1987

Policing Career Criminals: An Examination of an Innovative Crime Control Program

Susan E. Martin

POLICING CAREER CRIMINALS: AN EXAMINATION OF AN INNOVATIVE CRIME CONTROL PROGRAM*

Susan E. Martin**

A variety of criminal justice agencies have recently initiated efforts to focus resources selectively on the most active and dangerous offenders in response to resource limitations and research findings. Few police departments, however, attempt to proactively identify such offenders, devote extra resources to apprehending these offenders or build better cases against them to increase the rate at which they are convicted and incarcerated. In March, 1982, the Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, D.C. created the Repeat Offender Project (ROP) to achieve these goals.

This paper reports findings from an evaluation of ROP's selective apprehension approach. The evaluation involved three separate components: a field experiment to determine whether ROP increased the likelihood of arrest for targeted repeat offenders; intensive observation and informal interviews with ROP officers over an eight month period to determine how the unit operated; and a quasi-experiment. The quasi-experimental design, which is discussed in this article, compared ROP officers to (a) their performance prior to assignment to ROP and (b) a sample of officers in other assignments to address the following questions:
1. How did assignment to ROP affect the officers' arrest productivity?
2. Did the offenders that were arrested by ROP have longer and more serious criminal histories?
3. Were ROP officers' arrestees more likely to be prosecuted, convicted and incarcerated than offenders arrested under routine police operations?

** Project Director, Police Foundation. Ph.D., American University, 1977; M.S., University of Rochester, 1964; B.A., Swarthmore College, 1962.

I. BACKGROUND

POLICING REPEAT OFFENDERS

Since the publication of research findings indicating that a small proportion of criminals commits a disproportionate amount of crime,[1] a variety of criminal justice efforts have been initiated to selectively identify and incapacitate[2] persons who are "career criminals." To date, most of these efforts have been undertaken by prosecutors and parole boards. But the police, as gatekeepers of the criminal justice system, may also fruitfully adopt policies focused on such offenders.

Traditionally the police have been mobilized to enforce the law reactively, i.e., in response to a citizen's complaint.[3] Proactive (i.e., police initiated) policing efforts have been limited to investigations of vice and other "invisible offenses" for which there are no complainants.[4] The recent successes of Abscam, "stings," and efforts to control police and political corruption, however, have contributed to a growing interest in the use of proactive policing tactics to reduce street crime and deal with "career criminals."

Reactive and proactive policing involve officers in somewhat different tasks and require distinct tactics. In reacting to citizens' complaints, the officer's primary objective is to detect the occurrence of a crime and to identify and arrest the perpetrator either at the scene of the crime or through subsequent investigation. In proactive policing, the officer must observe or even facilitate a crime.[5]

---

[1] *See* M. WOLFGANG, R. FIGLIO & T. SELLIN, DELINQUENCY IN A BIRTH COHORT (1972); J. PETERSILIA, P. GREENWOOD & M. LAVIN, CRIMINAL CAREERS OF HABITUAL FELONS (1977); J. WILLIAMS, L. REDLINGER & P. MANNING, POLICE NARCOTICS CONTROL: PATTERNS & STRATEGIES (1979); J. CHAIKEN, M. CHAIKEN & J.P. PETERSON, VARIETIES OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR (1982); P. GREENWOOD & A. ABRAHAMSE, SELECTIVE INCAPACITATION (1982).

[2] Incapacitation is the effect of isolating an identified offender from the larger society (usually by imprisonment), thereby preventing him or her from committing crimes in society. It is regarded as one of the principles that traditionally has guided sentencing policy.

[3] *See* A. REISS, THE POLICE AND THE PUBLIC (1971); Black, *The Mobilization of Law*, 2 J. OF LEGAL STUD. 125 (1973).

[4] *See* J. WILSON, THE INVESTIGATORS (1978); Moore, *Invisible Offenses: A Challenge to Minimally Intrusive Law Enforcement*, in ABSCAM ETHICS: MORAL ISSUES & DECEPTION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT (G. Caplan ed. 1983); POLICE NARCOTICS CONTROL, *supra* note 1.

[5] *See* J. WILSON, *supra* note 4, at 48; P. MANNING, THE NARCS' GAME: ORGANIZATIONAL AND INFORMAL LIMITS ON DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT (1980); Moore *supra* note 4, at 27. Moore, for example, notes that police are sometimes involved in instigating (as opposed to merely observing) criminal offenses. *Id.* The difference between instigation and passive observation is that in the former the government agent plays a role in encouraging the occurence of the offense. *Id. passim.* This may lead to legal problems be-

Programs focused on career criminals may use various combinations of reactive and proactive tactics. To date, the reactive tactics used in such programs have included the prioritized service of warrants against identified "career criminals,"[6] notification of the prosecutor when an identified career criminal is arrested, and more active supplementation of cases against such persons.[7] Proactive tactics have included the use of decoys, surveillance, suspicion stops, and phony fencing operations.

Although many police administrators have expressed interest in career criminal programs, few police departments have adopted them. A recent survey found only thirty-three such programs in operation nationwide, most of which involved reactive case supplementation strategies, often in conjunction with prosecutors' units.[8] The few studies of the operation and effectiveness of career criminal programs suggest that their limited success has been due, in large part, to problems in program implementation.[9] Thus, Washington's Repeat Offender Project had to address both conceptual and operational issues in developing a viable offender-oriented program.

ROP'S DESIGN AND OPERATION

In March, 1982 the Metropolitan Police Department created the Repeat Offender Project "to identify, arrest, and successfully prose-

---

cause the line between facilitation and entrapment is often unclear. Nevertheless, much proactive policing depends on undercover police making themselves available and appearing to participate in illegal activities, such as purchasing stolen or contraband goods.

   [6] *See* W. GAY, T. BEALL & R. BOWERS, A MULTISITE ASSESSMENT OF THE INTEGRATED CRIMINAL APPREHENSION PROGRAM: A FINAL REPORT (1984).

   [7] *See New York City Police Department Felony Augmentation Program* (1981) [hereinafter *Felony Augmentation Program*]; Gay & Bowers, *Targeting Law Enforcement Resources: The Career Criminal*, FOCUS Sept. 1985.

   [8] Gay & Bowers, *supra* note 7, at 9.

