

**KERB-CRAWLING, PROSTITUTION
AND MULTI-AGENCY POLICING**

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POLICE RESEARCH GROUP
CRIME PREVENTION UNIT SERIES PAPER NO. 43
LONDON: HOME OFFICE POLICE DEPARTMENT

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First Published 1993

Police Research Group: Crime Prevention Unit Series

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research relevant to the work of the police service and Home Office Policy Divisions. One of the major police department divisions which acts as customer for the PRG is the Home Office Crime Prevention Unit which was formed in 1983 to promote preventive action against crime. It has a particular responsibility to disseminate information on crime prevention topics.

The object of the present series of occasional papers is to present research material in a way which should help and inform practitioners, including the police, whose work can help reduce crime.

ISBN 0-86252-978-6

Foreword

When centred upon residential areas, street prostitution and kerb-crawling can significantly reduce the quality of life enjoyed by a local population. This study, which attempts to test conclusions from an earlier successful initiative in Finsbury Park, London, assesses the impact of a multi-agency initiative developed jointly by the police service and local residents' associations within Streatham (South London) to deal with such problems.

One of the difficulties associated with the Finsbury Park work which was not considered at the time that research was carried out, was the extent to which tackling kerb-crawling and street prostitution in an area leads to its displacement or deflection to neighbouring sites. This present study assessed the extent to which this occurred and has shown that although there was some evidence of displacement, it was to areas such as the nearby shopping streets, which residents found less objectionable.

The research reported here also suggested that there was a reduction in the level of street prostitution and kerb-crawling and that the multi-agency initiative had led to direct improvements in the quality of life experienced by local residents. The level of harassment, noise and damage suffered all appear to have declined and the fear of crime experienced was ameliorated considerably. There were also some indications that the general level of crime experienced in the neighbourhood reduced. The assessment also demonstrates some of the problems experienced as part of multi-agency initiatives. It is, however, pleasing to see that the launch of the initiative appears to have improved relationships between all parties involved.

I M BURNS
Deputy Under Secretary of State
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May 1993

Acknowledgements

A considerable number of people have contributed to this project. Particular thanks go to Jayne Mooney, Mike Pollack, Eddie Whelan, Chris Bond, Leslee Saunders, Tom Wilson, Mr. Roger Street (Streatham), Superintendent West (Stoke Newington), Inspector Gelding (Southampton), Chief Inspector Hammond (Streatham), Superintendent Catherine Stanley (Liverpool), Inspector Russ Howard (Luton) and Detective Chief Inspector Chris Brightmore (Hammersmith and Fulham).

I would also like to thank all the interviewers and all those who spared the time to be interviewed. Lastly thanks also go to Paul Ekblom and Gloria Laycock for their support throughout the project and their help in preparing the draft.

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Contents

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Foreword | iii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| List of Figures | vi |
| List of Tables | vi |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 2. Developing a Multi-Agency Approach | 3 |
| 3. Multi-Agency Interventions: Two Examples | 6 |
| 4. Sources of Information | 8 |
| 5. The Prostitutes and The Clients | 10 |
| 6. Policing Prostitution | 16 |
| 7. The Impact of Intervention | 21 |
| 8. The Problems of Multi-Agency Approaches | 25 |
| 9. The Fear of Crime | 27 |
| 10. Displacement and Deflection | 29 |
| 11. Conclusions | 31 |
| 12. Bibliography | 34 |
| Appendix: Map of St. Leonards Ward in Streatham | 37 |
| Crime Prevention Unit Papers | 38 |

List of Figures

| Figure No. | Caption | Page |
|------------|--|------|
| 1 | Place of residence of arrested prostitutes in Streatham | 10 |
| 2 | Distance of home address from Streatham of kerb-crawlers | 13 |
| 3 | Age distribution of kerb-crawlers in Streatham | 14 |
| 4 | Prostitutes arrested January 1989 - May 1990 | 18 |
| 5 | Traffic flow in Woodbourne Avenue, 1988-1990 | 12 |
| 6 | Traffic flow in Becmead Avenue, 1988-1990 | 23 |

