How communities can attack 'street crime'

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fourth of 15 articles in the series "Crime and Justice in America." They constitute the text for an Oakland University Courses by Newspaper class led by Prof. Jesse Pitts.)

By JAMES F. SHORT JR. Crime has become a symbol has become a symbol of the

Crime has become a symbol of the city. No other problem so embodies the fears and concerns of city people, or their apparent impotency to protect their persons and property, or to gain control over their lives. City people, compared to others, are justified in their concerns over crime. Street crime. "ordinary crime." by whatever name we call it, is pre-dominantly an urban problem, though in recent years serious crime rates have been increasing more rapidly in SEMIUAL ANNUAL

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urban and rural areas than in large

suburban and rural areas than in Barge central cities.

Recorded crime has in fact increased substantially in city and country alike, about one-third since 1700 for serious violent and property crimes, and more than doubling since 1803, according to the Uniform Crime Reports of the FBI.

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Public alarm over the seriousness of crime has grown in recent years along with rising official crime rates. Yet, people may not be as powerless. Yet, people may not be as powerless to affect the extent of crime as they think. An increased understanding of who commits most crime and why points to the very real possibility of achieving some measure of crime control through community action.

trol through community action.

CRIME STATISTICS must be viewed with caution. Sometimes the actual amount of crime is overstated, and the state of t

IN ADDITION, changing laws—for example, those regarding the manufacture, distribution and use of drugs—change not only the statistics of crime but the behavior of those who enforce the law, as well as those who violate it and are protected by it. Increased alarm over crime has also led to increased reporting of criminal

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victimization. The precise amount of unreported crime is impossible to determine, but a decade of surveys suggests that the actual amount is two to three times that recorded in police statistics.

statistics.

The conclusion that there is much more crime than is reflected in official statistics is supported by extensive studies in which citizens—usually the studies in which citi suutes in which citizens—usually young people—are asked to respond to questions about their own commission of crimes. These studies find that virtually everyone does things that are illegal, but relatively few go on to become serious criminals.

become serious criminals.

AMONG THOSE who do commit serious crimes, young people from age 15 into their early 20s are heavily over-represented.

The highest proportion of arrests for the violent crimes of homicide, for-cible rape, robbery and aggravated assault for the past several years has been of 18-year-olds; and for burglary lacency-their land motor vehicle theft, 16-year-olds.

Arrests of temales for serious Arrests and make-up about 90 per cent of those arrests and 90 per aerust of the period crimes and 90 per aerusted for property crimes. Finally, arrest rates are highest for blacks, most other minority groups, and for the poor.

No one argues that being mor

the poor.

No one argues that being poor, young, male, black or an urban resident makes one a criminal. But these associations provide important clues to cause and control.

So powerful are these associations between crime and age, sex, and urban poverty that they help to explain a large portion of recent changes in crime rates. The population aged 1+24 increased during the 1950s by more

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than 50 per cent—the highest in our history, compared to only 10 per cent during the 1950s. About the same is projected for the 1970s. This placed great pressure on law enforcement at a time when national and world events combined to proue explosive changes. Violence associated with an unpopular war and unduffled promises of the civil rights movement provided a legacy of crime into the 1970s.

WHILE THE VAST majority of youth retain conventional aspirations and attachments to conventional institutions, some do not.

and attachments to conventional institutions, some do not. The fragility of highly urbanized, technologically dependent societies is dramatically revealed by political kid-nappings, airplane hijackings, threats to city water and power supplies, and seemingly radnom assaults justified by their perpetrators on political and keological grounds.

The distinction between ordinary and politically motivated crime often is difficult to make, especially in countries such as Northern freland that are plaqued by deep political, religious to the political political control of the countries with the countries when the converse and in prisons where those converse or converse or

and therefore little stake in conformity. Prison seldom strengthens conven-tional ties. Lessons learned and contacts made in prison provide greater opportunity and incentive both for revolutionary political activity and for a career in crime.

LOCKING PEOPLE up more efficiently and for longer periods of time may achieve a greater measure of safety—in the short run. In the long run, it is simply too expensive and too divisive to society, to keep large numbers of citizens isolated for very long. We must, therefore, deal with the causes of the crime problem in more fundamental ways, even as we protect ourselves from the most violent and destructive by incarceration.

The causes of crime range from

parental and peer relationships to media messages; from individual characteristics to the structure of the society within which laws are written and enforced and inequalities of opportunity, wealth and status are created and maintained.

The grinding effects of poverty in an affuent, consumer-oriented society, especially among youth who are glutions on the unemployment market and disvalued because of race or ethnic background, are reflected in the statisdisvalued because of race or ethnic background, are reflected in the statis-tics of crime.

RECENT STUDIES suggest that the most important causes of ordinary most important causes of ordinary delinquency and crime are related to the lack of effective controls emanat-ing in families and other institutions and in communities.

and in communities.

Families appear to be especially important in explaining the involvement of youngsters in minor delinquencies and so-called vistatus offenses'—behavior for which juvenelse but not adults can be arrested. The community, however, is most important in explaining differences in serious criminal involvement.

Family relationships also play a larger role in delinquent behavior in stable and affluent communities, while serious involvement in crime is easociated with peer relationships and

associated with peer relationships and other influences in economically poor-high-crime communities.

THE LESSONS of history and of recent experience with large-scale attacks on poverty and crime point to the crucial role of local community involvement in finding solutions to crime.

workernenin of inceal community involvement in infinding solutions to Sect community involvement has Sect community involvement has found to the commonly stories to increase reporting of criminal victimization, labeling of commonly stories to make positive identification easier and selling them more difficult, and elitzens patrolling in cooperation with local police.

Other programs are designed to involve both young people and adults in adjudicating and disposing of less serious crimes by juveniles. Some communities are also experimenting with using volunteers in community correctional programs.

These measures have all helped to reduce some crime in some areas.

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