanston's crime problems are primarily property-related. **All** this suggests that other attempts to release crime information to the public should be done very carefully, and must include some impact assessment before blanket approval is granted.

The most important point to consider, though, is that the release of local crime information was not done in a vacuum. That is, citizens were not merely informed about crimes occurring in their neighborhood. Instead, they were given this information in conjunction with other information (the crime prevention content of the newsletter) that specifically provided positive modes of response to crime. Had the crime listings been disseminated by themselves, residents' fears may well have increased, with a resulting increase in behavioral restrictions. In Evanston, however, the crime information was coupled with specific suggesions for citizens on how to respond in a "preventive" fashion. All indications suggest that this strategy has been quite successful.

## CONCLUSION

We have argued elsewhere that the police can and should play a pivotal role in our society's fight against crime (Kaminskiet al. 1983; Lavrakas in press; Rosenbaum 1982a. 1982b). They not only represent the legally mandated "force" that reacts to crime, but they can play an indirect, yet key role in preventing crime by educating the public about the public's own responsibility to prevent crime. We doubt that the public will respond to the call to "take a bite out of crime" in the magnitude that is sorely needed, if this call is limited to speeches by public officials and to national or statewide information campaigns. While such global messages are useful, we believe that citizens need to be more intimately knowledgeable about crime in their neighborhoods before they can and will respond in an effective fashion.

The experience in Evanston, Illinois, is one example of a new method that deserves consideration-in the drive to motivate citizens to assume their proper responsibilities in the fight against crime. Since our "field testing" of the ALERT newsletter in the spring of 1982, the H vans ton Police Department has decided to disseminate the version of the newsletter with the crime attachment on a citywide basis. Since the initial grant which funded the printing of ALERT expired, the department has been able to secure private and public financing that will allow for the printing of over

10,000 copies of the newsletter in 1983. So far. the community's response to ALERT has been one of overwhelming enthusiasm, and this includes the feelings of most local public officials. We do not know what the long run impact of the newsletter will be on public safety in Evanston, but this promising experience deserves consideration by other municipalities.[7]

[7]We plan (o continue to measure Ihe impact of the newsletter in 1983.

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