List of Tables

| Table No. | Caption | Page |
|-----------|---|------|
| 1 | Number of kerb-crawlers processed January 1988 - April 1990 | 19 |

1. Introduction

In the mid-1980s, a transformation occurred in the nature of street prostitution and kerb-crawling in Streatham in South London. These activities were not unknown in this area but, until this time, they had remained a peripheral and relatively minor problem. Following the implementation of a traffic management scheme¹ in nearby Tooting, combined with a concerted effort by the Tooting Vice-Squad to push street prostitution and kerb-crawling out of their 'patch', the residents of the St Leonard's area of Streatham became the unwilling beneficiaries of a deliberate policy of displacement.

The significant increase in the level of street prostitution and kerb-crawling was associated with a growth of incivilities, particularly in the form of noise and in the increasing volume of traffic; while various areas of 'private' space were regularly infringed and defiled. These issues came increasingly to dominate everyday life in the neighbourhood – particularly for women – more than anything else. Most noticeably, harassment on the street intensified. As one twenty-year old female resident expressed it:

'You cannot go out any time of the day or night without being propositioned. They ask you how much you charge and invite you to get in the car. If you refuse they will give you abuse or try to pull you into the car physically.'

'I've learnt not to trust anybody. If you don't put on an aggressive front they will walk all over you. I have kicked their cars, pushed them in the face and thrown things at them to keep them away...'

'I have been physically assaulted five times in the last four years. The last time a man pulled up beside me in the car and asked me how much I charged, I turned away and tried to ignore him. He stopped the car and grabbed me and pushed my face into a wall. He then got back into his car and drove off.'

This young woman had been trying to leave the area, but her parents are unable to sell their house. She felt trapped and angry. She said that it was the same for all her friends who lived nearby. Other residents expressed similar concerns. The vast majority (89.0%) of the residents who were interviewed in a residents' survey, which formed part of this research, reported that kerb-crawling and street prostitution had become the major problem in the area.

The qualitative shift in the nature of the problem called for different solutions. The existing forms of policing and community responses were ineffective. Growing requests for police intervention received a cool reaction and, when the police did intervene, they appeared to have little lasting effect upon the problem.

¹A traffic management scheme involves using certain methods such as one-way streets, barriers etc., to control traffic flow through an area.

The various residents' associations which were active in the area came together to form Streatham Against Kerb Crawlers (STAKC) in 1987. STAKC was organised as a vehicle for channelling information amongst residents and provided a mechanism through which pressure could be generated.

At that time, one of the members of STAKC became aware of a multi-agency strategy, which had been successfully implemented in Finsbury Park in North London and involved the combined efforts of the police, local authority and residents' associations (Matthews 1986) The Finsbury Park initiative involved the implementation of an extensive traffic management scheme, the development of more intensive and responsive policing and the active participation of residents in the area. The significance of this triangulated strategy was that it removed the problem of street prostitution and kerb-crawling over a two-year period with a limited degree of displacement.

2. Developing a Multi-Agency Approach

The members of STAKC decided to replicate this multi-agency approach. The starting point was to mobilise local interests. Through a series of newsletters and public meetings, the issues were discussed and it was agreed that a more comprehensive approach was required. The organisers of STAKC realised that, if change was to be achieved, they would have to be the driving force. They were also aware that change would not be instantaneous and that there could be difficulties in maintaining momentum over a period of time. The immediate task, as they saw it, was to persuade the police and the local authority of the seriousness of the problem and to encourage them to become involved in its resolution.

The police had a number of competing demands upon their time and resources. Although there was a formal commitment towards improving police-public relations in the area, some senior officers were reluctant to put more effort in this direction. The representatives of STAKC continually argued for a greater intensity of policing and for the police to simultaneously broaden their range of intervention. By offering to improve the flow of information in relation to kerb-crawling and soliciting, STAKC argued that the best use could be made of police resources and that it would be possible to target the problem more precisely. This encouraged the local police to become more interested in the issue and to be more fully involved in discussions about introducing a traffic management scheme into the area to deter kerb-crawlers.

