



Organized Crime Research Brief no. 6

Counter-measure Effects

BUILDING A SAFE AND RESILIENT CANADA

Police operations against organized crime have limited to no measurable impact on the public's perception of safety or recorded levels of crime at the city-wide level.

This report expanded on the body of research on organized crime (OC) counter-measures and reviewed how law enforcement operations targeting organized crime are evaluated. In particular, this research studied seven police counter-measures against OC activities that occurred between 1998 and 2004. The various operations targeted different types of organized crime groups. The purpose of studying these operations was to identify and assess the effects of the counter-measures on crime rates and perceptions of safety and well-being in the surrounding community.

Although several data sources were reviewed for their suitability in addressing the current research questions, only the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) and the General Social Survey – Victimization (GSS-V) data sets were used in the analysis. A review of newspaper articles about these law enforcement operations over the course of the study period was also conducted.

The findings from the UCR and GSS-v data, as well as the content analysis of print media showed that police counter-measures had limited success in changing the public's perception of their safety and in recorded levels of crime. Only in a few situations can an association be made between a specific police countermeasure and residents' perceptions of personal safety or a reduction in criminal activity. Also, it is important to point out that perceived safety does not necessarily reflect actual safety.

Although the analysis showed that these operations have limited success achieving tactical disruption and suppression goals, issues surrounding data availability

makes it difficult to comprehensively evaluate the effect of police counter-measures on crime or the community overall. As with any retrospective study, this project had several limitations. For example, the GSS data was at the level of Census Metropolitan Areas and was useful in the assessment of police counter-measures that occur in larger cities, but was less useful in the analysis of effects for smaller cities. Additionally, the GSS-v data were not designed to measure Canadian perceptions of crime and the health of the community as they specifically relate to OC, but to crime more generally. Counter-measures often target individual OC groups and not the criminal marketplace overall.

The content analysis demonstrated that the print media were more focused on the activities associated with police counter-measures and the follow-up stories (e.g., trials, profile of those involved in the case) than on providing an understanding of the views of those living in the communities. This finding is in line with other content analysis studies which have revealed that the media tends to focus on the sensational aspects of crime (e.g., the takedown of offenders and criminal trials) rather than on the effect of an operation on a community.

While this retrospective study shed some light on the effects of the police counter-measures on crime rates, public safety, and quality of life issues, the report articulated the difficulty of measuring the impact of counter-measures. The research confirmed the need for performance measures on police OC counter-measures. Police from other countries (e.g, Australia) are moving towards the development of performance measures to indicate whether resources are being used effectively and efficiently.

The authors also suggested that a corporate

communication strategy to inform the public about counter-measures could be established by individual police forces, a national database on counter-measures be developed as a useful evaluative tool, and suggested that detailed, prospective evaluation plans be built into counter-measures proposals.

Gabor, Thomas and John Kiedrowski, Victoria Sytsma, Ron Melchers, and Carlo Morselli. (2010) *Community Effects of Law Enforcement Counter-measures on Organized Crime*. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

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