3. Disorder, crime and community decline

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Introduction

This chapter reviews recent North American research on the relationship between crime and disorder and the social and economic forces which underlie stability or change in private-market residential communities. Its focus on crime is familiar; perhaps more unusual is the attention given to the role of *disorder* in stimulating neighbourhood decline. Communities are troubled when they cannot realise their values with regard to public behaviour. Some of those values clearly are protected by the criminal law and fall within the purview of routine police operations. Other widely approved standards of conduct are not so clearly supported by statute, and many more seem to present intractable enforcement problems despite their unlawful status. But those legal and operational distinctions have little to do with the impact of these problems upon community life, which appears to be considerable.

'Disorders' are conditions and events widely interpreted as signalling a breakdown in the realisation of conventional norms about public behaviour. Their presence appears to provide observable evidence of neighbourhood decline. Disorders include both visual signs of physical deterioration and behavioural evidence of social disorganisation. Deterioration is apparent in the widespread appearance of junk and trash in vacant lots, poor maintenanace of homes, boarded-up buildings, vandalism of public and private property, graffiti, and the presence of stripped and abandoned cars in the streets and alleys. Disorganisation is signalled by bands of teenagers congregating on street corners, public solicitation for prostitution, begging, public drinking, verbal harassment of women on the street, and open gambling and drug use. Some of these conditions and events are not clearly unlawful, and the police find it hard to do much about any of them; their significance is to be found in their impact on urban communities.

Almost 20 years ago, Biderman *et al.*, (1967) argued that people's major impressions about area crime are derived from such '. . . highly visible signs of what they regard as disorderly and disreputable behaviour in their community'. Surveys and observational studies suggest that disorder may have numerous ill consequences for urban neighbourhoods. Disorder sparks concern and fear of crime among neighbourhood residents, and may actually increase the level of serious crime. It apparently undermines the processes by which stable neighbourhoods exercise informal control over local events and conditions, and drives out residents for whom stable community life is

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important. In this view, disorder is a source of neighbourhood destabilisation and decline.

Disorder and fear of crime

Surveys enquiring about the extent of disorder problems find responses are closely related to fear of crime and perceptions that serious crimes are neighbourhood problems. Some research suggests visible disorderly activity by people has a greater impact than physical deterioration, but that both independently are important determinants of fear and some fear-related behaviours (McPherson *et al.*, 1983). This parallels Hunter's (1978) conceptual distinction between 'social' and 'physical' signs of what he dubbed 'incivility'.

Deterioration and disorder can be discomforting, and run counter to many adults' expectations about proper public conditions, although, of course, they will vary in their tolerance of such situations. Taylor, Schumaker and Gottfredson (1985) found that observational measures of physical deterioration had the greatest effect in blue collar, rather than in poor or more well-to-do areas of Baltimore. In wealthy areas, instances of these problems may be ignored as atypical and non-threatening, and residents of poor areas have many things to worry about. However, in moderate income areas of cities, where market conditions for housing are insecure, residents may be more sensitive to such barometers of decline. This may account as well for the high negative correlation they found between indicators of decay and neighbourhood confidence. People may take disorder as a sign of the disintegration of the standards which guide local public life. Local residents may be distressed about continuous confrontations with obstreperous and unpredictable people, many of whom seem hostile and potentially dangerous. Americans generally associate visible deterioration, gang graffiti, loitering teens and public drinkers, and other disorderly activities with a heightened risk of being victimised; they serve as what Stinchcombe *et al.*, (1980) called 'the signs of crime'. These conditions generate fear because they signal that the community is out of control. Lewis and Salem (1986) find that disorder popularly signals a diminished capacity for local problem solving, gives residents a feeling of personal isolation, and spreads the sense that no one will come to the rescue when they find themselves in trouble (see also Greenberg, 1984).

Disorder and conventional crime

Wilson and Kelling (1982) have suggested that disorder actually spawns more serious crime. They allude to a 'developmental sequence' by which unchecked rule-breaking fosters petty plundering and even more serious street crime and theft. The nature of the relationship between crime and disorder is still unclear, and Maxfield (1984) illustrates how perceptions of crime and disorder are differentially related to fear, depending upon their absolute level. However, several studies report high correlations (+.45 to +.60) between area-level measures of crime and perceived disorder. There apparently are few

high-disorder low-crime neighbourhoods, which suggests the effect of one condition upon the other is either quite powerful or due to their strong joint association with some other factor (Skogan 1983).