   [9] Programs that were evaluated included those in Kansas City, Manhattan, Birmingham, and a variety of the ICAP sites. *See* A. PATE, R. BOWERS & R. PARKS, THREE APPROACHES TO CRIMINAL APPREHENSION IN KANSAS CITY: AN EVALUATION REPORT (1976); *Felony Augmentation Program*, *supra* note 7; M. Wycoff, C. Brown & R. Peterson, Birmingham Anti-Robbery Unit Evaluation Report (1980)(unpublished report); W. GAY, T. BEALL & R. BOWERS, *supra* note 6. These reports observed a variety of problems. For example, surveillance operations were initiated without adequate information about suspects who often could not be located. Surveillance lasted so long that targets became "tail conscious." Blending into the ghetto environment was difficult because almost all of the officers were young, white males who were required to remain cleanshaven and drove cars that were easily identified as police cruisers. In addition, interunit rivalry reduced information sharing, target selection procedures relied too heavily on criminal record information, and coordination with prosecutors was inadequate.

cute recidivists"[10] using a variety of vice, surveillance, investigative
and intelligence tactics. Due to ROP's size and cost, the department
agreed to an external evaluation of ROP's activities and its
effectiveness.

At the time the study was initiated in January, 1983, ROP con-
sisted of sixty officers commanded by a captain and three lieuten-
ants. The officers were organized into eight squads of four to six
officers, a detective, and a sergeant. The squad was the basic work
unit to which targets were assigned and arrests credited. In addi-
tion, a target committee composed of five experienced investigators
was responsible for developing new targets, reviewing candidates
generated by the squads, and maintaining ROP's records.

In creating the unit, ROP's commanders selected officers who
varied in age, race, sex, appearance and prior police experience.[11]
They acquired twenty old cars that blended inconspicuously into in-
ner-city neighborhoods, surveillance and investigative equipment
and a computer terminal linked to the department's information sys-
tem. To aid in target selection, ROP routinely sought additional
information.[12]

To reduce interunit rivalry that could inhibit the flow of infor-
mation needed for effective functioning, ROP commanders adopted
an internal arrest log. The log listed all arrests for which ROP of-
ficers were responsible, even if the arrest was formally booked to
another officer. This enabled ROP to assign formal arrest credit to
other officers, gain information from them and, at the same time,
obtain recognition from their supervisors for their work.

The initial ROP design distinguished between two types of ac-
tive offenders known as "targets." "Warrant targets" were persons
already wanted on one or more warrants who could be arrested on
sight. "ROP-initiated targets" (R.I. targets) were persons believed
to be criminally active but not currently wanted. Experience quickly
led ROP to create a third category of targets called "type threes."
These were individuals whom the officers arrested in the course of
other activities.

---

[10] Special Order 82-6, March 26, 1982.

[11] The criteria for selecting ROP officers from approximately 400 applicants were
not clearly specified. In an interview, the unit commander asserted that he and the three
lieutenants chose people they personally knew to be aggressive and independent of-
ficers. Interview with Edward Spurlock, Police Captain, in Washington, D.C. (July 15,
1982).

[12] Information regularly obtained from departmental sources included the daily ma-
jor violators list, the criminal histories of recent arrestees, daily crime reports from each
district and specially prepared weekly printouts listing all persons wanted on three or
more felony warrants.

ROP's original criterion for selecting targets was "the belief that the person is committing five or more Part I offenses per week."[13] After January 1983, when a new theft statute went into effect,[14] "persons believed to be trafficking in stolen property" were added to the targeting pool. This standard must be examined in terms of both its symbolic and practical effects. To observers and ROP officers the standard suggested that the unit should seek to apprehend the most active twenty percent of all criminals.[15] In practice, however, the standard failed to specify the indicators of "the belief," provided no guidelines for the officers to assess the relative length and seriousness of a target's criminal record, and made no distinctions among Part I offenses. For these reasons, target selection remained discretionary, situation specific and based on the particularistic knowledge of members of each squad.[16]

Initially, target committee members selected virtually all of the targets. Their choices rested largely on official record information. With encouragement from ROP commanders, squads gradually built up informal information networks and developed their own targets on the basis of information provided by other officers and informants.

To apprehend a warrant target, ROP officers first had to locate him or her. Sometimes this simply involved a "turnup" at the target's last known address. Often, however, this required the officers to learn the target's whereabouts from relatives or acquaintances. Arresting an ROP-initiated target required the development of evidence about a specific crime in which the target had participated. The tactics used by ROP in their pursuit of such targets included

---

[13] Special Order 82-6, March 6, 1982. Part I offenses include homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft, and arson.

[14] Theft and White Collar Crime Act of 1982, 22 D.C. CODE ANN. § 3831 (Supp. 1986).

[15] Targeting criminals believed to be committing five Part I offenses per week, suggests that ROP sought targets committing 250 crimes annually. According to RAND findings, this means targeting persons who were between the 79.9th percentile (representing those committing 200 crimes annually) and the 84.5th percentile (for persons committing 300 or more crimes annually) including fraud and forgery which are not Part I offenses. *See* J. CHAIKEN, M. CHAIKEN & J.P. PETERSON, *supra* note 1, table A 15. Furthermore, these figures probably over estimate the activity of the surveyed offenders who were prisoners convicted of robbery and burglary, and not a representative sample of active criminals. *See* C. VISCHER, *The Rand Inmate Survey: A Reanalysis*, in 2 CAREER CRIMINALS AND CRIMINAL CAREERS 161 (A. Blumstein, J. Cohen, J. Roth & C. Vischer eds. 1986).

[16] One study of target selection by vice officers observed that tight organizational control, systematic planning, and development of targets based on clearly articulated goals and strategies was very rare. Rather, informally understood "working bases" guided the officers' choices. *See* P. MANNING, *supra* note 5, at 97.

"buy and bust,"[17] cultivating informants and investigating their "tips," surveillance of targets, and linking property believed to be stolen with its rightful owner.[18] In sum, ROP used various channels of information to identify active offenders, determine if they were currently wanted on a warrant, and if not, find a way to catch them committing a crime or develop evidence about an earlier crime on which they could be arrested.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental nonequivalent control group design was used to compare the number and seriousness of the arrests made by ROP and comparison officers, the outcomes of these arrests, and their arrestees' criminal histories at two time periods. Time 1 (T1) extended from April 1 through September 30, 1981 (prior to the creation of ROP); time 2 (T2) went from April 1 through September 30, 1983.

