

SAN DIEGO CRIME TREND CHANGES

November, 1977

FILE
Police Dept
FILE

The causes of crime have always been extremely complex. We have gone to great lengths to penetrate beyond the numbers, but there is no one definite defensible explanation for the significant rise of selected index crimes in San Diego. As the crime statistics are rising here, in contrast to the majority of the state and the nation's urban areas, there are some parallel trends that may be related.

First, the most simplistic and obvious trend is that we are in the depths of a descending ratio of officers to population. The number of officers available for duty has decreased while the population has continued to rise. (Other major cities are declining in population.) We are soon to pass Dallas to become the eighth largest city in the United States. The crime prevention value of the numerical ratio of police to population is in serious question; yet, the number of apprehensions of violators and their removal as potential criminals, is directly related to the number of officers fielded over the statistical year. Fewer criminals should yield fewer crimes, therefore, to an undetermined degree the number of officers is related to crime. We are currently about ten percent down in all divisions from our budgeted personnel strength.

The manpower deficiency has had another effect, which again cannot be proved as a contributor to rising crime. The detectives, due to personnel shortages and higher priorities, are investigating fewer and fewer crimes against property. Five years ago all burglaries were investigated by a detective. Last year 50 percent were investigated. Currently less than 38 percent are being investigated. Our cancellation by investigative arrest declines as our reported burglaries rise.

What mean?
Proof

A more direct factor affecting our rate of reported crime is the influence of border related crime. Even a casual visitor to Tijuana can see that this sister city has become a magnet for all of Mexico. It is that country's fastest growing city. From a border town of 5,000 at the end of the 40's, the population will soon equal ours. Often over 3,000 aliens are contacted by the border patrol during one night's activities. The crimes occurring within the immediate area of the border and our response to them has received national attention. The impact of this unique problem relates directly to increases in reported crime. Our increases in robberies and rapes over the last three years can be partially attributed to this problem. The Los Angeles Police Department is on record estimating that 16 percent of their crime is attributed to illegal aliens. *How?*

Continuing the relationship to the border, another factor emerges. There has been a shift from Mideast to Mexican heroin during the period of increasing property crime. The San Diego/Tijuana border gate is the most active and easily avoided border crossing point in the United States. While the population of addicts in San Diego is estimated between 600 and 700, a small number when compared to New York, Detroit, or Chicago, it is a large number when related to total population. Some authorities estimate that 90 percent of all residential burglaries are committed by addicts. We believe that this fact alone is largely responsible for our trends in property crime rates. More recent rises are closely correlated with successful United States and Mexican federal efforts to destroy

growing poppies and shut down smuggling operations. This year the street price of heroin is up and the quality is down. Last year's \$50 habit now requires \$200 to sustain. This factor is undoubtedly the most reasonable explanation for our present trends in property crimes.

As a final note on San Diego crime, there is a very interesting and subtle phenomena in effect. It could well play an important role in our future analysis of reported index crimes. The differential between true victimization rates and reported crime rates has been receiving national study. Grossly speaking, around 50 percent of all index crimes are not reported to the police and therefore do not become part of the crime rate. The reasons for non-reporting are varied and psychologically complex. They are generally rooted in what has become known as *public apathy*. "It wouldn't do any good," or "The cops don't care," are typical responses to victimization studies made in all areas of the country.

It may seem ironic, but there is ample reason to believe that a police department may increase its rate of FBI index crimes by doing an outstanding job of convincing the community that *it would do some good, or the cops do care*. In the field of business and economics it is an unquestioned principle that as satisfaction with a service or a product increases, the use of that service or product also increases. *Could it also be that this principle explains the relationship between reform in treatment and examination of rape victims and the increase in reported rape?* Two years ago it was widely held that only one in ten rapes was reported to police. If better care of victims and better treatment by the courts caused a ratio increase to two of ten, a 100 percent increase in reported rapes would result.

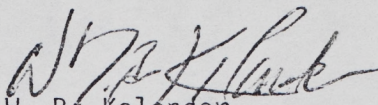
An even more intriguing application of this phenomena, is the effect of concerted police/citizen involvement in community crime prevention. We were recently motivated to examine this issue in light of the fact that San Diego now has 78 active citizen groups involved in police sponsored crime prevention programs throughout the city. Two years ago there were none. A key message of these programs is: "Help us to help you, by calling if you see anything suspicious and by reporting all crime."

Using a geographically isolated community to prevent displacement and by using a matched control area, we measured the impact of our intense crime prevention programs. Our test community became as active and as aware of crime problems and crime prevention as we could make it. The increase in reported Part I crimes during the test period was 65 percent while in the matched control area and city-wide, the increase was six percent. Our Crime Prevention Program, by traditional yardsticks, resulted in a 59 percent increase in reported crime. At the same time, pre- and post-survey analyses showed equally dramatic increases in San Diego's confidence in the police. Citizens generally felt a sense of personal and property safety.

This surprising result can only be explained as an increase in the number of reported crimes and a decrease in the number of unreported crimes due to an increase in the quality of the relationship between the community and the police.

The overall efforts of the San Diego Police Department to improve the police-community relationship are some measure of our national reputation for excellence. No city has equalled our direct efforts. The Crime Prevention Review of October, 1977 published by the Attorney General of the State of California features my article

titled "Total Community Relations Through Crime Prevention." It is an ironic and sad commentary that we can at the same time be a model for innovative and wide-ranging crime prevention programs and be at the top of the stats for reported property crime growth rate.


W. B. Kolender
Chief of Police