Wilson and Kelling argued that disorder undermines the processes by which communities ordinarily maintain order. In stable neighbourhoods families care for their homes, and residents supervise the activities of youths, watch over one another's property, and challenge those who seem to be up to no good. Wilson has elsewhere referred to the 'moral tutelage, reciprocal obligations, and public humiliations' which maintain order in such places. Where public drinking, street gambling, begging, teenage loitering, and the like, go on, those arrangements do not work very effectively. Respectable people then use the streets less often; when they do, they avoid contact with strangers and potentially threatening situations, and believe it is safer to 'not get involved'. They think of the area as a 'place to live', but have little commitment to it. In such areas, no one takes responsibility for rowdy behaviour in public places, the residents' sense of 'territoriality' shrinks to include only their own households, and untended property is fair game for plunder or destruction. Where communal barriers against crime are low, local youths ramble freely.

Wilson and Kelling (1982) argued further that a neighbourhood's reputation for being tolerant of social disorder serves as an invitation to outside troublemakers. Criminals are attracted into such areas because of the opportunities for crime they offer. Areas which tolerate (or cannot counter) rowdy taverns, sex-oriented paraphernalia shops, public drinking, prostitution, and other disorders, quickly will attract street robbers to prey upon the trade. Thieves will sense the limited surveillance capacity of the area, and that it presents easy pickings for burglars. Where disorder is common they feel their chances of being identified are low, and are more confident no one will intervene. Many disorderly activities create their own criminal sub-industries. Drinking and gambling lead to assaults and fights; prostitution and drug sales attract those who prey upon the consumers of vice. Wilson and Kelling suspect that the concentration of supposedly 'victimless' activities can in short order inundate an area with serious and victimising crime.

One important feature of this interest in disorder is its policy implications. Speculation about the ill consequences of disorderly acts and conditions, and of the presence of deviant persons on city streets, has led to calls for action to suppress them. Early analysts merely found it interesting that factors other than 'real crime' were related to community decline; more recently some have taken that finding as licence to recommend direct intervention by the police to break up disorderly activity and presumably intervene in the spiral of disorder, fear, crime and neighbourhood decline.

This is controversial because it seems to call for the reversal of trends in American social policy, including the decriminalisation of status and victimless offences, community-based treatment of drug addicts, and the deinstitutionalisation of sentenced offenders and the mentally ill. These policies presumably account for some of the disorder plaguing urban neighbourhoods. Wilson and Kelling also advocate that the police take the initiative in discovering and acting on disorder, on the basis of what they dubbed 'communal needs'. Many of these needs would not be found in the criminal code. Aggressive order maintenance activity by the police raises the

spectre of racial and class discrimination in 'norm enforcement', problems which are difficult enough to control in 'law enforcement'. It also raises significant civil liberties issues.

The consequences of crime and disorder for communities

Most neighbourhoods form stable social systems, and this is one reason why their names often are useful labels. Their future generally resembles their past. Through individual initiatives and collective action, residents find ways to retard unwanted change and preserve their community's character.

However, when things happen which disrupt the processes by which neighbourhoods renew themselves, dramatic changes can ensue. Forces can be set loose which stimulate further changes rather than dampen them. In such areas, one problem leads to another. Systems characterised by such 'positive feedback' change rapidly. These changes do not necessarily make crime or the quality of life in those areas worse (see McDonald, 1986), but when they do neighbourhoods can quickly decline.

Once areas slip into the cycle of decline, feedback processes rapidly take control of neighbourhood conditions. The problems which emerge include crime, physical deterioration and social disorder. These in turn undermine the capacity of the community to deal with its problems. Crime and disorder stimulate physical and psychological withdrawal from the community, a weakening of informal social control mechanisms, a decline in the organisational and political capacity of the neighbourhood, and deterioration of local business conditions. These problems feed upon themselves, spiralling neighbourhoods deeper into decline. As Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) report, area crime shifts from being just a 'dependent' variable to being an 'independent' variable as well, in areas characterised by long periods of decline.

Thus, crime and disorder play an important role in stimulating urban decline. A major consequence of post-war mobility in American society is that all but the black and poor can flee urban problems. When disorder makes people uncomfortable and encounters with strangers leave them uneasy, communities grow unpleasant and they feel unsafe, many can leave. Measures of crime and disorder problems are strongly related to residential dissatisfaction and the desire to move (Kasl and Harburg, 1972; Droettboom *et al.*, 1971). Moving is selective, and families and the middle class leave first, often to be replaced by unattached and transient individuals (Frey, 1980; Duncan and Newman, 1976). Those who cannot leave may psychologically withdraw, finding friends elsewhere or simply isolating themselves (Kidd and Chayet, 1984). This further limits participation in neighbourhood organisations, reduces supervision of youths, and undermines any general sense of mutual responsibility which may have been felt by area residents.