SAMPLING DESIGN

Officer Sample

The officer sample included an ROP group and a nonequivalent comparison control group. The ROP group (N=40) consisted of all officers who were in the unit during T2 and had street assignments in T1. ROP officials and members assigned to clerical or dispatching duties or to specialized units during T1 were excluded.[19]

The comparison sample included several groups of officers all of whom had the same assignment in T1 and T2: (1) a random sample of fifty-three patrol officers, thirty-five district detectives and

---

[17] A "buy and bust" strategy involves an undercover police officer or informant purchasing a drug from a seller. The purchase is immediately followed by an arrest of the seller without delay or concern for concealing the identity of the purchaser.

[18] For a more complete discussion of targeting and apprehension activities, see S. Martin, Catching Career Criminals: A Study of the Repeat Offender Project (Technical Report to the National Institute of Justice 1986).

[19] There were twenty-six additional officers who had been in ROP but left that unit prior to April 1, 1983. Data were also collected on these ROP dropouts and their arrestees to see if the officers that remained in ROP during the study differed significantly from officers that left the unit. When no difference was found between the two groups of ROP officers and their arrest activities at T1, the dropouts were excluded from subsequent analyses. T-tests comparing differences of means between the ROP experimentals and dropouts found no differences between them with respect to age (t=.447, n.s.), length of service (t=.138, n.s.), race (t=.079, n.s.), and sex (t=.757, n.s.). Nor did the groups differ substantially in their 1981 arrest rates. The ROP experimental officers made a mean of 14.48 total arrests, the dropouts a mean of 13.1 (t=1.02, n.s.). In addition, informal interviews with ROP personnel confirmed these findings. ROP dropouts were a cross section of the unit's officers, they left for a variety of reasons.

seven vice officers all of whom who were sworn in prior to April 1, 1979;[20] (2) all sixty casual-clothes tactical officers in that assignment at both time periods; and (3) all fourteen officers in the Special Operations Division's warrant squad in both time periods.

The random sample of patrol, detective and vice officers was selected in several steps. Five hundred names were randomly drawn from a list of all sworn officers assigned to the Patrol Division's seven districts as of June 30, 1983. All officers sworn in after April 1, 1979, and those who had changed district, division, or rank after April 1, 1981, were eliminated. For those remaining in the sample, the administrative officer in each district was consulted to determine whether the officer's specific assignment at T1 and T2 was the same and whether it offered the opportunity to arrest adult offenders. All officers who had changed assignments and those assigned to community services, crime scene search, canine, administration, traffic, and station clerk duties were eliminated. The first sixty patrol officers and all detectives, vice and tactical officers were selected.[21] The small size of the tactical officer sample led to the decision to include the population of eligible tactical officers.

Arrestee Population

The arrestee population included each person arrested by an ROP officer or comparison officer in either T1 or T2. Information on each adult arrest was collected from official arrest logs kept at each district station. If an arrestee faced multiple charges, the arrest was included if the officer in the sample was credited for any charge. For each arrest the most serious arrest charge was recorded.[22] In addition to the 228 official ROP arrests recorded in the Special Operations Division's arrest book in 1983, data were collected on the seventy arrests recorded in the ROP internal log.

The total arrestee population during T1 included 579 persons arrested by ROP officers and 1,908 arrested by the comparison of-

---

[20] All ROP officers were sworn in prior to this date. Rookies were deleted from the comparison sample in order to eliminate the effect of a lack of police experience as an explanation for any observed differences in arrest behavior.

[21] After collecting data on arrests made by these patrol officers, it became evident that seven of them had either changed assignment or had been on extended sick leave. When these observations were confirmed by the administrative officers, these officers were eliminated from the sample, but they were not replaced.

[22] In recording the most serious charge, the coders used the following ranking system: Part I offenses according to the Uniform Crime Report ranking; Part II offenses against a person; any weapon offense; any drug offense; any other property offense; municipal code violations (e.g., vending without a license and disorderly conduct), and traffic offenses.

ficers; during T2, 298 ROP arrestees and 2,078 comparison arrestees.

For the analyses of ROP and comparison case dispositions and the arrestees' prior arrest histories, computer-generated random samples of about 300 ROP-81, comparison-81, and comparison-83 arrestees were drawn to compare with all ROP-83 arrestees.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data

Data were obtained from the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department on the date of birth, length of police service, sex and race of each officer in the study. The department also provided arrest records for the approximately 1,200 arrestees in the sample. From the police arrest logs each adult arrestee's name, date of birth, race, social security number, date of arrest, total number of charges and most serious arrest charge was obtained. Prosecution, disposition, and sentence data were collected from the public records of the Criminal Division of the District of Columbia Superior Court and the United States District Court.

These data were used in three separate analyses that examined arrestees' prior criminal history, their case dispositions and sentences, and the officers' arrest productivity.

Criminal History Analysis

The criminal history analysis was designed to determine whether ROP officers were more likely to select and arrest repeat offenders (i.e., persons with long prior arrest records for serious crimes) than they had been in their previous assignment or than the comparison officers. Ten measures of prior record were used: the total number of prior arrests, the total number of prior Part I arrests, the number of arrests for each of the principal Part I offenses,[23] and Part I arrests during the five years prior to the end of the study period (September 30, 1981 or 1983). Because the mean age of the ROP-83 arrestees was higher than that of the three other groups, the analyses of arrest history were statistically adjusted for arrestee's age.[24] The statistical tests used to compare the arrest his-

---

[23] *See supra* note 13.

[24] The ROP-83 arrestees' mean age was 30.9; the mean ages of ROP-81, comparison-81 and comparison-83 were 28.5, 28.2 and 28.4 respectively. Thus, the adjustment for age was employed to reduce bias arising from differences among the groups in vulnerability to an adult arrest. To illustrate, a nineteen year old has had only a one year window of vulnerability; a twenty-nine year old has had ten additional years to accumulate a

tories of the arrestees of each officer group at T1 and T2 included one way analysis of variance, simultaneous tests of significance of pairs of means and regression. Since the findings of these analyses were similar, only the regression results are reported here.