Crime and disorder erode residential commitment

One critical role of crime and disorder appears to be their impact upon the number and mix of people moving into and out of a neighbourhood. Selective out-migration is the most fundamental source of neighbourhood change (Frey,

1980). Neighbourhoods never remain the same; even in places which appear tranquil, families are moving in and out, the building stock is ageing, and macro-economic forces are continually changing the price and demand for housing there. However, if about the same number of people move into a neighbourhood as move out, and if they resemble those who left, it can be counted as 'stable'. Areas are stable when the housing stock is continually renewed, and if people can sell and buy homes there at prices appropriate for the structures and their social class; stability means that the neighbourhood as a social system reproduces itself.

However, many will not want to remain in an area characterised by crime and disorder, and fewer still will want to move in. Measures of both are strongly related to residential dissatisfaction and the desire to move to a safer place (Kasl and Harburg, 1972; Droettboom *et al.*, 1971). However, studies of actual moving—as opposed to residential dissatisfaction—document the realities of economics and race (Duncan and Newman, 1976). In the US, middle-class and white residents actually move on, and their replacements are different. A comparison of 'movers' and 'stayers' in the Chicago metropolitan area indicated that households which left the central city were more affluent, more educated, and more often formed intact families. This was despite the fact that blacks, unmarried adults and the poor were far more likely to be unhappy about their neighbourhood. Those who moved out were 'pulled' by the attractiveness of safe suburban locations as well as 'pushed' by fear and other concerns (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981).

As this implies, flight from neighbourhoods may carry away somewhat less fearful residents, leaving behind those who were more fearful to deal with the area's problems. A few elderly and long-time residents may remain behind after this transition because they are unwilling to move or cannot sell their homes for enough to buy another in a nicer neighbourhood. They find themselves surrounded by unfamiliar people whom they did not choose to live with. Loneliness and lack of community attachment are significant sources of fear among the urban elderly (Yin, 1980; Jaycox, 1978), especially among women (Silverman and Kennedy, 1985). It also appears that perceived social diversity (measured by questions about whether neighbours are 'the same' or 'different' from the respondent) has a strong effect on fear only among the elderly (Kennedy and Silverman, 1985).

Demographic changes are very significant for the local housing market. If fewer or poorer people want to move in, real estate values shift. A soft demand for housing due to the undesirability of the area can be stimulated by reducing its price and changing standards for tenant selection, but this further effects the mix of in-movers. Kobrin and Schuerman (1983; 1981), using census figures and recorded crime, place demographic change near the beginning of the decay process. Land use, housing, and population changes at first lead to shifts in crime rates. Changes in the socio-economic status of residents of destabilising areas follow population turnover. The consequences which follow can stimulate even further change, including mounting levels of crime and disorder.

If residential buildings are unprofitable, owners have few incentives to maintain them adequately or even to pay the real estate and utility bills. If there is no demand for them they may sit boarded up. The arson rate reflects the same calculations (Sternlieb and Burchell, 1983). Future investments in a

neighbourhood appear to be affected by a relatively low level of building abandonment, perhaps 3 to 6 per cent (Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1973). Abandonment has increased as migration into many American industrial cities has slowed to a trickle; the 'waystation' role historically played by the worst housing in inner-city, mixed land-use areas, which gave it continued economic value, has vanished with the disappearance of new migrants.

Mounting levels of crime and disorder may further reduce real estate values (Frisbie *et al.*, 1977). Multiple regression models of the crime-property value nexus find area-level crime rates are so highly correlated with other physical and social determinants of property values that the independent effect of crime cannot be estimated. However, Taub, Taylor and Dunham's (1984) survey data indicates that individual's market evaluations and investment plans are affected by dissatisfaction with safety, perceived risk of victimisation in the area, and actual victimisation. Crime affects the upkeep of the neighbourhood, and together the two affect perceptions that the neighbourhood is changing for the worse and desire by residents to move away.

Crime and disorder undermine informal social control

There are other psychological and behavioural consequences of crime and disorder. People can feel powerless, impotent and vulnerable in the face of crime. High area levels of perceived crime and disorder appear to undermine residents' beliefs that problems can be solved locally, it increases their sense of personal isolation, and spreads the perception that no one will come to their rescue when they find themselves in trouble (Lewis and Salem, 1986). Not surprisingly, concern about crime and fear of crime do not stimulate constructive, preventive responses to crime (Tyler, 1984; Lavrakas, 1981). Surveys and experiments indicate that fear reduces people's willingness to take positive actions when they see crimes—including simply calling the police. The reduction in the number of legitimate users of the streets caused by fear, coupled with the unwillingness of bystanders to intervene because they are afraid, can create easy opportunities for predators.

Fear of crime also decreases the radius which individuals feel responsible for defending. When that boundary is expansive, individuals monitor more strangers, youths and suspicious sounds and activities. Where territories encompass only people's homes and families, untended persons and property are fair game for plunder. Territoriality is an important component of the larger process of surveillance, which may be an important mechanism for controlling crime. Surveillance entails both 'watching' and 'acting'. Acting is facilitated by personal recognition, shared standards about appropriate public behaviour, a sense of responsibility for events in the area, and identification with potential victims. There is some evidence (summarised in Shotland and Goodstein, 1984; Goodstein, 1980) that crime is encouraged by low levels of surveillance of public places, and reduced by people willing to act to challenge strangers, supervise youths, and step forward as witnesses.

One of the most significant consequences of crime and disorder may be withdrawal from community life. Fearful people report they stay at home more, especially after dark. When they do go out, they carefully avoid coming

into contact with strangers or potentially threatening situations, and they confine their path to the safest times and routes possible. They avoid people they do not know, and 'not getting involved' in events seems the wisest course. Among women in particular, adoption of such defensive tactics is related to levels of neighbourhood disorder as well as to perceived risk of victimisation (Riger *et al.*, 1982). At best this can result in a form of 'ordered segmentation' of the community which enables diverse and potentially conflictful people to share the same turf without coming into contact; they divide the area among themselves by time and space, thus avoiding potentially unsettling encounters (Suttles, 1968).

There has been a great deal of research on the effect of the strength of 'local social ties' on interventions (or intentions to intervene) of a variety of kinds, especially to control juveniles. The effect of social ties is strong, but they are affected by fear. In stable neighbourhoods residents supervise the activities of youths, watch over one another's property, and challenge those who seem to be up to no good. Neighbourhood change brings newcomers, changes in patterns of street life, and unpredictable people to the neighbourhood. This further rebounds to the disadvantage of such areas through the impact of dense social relationships on fear. Surveys often find that the strengths of local social ties are a strong and independent correlate of feelings of safety. They also increase the scope of individual territoriality, cement identification to one's area, and encourage participation in organised community activity (Taylor *et al.*, 1984; DuBow and Emmons, 1981; Hunter, 1974). Thus, another consequence of individual passivity, weak informal social control, and collective incapacity, is that neighbourhoods caught in decline lose the ability to control problems caused by youths living in the area.

Crime and disorder erode organisational capacity

Both concern about crime and disorder and simple demographics work against organised community life in neighbourhoods caught in the cycle of decline. Research indicates that fear of crime does not stimulate participation in collective efforts to act against crime; rather, it often has the effect of undermining commitment to an area and interest in participation (Lavrakas *et al.*, 1981). Where fear promotes suspicion in place of neighbourliness it can be difficult to forge formal linkages between residents to attack neighbourhood problems.

When neighbourhoods spiral into decline, demographic factors related to participation in community organisations can shift unfavourably. Those who move in tend to be harder to organise; they are renters, single-parent families, the poor and less educated, younger and unmarried persons and nonfamily households. They report having little economic or emotional commitment to the community, and usually expect to move again.

As a result of these demographic changes, the political capacity of the area is diminished. This affects the ability of residents to effectively demand that landlords and governments act on their behalf. Where they are strong, organisations can provide a mechanism for combating crime and disorder. One important function of community organisations is to convey the image—to residents and outsiders alike—of a mobilised community which will

resist unwelcome change (Unger and Wandersman, 1983). Organisations can restore or reinforce a local value consensus and emphasise the shared interests of people living together (DuBow and Emmons, 1981). Where informal organisation is limited, there may be few other mechanisms for generating community cohesion around the issues of crime, disorder, and decline. For example, Cohen (1980) finds that street prostitution flourishes only where community consensus is weak and there is no organised resistance to deviant public behaviour.