Disposition Analysis

A variety of factors have been found by reseachers to affect case disposition and sentencing. These include the seriousness of the arrest and prosecution charges, the length and seriousness of the arrestee's prior criminal history, the arrestee's age and the strength of the evidence available in the case.[25] The study's disposition analysis sought to determine: (1) whether the arrests produced by ROP differed from those of the comparison groups; (2) whether this led to higher rates of prosecution, conviction and incarceration of repeat offenders and; (3) if so, to what factor or combination of factors this finding could be attributed.

ROP and comparison officers' cases were first analyzed with respect to the types of arrest and prosecution charges. The strength of evidence was then computed indirectly as the remaining differences in case dispositions after statistically controlling for the effects of the arrestees' age and prior arrest records. To explore the separate and joint effects of the disposition of the prosecuted case, incarceration given conviction, and sentence length given an incarcerative sentence, each variable was regressed on the arresting officer group (coded as a dummy variable with comparison-83 as the suppressed category). Each full model included charge type, arresting officer's assignment, arrestee's age, and his or her prior arrest history. Crime type and officer assignment were also coded as dummy variables with property crimes and SOD warrant squad as the suppressed categories. The sentence length model was run twice; first using the normal form then with a logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable to reduce the effect of extremely long sentences.[26]

---

lengthy arrest record. Since the ROP-83 arrestees tended to be older, the adjustment provided a more conservative measure of their criminal activity.

[25] For a review of the literature on the determinants of sentencing, see RESEARCH ON SENTENCING: THE SEARCH FOR REFORM 83 (A. Blumstein, J. Cohen, S. Martin, & M. Tonry eds. 1983).

[26] The regression was run using ordinary least squares (OLS) rather than the technically more correct logit for two reasons. First, interpretation of the data is much more straightforward. Second, where the dependent variable is within a seventy-five to twenty-five percent split, there is little difference in outcome. See A. GOLDBERGER, ECONOMETRIC THEORY 201 (1964).

Officer Arrest Productivity Analysis

The officer productivity analysis was designed to look at the effect of assignment to ROP on officers' arrest productivity using three different outcome measures: total arrests including violations of municipal ordinances and traffic laws; "serious" arrests; and Part I arrests. "Serious" arrests includes all Part I offenses as well as arrests for weapons offenses, drug distribution or possession with the intent to distribute, and arrests on a felony bench warrant.[27]

Changes in the individual arrest rates of each ROP and comparison officer were examined using two different measures for ROP arrests and by statistically controlling for differences related to district, assignment, time in ROP, and the 1981 productivity arrest.[28] Six models were developed to examine each of the three arrest measures. Model 1 included all ROP officers without adjusting either for the number of weeks in ROP during T2 or for the effects of changes in the arrest rates of a few extremely active officers. In Models 2 through 6 various combinations of adjustments for time in ROP and for the effects of extreme values were introduced. Twelve of the ROP officers were in that unit less than the full twenty-six week T2 period. To eliminate bias against ROP, which could be related to officers' time in the ROP unit, two adjustments were introduced. In Models 3 and 4, (labeled "adjusted") time in ROP was adjusted by proportionally increasing the weight of the number of arrests made by ROP officers who were in the unit less than twenty-six weeks. In Models 5 and 6, (labeled "partial") time in ROP was adjusted by eliminating from the analysis the five ROP officers who were in the unit for less than thirteen weeks during the study period. To adjust for the effects on the entire sample of extreme changes in individual arrest rates, in Models 2, 4 and 6 a logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable was used.[29]

---

[27] These three overlapping arrest categories provided a more comprehensive measure of the nature of officers' arrests than any single meassure. The "serious" category was developed to include the "quality" arrests that are frequently made by vice officers (i.e., drug distribution or possession with intent to distribute), those made by warrant squad and ROP (i.e., felony bench warrant arrests) where the charge was usually a Part I offense, and those regarded by police officers as serious (i.e., weapons offenses).

[28] Examination of ROP and comparison officers' demographic characteristics indicated that they did not differ in racial composition, but that ROP officers were significantly younger (ROP $\bar{X}=32.6$; comparison $\bar{X}=34.8$, t=-3.22 p<.01), less experienced (ROP years of police service $\bar{X}=9.22$; comparison $\bar{X}=11.58$, t=-4.47 p<.001), and more often female (ROP $\bar{X}=1.15$; comparison $\bar{X}=1.02$, t=2.05 p<.05) than the comparison officers. To control for the possible effects of these differences on arrest productivity each officers' 1981 arrest rate was included in the regression equation. This means that the 1983 arrest activity measure was a change score variable.

[29] Regression analysis assumes that the underlying relationships among variables are

Each model was run twice using different measures of ROP-83 arrests. The first measure, *total* arrests, included both those officially credited to the unit as recorded in departmental arrests books as well as the unofficial arrests recorded in the internal log maintained by the ROP unit. The unofficial arrests included those that ROP officers brought about but did not actually make (e.g., they convinced someone to turn himself in), those they "gave" to another assisting officer, and those arrests they participated in that occurred outside Washington, D.C. The second measure, *official* arrests, included only arrests formally credited to ROP officers in the departmental arrest book.

Use of either the official or total arrest measure involved introducing contrasting biases. Because ROP officers were strongly encouraged to formally credit arrests to others and to cooperate with other officers in both the District of Columbia and neighboring police departments, the official arrest measure systematically underrepresented ROP officers' arrest productivity. The total arrest measure, on the other hand, inflated ROP officers' arrest rates relative to those of comparison officers who may have contributed to others' arrests but got no such informal recognition for doing so. To be conservative, the data subsequently presented in Table 7 and the accompanying text (except as otherwise noted) are based on the official arrest measure which understates to an unknown degree ROP officers' true arrest productivity.

III. FINDINGS

PRIOR ARREST HISTORY

Comparison of the mean number of prior arrests of ROP officers' 1983 arrestees with the mean number of prior arrests of their arrestees in 1981 and with the mean number of prior arrests of comparison officer arrestees in both years (after adjusting each for age) indicated that ROP-83 arrestees had substantially longer and more serious prior arrest records than the arrestees in the other three

---

both linear and additive. In certain instances when this is not the case and a single linear model is inadequate, a transformation of the original variables may permit the resultant relations among the transformed variables to become linear. One type of nonlinearity, which arises when a few extreme values affect the outcome, can be overcome by using a logarithmic transformation. The model then becomes $y = a + b \log X = a + bz$. Each X score is transformed into a new variable, Z, which is the log. Such transformations are particularly useful where an independent variable, X, takes a wide range of values but once a certain value is reached further increases or decreases have less and less effect on the dependent variable. Thus, a logarithmic transformation reduces the effect of extreme values on the overall outcome. *See* H. BLALOCK, SOCIAL STATISTICS 312 (1960).

groups. For example, in 1981 both ROP and comparison arrestees had an adjusted mean of 5.9 total prior arrests. In 1983, the ROP arrestees' adjusted mean rose to 6.4, whereas the 1983 comparison group arrestees' adjusted mean dropped to 4.9. This difference was statistically significant ($p < .01$).

TABLE 1
REGRESSION OF ARRESTEE'S PRIOR ARREST HISTORY ON OFFICER GROUP AND AGE

	b	STANDARD ERROR OF b	t	R^2
TOTAL ARRESTS				.10
ROP-81	1.04	.573	1.83	
Comparison-81	.98	.575	1.70	
ROP-83	1.62	.594	2.73**	
Age	.25	.025	10.00**	
Intercept	−2.35			
TOTAL PART I's				.04
ROP-81	.38	.267	1.42	
Comparison-81	.62	.267	2.32*	
ROP-83	.78	.276	2.83**	
Age	.17	.012	14.17**	
Intercept	−.22			
ROBBERY				.01
ROP-81	.081	.092	.88	
Comparison-81	.153	.093	1.65	
ROP-83	.264	.096	2.75**	
Age	.004	.004	1.00	
Intercept	.253			
PART I ARREST IN PAST 5 YEARS				.02
ROP-81	.131	.132	.99	
Comparison-81	.392	.132	2.97**	
ROP-83	.369	.137	2.69**	
Age	.014	.005	2.80**	
Intercept	1.320			

\# Standard error of the b coefficient
* Significant $< .05$
** Significant $< .01$

Differences between ROP arrestees' prior criminal histories and those of the other three groups were also examined by regressing total, Part I, and each offense type on officer group (coded as a dummy variable with comparison-83 as the suppressed category)

and arrestee age. As shown in Table 1, after statistically removing the effect of age by including it in the regression model, ROP-83 arrestees had significantly more total prior arrests, prior Part I arrests, robbery arrests, and Part I arrests in the previous five years than the comparison-83 group arrestees. Age was also significantly associated with total, Part I and Part I arrests in the previous five years.

CASE DISPOSITIONS

The type of offenses for which ROP and comparison officers made arrests were very similar in 1981 except that the comparison group made more "fugitive, etc." arrests (seven percent vs. one percent of their respective total arrests) and fewer "other" arrests (twenty-four percent vs. thirty-five percent) as shown in Table 2. In

TABLE 2
ARREST OFFENSE TYPE BY OFFICER GROUP

PERCENT ARRESTED FOR OFFENSE TYPE	ROP-81 (N=308)	COMPARISON-81 (N=300)	ROP-83 (N=261)	COMPARISON-83 (N=308)
Violent Part I	12	12	12	9
Simple Assault	3	3	1	2
Nonviolent Part I	15	20	12	13
Nonviolent Part II	4	4	6	4
Weapon	3	3	3	4
Drug Dealing and Possession with Intent to Distribute	4	2	3	4
Drug Possession	18	17	13	16
D.C. Case on Bench Warrant*	5	8	8	11
Fugitive, Escape, Parole or Probation Violation	1	7	26	8
Other**	35	24	15	30
Total	100%	100%	99%	100%

* Failure to appear at any point in the processing of a criminal case led to the issuance of a bench warrant for the rearrest of the accused.
** Includes sexual solicitation, operating a lottery (gambling), disorderly conduct, unlawful entry, violation of vending regulations and all traffic offenses.

1983, they were also quite similar except in these same two categories. In 1983, the proportion of ROP arrests for fugitive, escape, probation and parole violations rose to twenty-six percent of all arrests while the proportion of "fugitive etc." comparison arrests was

only eight percent. The proportion of "other" arrests fell to fifteen percent while thirty percent of comparison officers' arrests were in the "other" category.

Most arrests in both the "fugitive etc." and "other" categories are not presented for prosecution in the District of Columbia courts and, therefore, do not appear in the subsequent disposition analyses. However, they differ markedly in seriousness. The offense underlying a fugitive arrest is almost always a felony. Probation and parole violations often result in incarceration. "Other" offenses, in contrast, involve predominantly minor misdemeanors for which the arrestee, in essence, pays a fine.[30] Thus, overall ROP-83 arrests tended to be for more serious crimes than comparison arrests.

TABLE 3
INITIAL PROSECUTION DECISION BY OFFICER GROUP

PROSECUTORIAL DECISION	ROP-81 N	ROP-81 %	COMPARISON-81 N	COMPARISON-81 %	ROP-83 N	ROP-83 %	COMPARISON-83 N	COMPARISON-83 %
Charged as a Felony	50	25	54	28	67	44	39	21
Charged as a Misdemeanor	103	52	83	44	48	31	83	45
Previously Charged Bench Warrant	13	7	25	13	17	11	30	16
Not Charged	31	16	28	15	21	14	32	17
Total	197	100%	190	100%	153	100%	184	99%

$Chi^2 = 33.6$
$DF = 9$
$p < .001$

Differences in the initial prosecutorial treatment of 1983 ROP and comparison officers' District of Columbia arrests on original charges also suggest that those arrests made by ROP officers were for more serious offenses than those of comparison officers. Table 3 shows that the proportion of ROP and comparison arrests prosecuted as felonies was similar in 1981. In 1983, however, forty-four percent of the ROP arrests but only twenty-one percent of the comparison arrests were charged as new felony cases.

Table 4 showing case dispositions indicates that two changes appear to have occurred between 1981 and 1983. First, there was a

---

[30] Persons charged with driving without a license, disorderly conduct, and vending regulation violations may simply elect to forfeit the collateral they post at the police station. The few "other" arrests resulting in cases presented for prosecution included charges of drunk driving, operating a lottery, sexual solicitation, and unlawful entry.