Another role of neighbourhood groups is to extend face-to-face contacts between residents and generate optimism about the future of the area, both important factors facilitating crime-prevention efforts (DuBow and Emmons, 1981). Perceptions registered in surveys that 'neighbours help each other' are an important source of morale in urban communities and seem to stimulate a variety of positive actions against crime (Lavrakas, 1981). Participation in neighbourhood organisations seems to stimulate homeowner investments as well (Taub, Taylor and Dunham, 1984). However, in neighbourhoods in decline, mutual distrust and hostility are rampant and antipathy between newcomers and long-term residents prevails. Residents of poor, heterogeneous areas tend to be more suspicious and feel less communality with one another (Taub, Taylor and Dunham, 1984; Greenberg *et al.*, 1982; Taylor *et al.*, 1981). Greenberg (1983) concludes that crime prevention programmes requiring social contact and neighbourhood co-operation are less often found in heterogeneous areas and those with high levels of fear. Surveys indicate that respondents who think that local crime is carried out by 'people in the neighbourhood' are more fearful than those who think it is the responsibility of 'outsiders'. This perception is a corrosive one, for it undermines trust among neighbours. It certainly violates one of the assumptions behind Neighbourhood Watch and other programmes which attempt to promote mutual co-operation to prevent crime—it may not seem wise to inform the neighbours that you will be out of town when it is their children whom you fear (Greenberg, 1983).

Intervening in the cycle of decline

Despite the trends reviewed above, urban neighbourhoods do not inevitably shift into a cycle of decline, even where crime and disorder are common. There is some evidence of a modest reversal of these processes, with a 'return to the cities' affecting areas in the United States with locational advantages and housing suited to affluent, childless households (Laska and Spain, 1980). Neighbourhoods can improve their standing through both gentrification and 'incumbent upgrading' (cf. McDonald, 1983). This can force up rents, increase the value of land, and upgrade the housing stock in small areas through economic pressures acting in reverse of the trends described above.

Concern about crime and disorder are only two features of urban life, and are not necessarily the most important determinants of decisions to move or to invest in an area. Taub, Taylor and Dunham's (1984; 1981) study of fear of crime and real estate prices in Chicago neighbourhoods suggests that fear has substantial negative effects on moving and investment decisions only if *other* neighbourhood factors are pushing in the same direction. If they are, people

who live there view crime as a leading indicator of community decline. Among white Chicagoans, for example, fear of local crime was related to the perception that investment in the neighbourhood was unwise only among those who thought their area was racially unstable. In areas which were deteriorating crime was seen as a sign of neighbourhood decay, and people who lived in deteriorating areas reported feeling helpless in the face of large-scale social forces which seemed to be working against them.

However, factors other than concern about crime are important in determining the demand for property or rental housing which pushes real estates values up or down. These include closeness to the downtown, the quality and style of the housing stock, access to amenities and transportation, and the availability of loans. When other factors are positive and (especially) when property values are appreciating, residents find ample reason to be satisfied with the area, and they tolerate surprisingly high levels of crime. The same seems to be true for small retail businesses in urban residential areas. McPherson *et al.*, (1983) found that even in disorderly, problem-ridden, high-crime areas, owners were more likely to plan to remain in business and make future investments where they believed the future of their market area looked bright, and if they were optimistic about local development efforts. Concern about crime does not *in itself* determine levels of investment, the confidence of residents in the future, or property values. Rather, it is one strand in a bundle of features which make up a community's character. Where people are optimistic about the bundle as a whole, crime counts for less.

This does not mean that residents of higher-crime but appreciating areas are not personally fearful. McDonald (1986) summarises several studies indicating residents of inner-city gentrifying neighbourhoods are concerned about crime; the difference is, they are willing to tolerate that condition despite their ability to move elsewhere. One reason they can do so is that residents of gentrifying areas often are childless, and thus able to ignore a number of local problems, including school safety. A survey in poor neighbourhoods of Philadelphia found that the safety of their children in and on the way to school was the number one crime-related concern among parents. Interviews with their children revealed that they also saw schools as dangerous places (Savitz *et al.*, 1977). Another reason why they tolerate untoward neighbourhood conditions is they may have well-founded optimism for the immediate future. Economically advantaged areas often succeed in steering more city resources into building the stock of local amenities which underlie appreciating property values. 'Rehabbers' often prove to be effective petitioners for better services, including police protection, and understand the change in neighbourhood dynamics associated with stimulating negative rather than positive feedback processes.