TABLE 4
DISPOSITIONS OF PROSECUTED CASES BY OFFICER GROUP

PERCENT OF DISPOSITION	ROP-81 (N=166)	COMPARISON-81 (N=162)	ROP-83 (N=132)	COMPARISON-83 (N=139)
Felony Conviction	19	21	24	16
Misdemeanor Conviction	30	32	38	47
Total Conviction	49	49	63*	63
Nolle, Dismiss, Acquit	51	51	37	37
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chi² = 28.9
DF = 9
p < .001

* Felony and misdemeanor convictions do not total 63% due to rounding.

general increase in the conviction rate from forty-nine to sixty-three percent of all cases for both ROP and comparison groups. Second, there was a separate ROP effect as the officers in that unit increased the proportion of their cases resulting in felony convictions from nineteen to twenty-four percent while comparison officers' felony convictions fell from twenty-one to sixteen percent of their dispositions.

The findings on incarceration rates and sentence lengths must be interpreted cautiously because eighteen ROP and thirteen comparison cases were still pending on December 31, 1984, (the end of data collection) and most of these involved serious felonies likely to result in incarceration, provided the arrestee was convicted. Nevertheless, the proportion of convicted ROP arrestees sentenced to incarceration in 1983 (forty percent) was essentially the same as the proportion of arrestees in both groups sentenced to serve time in 1981 (forty-one percent for ROP-81 and forty-two percent for comparison-81) while the comparison-83 incarceration rate fell to thirty-two percent.

The regression of incarceration on officer group, conviction offense type, convictee's prior arrest history and age, as shown in Table 5 indicates that there were no significant differences among the officer groups after the effects of the offender's prior criminal history were removed. However, the number of prior arrests was significantly associated with the likelihood of incarceration. This suggests an explanation for the absence of a change in ROP-83 and

the decrease in comparison-83 incarceration rates. Growing over-crowding at local prisons and jails led to more conservative sentencing and a general decrease in incarceration rates, but because ROP arrestees had longer and more serious prior arrest records than comparison arrestees, their incarceration rates remained at the 1981 level.

TABLE 5
REGRESSION OF INCARCERATION DECISION ON OFFICER GROUP, AGE, PRIOR ARREST HISTORY AND OFFENSE TYPE

	b	STANDARD ERROR OF b	t
ROP-81	.009	.093	.10
Comparison-81	.123	.086	1.43
ROP-83	.133	.129	1.03
Total Prior Arrests#	.017	.004	4.25**
Age	.073	.013	5.62**
Violent	.159	.091	1.74*
Weapon	.037	.152	.24
Narcotic	−.082	.091	.90
Bench Warrant	.216	.101	2.14*
Other Offense	−.065	.167	.39
Patrol	.099	.138	.72
Tact	.111	.119	.93
Vice	.059	.183	.32
Detective	−.108	.162	.66
Intercept	.041		

$R^2 = .148$
F = 3.58
DF = 1,206

\#   The regression was run twice. First it included total prior arrests, then it used prior Part I arrests. Each measure of prior record was significant, but the other findings were unaffected.
*   Significant < .05
**   Significant < .01

The regression of sentence length on arresting officer group, with prior arrest history, offender age, and conviction offense included in the model, showed that ROP-83 cases did not significantly differ from those of the other groups using the normal form. When a logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable was used, however, ROP-83 sentences were found to be significantly longer, as shown in Table 6. This finding suggests that ROP had an independent impact on the length of sentence apart from the effects

of offense type and offender's age. This is particularly notable in light of the large number of ROP cases still pending.

TABLE 6
REGRESSION OF LOG-TRANSFORMED SENTENCE LENGTH ON OFFICER GROUP, AGE, PRIOR ARREST HISTORY AND CONVICTION OFFENSE TYPE*

VARIABLE	b	STANDARD ERROR OF b	t
ROP-81	.445	.468	.95
Comparison-81	.101	.464	.29
ROP-83	1.073	.491	2.19*
Total Prior Arrests	.003	.017	.18
Age	.064	.024	2.66**
Violent	1.380	.452	3.05**
Weapon	.570	.779	.73
Narcotic	.108	.540	.20
Bench Warrant	.157	.464	.34
Other Offense	.538	1.050	.51
Intercept	3.550		

$F = 3.14$
$R^2 = .32$
$DF = 3,73$

*   Significant $< .05$ level.
** Significant $< .01$ level.

There are two explanations for this ROP effect on sentences. First, stronger evidence in ROP cases may have enabled prosecutors to negotiate for longer prison terms. Second, differences between the seriousness of ROP and comparison conviction offenses within each of the broad offense type categories used may have contributed to differences in sentence lengths.

OFFICER ARREST PRODUCTIVITY

The third component of the study focused on the impact of assignment to ROP on its officers' arrest productivity. The results, shown in Table 7, are based on the ROP official arrest measure. The top row indicates that across all six models assignment to ROP significantly reduced individual officers' total 1983 arrest rates. None of the adjustments altered the significance of this finding. ROP membership also significantly depressed official Part I arrests across all models, as shown in the second row of Table 7. The third

TABLE 7
REGRESSION OF OFFICIAL 1983 ARREST RATES ON OFFICER GROUP, 1981 ARREST RATES, DISTRICT AND ASSIGNMENT[t]

	ALL ARRESTS					
	MODEL 1 (UNC)	MODEL 2 [#] (ULC)	MODEL 3 (ANC)	MODEL 4 (ALC)	MODEL 5 (UNP)	MODEL 6 (ULP)
81 Arrest Rate[##]	.497**## .460 (.064)	.374** .380 .061	.494** .457 (.065)	.373** .406 (.061)	.499** .381 (.066)	.361 .371 .062
ROP Exp.	−7.235** −.217 (1.79)	−.453** −.185 (.134)	−6.77** −.203 (1.79)	−.366** −.151 (.134)	−7.47** −.212 (1.92)	−.371** −.146 (.143)
Constant	7.22	1.27	7.21	1.27	7.27	1.32
Adj. R.	.46	.47	.45	.43	.45	.42
	PART I ARRESTS					
81 Arrest Rate[##]	.260** .356 (.049)	.269** .305 (.059)	.258** .354 (.049)	.267** .302 (.059)	.260** .357 (.050)	.270** .307 (.060)
ROP Exp.	−.962** −.178 (.348)	−.303** −.175 (.111)	−.910** −.168 (.349)	−.281** −.162 (.112)	−.903** −.158 (.374)	−.255** −.141 (.119)
Constant	1.73	.680	1.74	.683	1.71	.666
Adj. R.	.21	.21	.21	.20	.20	.19
	"SERIOUS" ARRESTS					
81 Arrest Rate[##]	.307** .273 (.065)	.260** .266 .063	.303** .269 (.065)	.254** .259 (.064)	.307** .272 (.065)	.263** .270 .063
ROP Exp.	−.113** −.009 (.069)	.064 .030 (.122)	.093 .008 (.614)	.109 .052 .123	.081 .006 (.652)	.151 .069 (.128)
Constant	1.65	.682	1.65	.690	1.60	.658
Adj. R.	.53	.35	.53	.34	.53	.35

[t] District and assignment, which were included in all models, are not shown in the table. Data for the full model are available from the author.

[#] In the models, U=unadjusted for time; A=adjusted for time by weighting; N=normal; L=logged form; C=complete sample; P=partial with five ROP officers in the less than 13 weeks deleted.

[##] Upper coefficient is unstandardized regression coefficient; middle is standardized form (Beta); standard error is in parenthesis.

* Significant < .05 level.

** Significant < .01 level.

row of the table shows that in all but the unadjusted model, ROP had no effect on its officers' official "serious" arrest rates.

When the analyses were rerun using total ROP arrests rather than official arrests, however, the depressive effect on Part I arrests

disappeared in all of the models and a significant positive ROP effect appeared in all but the unadjusted model. This suggests an ROP effect across the ROP officer population. Since there was no increase in the rate of Part I arrests, the increase in "serious" arrests, which included Part I's, is attributable to more arrests for the other crimes in the "serious" category.

Because of the biases inherent in each of the measures of ROP 1983 arrests, the "true" effect of ROP on its officers' Part I and "serious" arrest productivity remains unclear. The data suggest that ROP officers tended to make fewer Part I and more "serious" arrests in 1983 than they had in 1981. However, the magnitude of these changes relative to changes in comparison officers' arrest rates in 1983 remains in doubt.

IV. DISCUSSION

The foregoing examination of the effect of the Repeat Offender Project's proactive perpetrator-oriented crime control strategy on three aspects of officers' arrest-related behavior suggests that ROP has achieved most of its goals. First, it has significantly increased the seriousness of the criminal histories of its officers' arrestees. Second, it has altered the nature and outcomes of ROP officers' arrests in several ways. It has directly increased the seriousness of the instant arrest charge made by its officers and the likelihood of the case being prosecuted and the offender convicted of a felony. ROP also has indirectly led to increases in incarceration rates and sentence lengths for offenders arrested by ROP officers. These appear to be the result of the more extensive criminal histories and more serious instant arrest offenses of the individuals arrested by ROP officers. At the same time, ROP has affected its officers' arrest productivity. ROP has significantly reduced its officers' total number of arrests and probably their Part I arrests while having no effect (to be conservative) or increasing (using the more inclusive measure) the number of their "serious" arrests. These findings suggest two areas for further discussion: first, an explanation of the changes in officer behavior; second, an examination of the policy implications of these charges for police departments.

EXPLANATION OF CHANGES IN ROP OFFICERS' BEHAVIOR

The magnitude of the changes in officers' arrest productivity, the nature of their arrests, and the criminal histories of their arrestees all suggest that the differences between ROP and comparison officers in 1983 was the result of an organizational effect rather

than initial differences among the officers. By altering the nature and organization of the officers' work activities and the norms and goals of the unit in which they work, ROP produced a change in the officers' behavior. From the outset, ROP's command staff made clear that the officers were expected to make "quality" arrests of active repeat offenders by concentrating on investigation and surveillance of pre-selected targets. The officers were discouraged from making arrests for traffic violations, disorderly conduct, or other misdemeanors which had constituted more than one third of their arrests in 1981. The ROP officers' supervisors indicated their disapproval of minor arrests by excluding them from ROP's biweekly report to the Chief. Other ROP officers teased those who made such arrests about "lowering ROP standards." Consequently, such arrests were greatly reduced.

Changes in officer arrest behavior also stemmed from changes in the organization and nature of the officers' work. Rather than working alone or in pairs, ROP officers worked in five to seven person squads which were assigned targets and given credit for arrests. The officers spent more time on fewer activities than they had in their previous assignments. The ROP officers proactively selected targets on the basis of a variety of indicators, in contrast with their former practice of reactively arresting individuals whom they encountered violating the law.

The decrease in ROP officers' rates of Part I arrests and possible increase in arrest rates for "serious" crimes can also be explained by the ROP unit's targeting and apprehension strategies. These, in turn, were influenced by internal and broader environmental pressures. Initially surveillance was the principal strategy that was used by the ROP squads in their efforts to apprehend targets. Surveillance efforts were supposed to occupy half of the officers' time and energy. Faced with few arrests of R.I. targets and growing officer frustration, ROP personnel made several adaptations to increase the unit's productivity.

First, the officers increased the proportion of warrant targets and, within this target category, increasingly selected persons wanted on one or more felony bench warrants.[31] Warrant targets were preferred because they tended to take less time and effort and required less investigation than R.I. targets. ROP officers found it

---

[31] A bench warrant is issued by the District of Columbia Superior Court when a person fails to appear for a court date, is charged with a violation of probation or parole, or is wanted in another jurisdiction thus, making him or her a fugitive from justice in the District of Columbia.

far easier to arrest a person wanted on an outstanding warrant for robbery than to catch him or her "in the act."

The ROP officers specifically selected warrant targets wanted on bench warrants for several reasons. First, there was less competition with other District of Columbia officers who might also be searching for such persons. Second, parole and probation violators were less likely than other warrant targets to be released on bail. Third, the ROP officers were often provided with information on the whereabouts of the target by parole or probation officers and by officers in neighboring jurisdictions which facilitated the search. Fourth, arrests of fugitives involved little paperwork, and led to trials in courts believed to give tougher sentences than the District of Columbia Superior Court. As Table 2 indicates, persons arrested on bench warrants accounted for more than one third of all ROP arrests. An examination of ROP's internal records indicated that most bench warrant arrests actually involved an underlying Part I offense.