This means dealing with population turnover. Schuerman and Kobrin (1986) have some hope for what they dub 'emerging crime areas'. These are 'middle-aged' rather than old residential areas, with changing populations but substantial pockets of middle-class residents. Here they recommend (without elaborating upon the mechanisms) 'declaration of demographic and socio-economic change'. Wilson and Kelling (1982) focus upon 'the ratio of respectable to disreputable people' in an area to foresee its fate. Neighbourhoods not too far past their 'tipping point' are those with substantial levels of legitimate street use and a critical mass of residents interested in keeping the

area in good repair. Taub, Taylor and Dunham (1984) found that defensively 'stabilising the real estate market' was the first concern of community organisations in the Chicago neighbourhoods they studied, and that '... [m]ost of the strong community organisations considered in this book arose in response to impending or actual racial change' (p 184). At best, they found that this was accomplished by self-consciously promoting the virtues of racial integration and appealing to class interests instead. They also found that neighbourhood efforts to reverse tendencies toward decline primarily were successful when supported by large but immobile corporate institutions (hospitals, banks, universities) with an investment to protect.

Recent US experiments in community policing also speak to the problem of controlling crime and – especially – disorder. One programme in Newark, New Jersey, was specifically designed to test Wilson and Kelling's 1982 recommendations. In one target area, a special task force cracked down on disorderly public conduct, aggressively driving groups of younger males off the streets. This was combined with extensive foot patrol in residential parts of the area, and blockades and radar checks to enforce drinking and speeding laws. Also, there was an effort to intensify city services in the area, clean up unsightly lots, and control minor delinquency. This effort was dubbed 'Reducing the "Signs of Crime"', reflecting its intellectual origins.

This and other programmes in both Newark and Houston, Texas, were rigorously monitored and evaluated. Measures of perceived problems with crime and disorder and residential commitment were included in pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys conducted in both target and control areas of both cities. The evaluation indicated that Newark's special disorder control programme had no discernible positive effects. (For a further discussion see: Pate *et al.*, 1986; Skogan *et al.*, 1986).

However, several other programme packages in the two cities met with some apparent success in reducing levels of perceived disorder and increasing levels of residential commitment. Perhaps the most successful was a form of directed foot patrol. In target areas in both Houston and Newark, teams of patrol officers went 'door-to-door' interviewing residents to gather information on neighbourhood problems of all kinds. In Newark this programme was linked to a store-front police office offering a range of services. In both cities (but in most organised fashion in Newark) the teams acted to solve the problems they identified, either on their own or by mobilising other city agencies. The evaluation indicated that these activities were widely known in the target areas, and they appear to have reduced levels of perceived disorder and increased satisfaction with the neighbourhood. These patrols also tested certain aspects of Wilson and Kelling's original argument. They thought it was critical that the police devise mechanisms for identifying neighbourhood problems and understanding the sometimes varying standards of public conduct which communities wish maintained. Directed foot patrol is one such mechanism, a systematic way of gaining contact with ordinary area residents and assessing local order problems. Much earlier, Bittner (1967) found that policing public drinking on Skid Row was more effective when the officers involved had a detailed knowledge of those who frequented the area and their different yet still understandable patterns of behaviour. The Houston and Newark efforts appear to have combined at least a bit of this with the general benefits of foot patrol identified in previous experiments, which include reduced fear and

lower levels of perceived crime (Police Foundation, 1981). The resulting package may provide a vehicle for facilitating police intervention in the disorder-decline nexus.

Summary

This chapter reviewed recent North American research on the impact of disorder and crime upon neighbourhood social and economic processes. Disorder undermines the private residential housing market through its impact upon neighbourhood commitment and satisfaction, the desire of residents to move away from troubled areas, and the market value of the housing stock. Both disorder and crime erode the capacity of communities to exercise informal social control, through their impact upon territoriality, intervention efforts, and even the extent of self-help. Instead, people in troubled areas physically and psychologically withdraw from community life. Disorder and crime also handicap communities politically, through their corrosive impact upon neighbourhood organisational capacity. Research suggests that under some circumstances the operation of private-market economic forces can reverse cycles of neighbourhood decline. Efforts to do this by community organisations in the US typically focus upon controlling land-use and population turnover. Finally, recent experiments with community policing hint that decentralisation, directed foot patrol, and other efforts to increase co-operation between the police and neighbourhood residents may have an impact upon both disorder and fear of crime.

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