The second adaptation that affected the number and nature of ROP officers' arrests was a policy of arresting an ROP-initiated target on any legally appropriate charge rather than waiting for a Part I arrest. The officers targeted persons believed to be high rate Part I offenders but arrested them for other crimes for which it is easier to make an arrest. Because a high proportion of very active offenders are drug addicts and support their habits by dealing, stealing, or both,[32] and many are armed, ROP officers found it far easier to apprehend such individuals for possession of contraband (i.e., a gun, drugs, or stolen property) than to observe and arrest them committing a Part I crime.

ROP's policy of aggressively cultivating informants, following up "hot tips" provided by a variety of sources, and using its officers in undercover operations also led to an emphasis on "serious" and Part II property crimes. There is an organized market for illicit goods in which informants were often participants. Thus, the ROP informants were more likely to know about the crimes of other criminals participating in this market than the less organized, violent Part I offenses. The illicit market also enabled ROP to use undercover "infiltration" tactics to penetrate organized theft and fencing activities. Several squads became involved in investigations of ROP-initiated targets that took several months before they resulted in the recovery of large amounts of stolen property and the arrests of a few

---

[32] *See* J. CHAIKEN, M. CHAIKEN & J.P. PETERSON, *supra* note 1, at 155.

highly active "fences," burglars, and thieves on charges of receiving and trafficking in stolen property.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Despite ROP's apparent success in selecting, arresting, and contributing to the incarceration of repeat offenders, several factors suggest a cautious interpretation of the findings regarding the effectiveness of a specialized proactive police unit for addressing urban crime problems. ROP's ultimate goal was the reduction of crime principally through the incapacitation of high rate offenders.[33] Unfortunately, no measure of its incapacitation effect could be developed. To measure ROP officers' incapacitation effects in the same way that their arrest productivity was examined would have required data on each arrestee's pretrial release status and case outcome. Such data were unavailable within the design and budget of this study.

In the absence of statistical estimates or self-reported data on arrestees' individual crime rates, the arrestees' records were used as an indicator of their criminal activity. Such a measure has serious limitations. RAND studies of self-reported criminal activities found that on the average, individual offense rates were higher for persons with more extensive arrest histories than shorter ones.[34] But these studies also found that prediction models based on arrest history alone often failed to distinguish between high rate and low rate individual offenders. ROP arrestees were found to have longer prior records than comparison arrestees. Furthermore, the "street" information on which ROP officers relied heavily in selecting targets probably led to a more accurate selection of criminally active targets than reliance on criminal history alone. Nevertheless, it is impossible to determine how often ROP officers selected targets that were among the most active twenty percent of all offenders, which was their goal. Other factors suggest that some ROP targets did not meet the targeting criteria. When faced with pressures to "put some meat on the table" and to nurture sources of information by doing favors for other officers, ROP officers stretched target selection criteria. ROP's targets tended to be mature adults (the mean age of its arrestees was 30.9) although several studies have found that criminal activity diminishes with age. Thus, some ROP targets may have been "burned out" criminals. Reliance on District of Columbia

---

[33] *See supra* note 2.

[34] *See* P. GREENWOOD & A. ABRAHAMSE, *supra* note 1, at 37; J. CHAIKEN, M. CHAIKEN & J.P. PETERSON, *supra* note 1, at 44; M. CHAIKEN & J. CHAIKEN, WHO GETS CAUGHT DOING CRIME 15 (1985).

criminal history data rather than complete FBI records also presents
a limited picture of the arrestees' criminal histories. For these rea-
sons, the findings regarding ROP targets' criminality must be re-
garded as suggestive.

In assessing ROP's effectiveness one must also consider its
costs. In addition to the approximately $60,000 capital investment
in the unit, the assignment of officers to ROP reduced their arrest
productivity. The arrests forgone, however, were mostly for traffic
infractions and public order offenses. Thus, the trade off appears to
be a reduction in order maintenance and service activities in ex-
change for an increased focus on crime reduction efforts.

ROP officers' extensive discretion, their use of undercover tac-
tics and reliance on informants provides them with substantial op-
portunities to harass, entrap, and otherwise violate citizens' rights.
To date, ROP has avoided lawsuits, major complaints of harass-
ment, the use of firearms and due process violations by emphasizing
careful attention to legality. Nevertheless, the potential dangers to
civil liberties that units such as ROP pose must be considered by
departments planning to establish similar proactive units. Clearly
specified, written target selection criteria and administrative control
mechanisms over targeting and apprehension activities are neces-
sary to limit potential abuses of discretion and to reduce the danger
that informants rather than the organization will shape targeting
priorities.

Satisfactorily balancing warrant and unit-initiated targets poses
a difficult policy choice that should be addressed explicitly. Warrant
targets on the average take less time and officer effort to apprehend
and can be selected to focus on persons wanted for violent offenses.
Because of their wanted status, the apprehension of warrant targets
poses less of a threat to civil liberties than arrests of unit-initiated
targets. The latter, on the other hand, constitute the unique proac-
tive aspect of such a unit's operation. The unit-initiated targets tend
to be persons who are involved in organized property crime and
thus, promise greater payoffs in terms of information about a net-
work of criminal activities. The mix of warrant and unit-initiated
targets should be affected by the backlog of wanted persons in the
jurisdiction and by the relative magnitude of the jurisdiction's
problems with violent and property crime.

One must be cautious in generalizing the findings of this case
study. What "worked" for ROP may be related to the particular
characteristics of Washington, D.C., its police department, or the
personnel and leadership of ROP which may not be present if ROP
is replicated elsewhere. ROP's newness and visibility also may have

contributed to a "we try harder" spirit in the unit that is likely to diminish with routinization.

This study has left a number of questions unanswered. Further research is needed, for example, on ROP's target selection procedures and its crime control effects. Nevertheless, this study's findings provide some encouragement for police to develop an offender oriented, proactive strategy to supplement reactive police tactics in the effort to catch career criminals.