Discussions began with the local authority and a draft traffic management scheme was drawn up which was designed primarily to deal with the problem of kerb-crawling. It involved introducing a series of one-way streets and road closures which would make it difficult for any prospective kerb-crawler to drive around the area. After some alterations, this traffic management scheme was introduced in December 1989.

The obvious question, and the one which underpins this paper, was whether this type of multi-agency offensive could work in Streatham. Although Streatham residents experienced many of the same problems as the residents in Finsbury Park, there were some significant differences between the two areas. First, unlike Finsbury Park, which was a relatively poor, run-down, inner city area with a transitory population and a strong ethnic mix, this particular part of Streatham was a predominantly white middle class district with a substantially stable and older population, living in pre-war semi-detached houses. Secondly, whereas the prostitutes who worked in Finsbury Park (of whom there were over 200) by and large expressed a differential commitment to 'the game', most of the prostitutes working in Streatham saw themselves as 'career' women. Thirdly, and most importantly, the intensification of the problem was only a relatively recent event and Streatham, unlike Finsbury Park, was not generally seen as a traditional 'red light' district. These differences between the two areas appeared to offer both advantages and disadvantages for the prospects of successfully implementing a multi-agency approach in the Streatham area.

The evaluation of the Streatham initiative raised some important issues. First, it offered the possibility of examining the flexibility and limitations of the much-vaunted multi-agency approach. Secondly, it allowed some examination of the relation between public order issues, crime and neighbourhood change; and, thirdly, it raised the vexed issue of displacement in relation to what is often considered to be one of the most intractable of social problems. Finally, it invited some consideration of the relation between disorder, or 'incivilities' as they are sometimes referred to, and the so-called 'fear of crime'.

Probably the most influential writers on these issues are James Q Wilson and George Kelling who put forward a very plausible thesis concerning the relationship between problems of disorder, or incivilities, crime and neighbourhood decline. Although writing from an American vantage point, their work has been extremely influential in Britain and has profoundly affected thinking about issues relating to public order (see Hope and Hough, 1988, Matthews 1992). Wilson and Kelling (1982) note that certain forms of disorder, including activities like soliciting and kerb-crawling, can have a more devastating effect upon a neighbourhood than a team of professional burglars. Once forms of disorder become established in the area, it signifies that 'no-one cares' and that the area is vulnerable and poorly protected. It then attracts a range of criminal activities and sets in motion a dynamic of neighbourhood decline. In this thesis, it is disorder nor crime which is the instigator of neighbourhood decline and it is in relation to problems of order maintenance that police activity should be principally directed. Only in this way, it is argued, will the safety and cohesion of neighbourhoods be restored. The central elements of this thesis have been clearly expressed by Wesley Skogan in the following terms:

'Disorder not only sparks concern and fear of crime among neighbourhood residents, it may actually increase the level of serious crime. Disorder erodes what control neighbourhood residents can maintain over local events and conditions. It drives out those for whom stable community life is important, and it discourages people with similar values from moving in. It threatens house prices and discourages investment. In short, disorder is an instrument of destabilisation and neighbourhood decline.' (Skogan 1990:3)

Street prostitution and kerb-crawling have an ambiguous status in relation to the concepts of 'crime' and 'disorder'. Prostitution itself is not an offence, but almost every conceivable way of engaging in prostitution in Britain is illegal. Kerb-crawling, on the other hand, became an illegal activity through the 1985 Sexual Offences Act, but because of the problems in the formulation of an offence in which, by definition, 'persistence' is an essential ingredient, various non-persistent forms may not constitute an offence. Clearly, however, these types of quasi-illegal street activities are those identified by Wilson, Kelling and Skogan as constituting the type of public order problems which can both devastate neighbourhoods and attract a variety of criminal activities into the area. In this localised study, these contentions were examined and, in particular, an attempt was made to draw out the relation between street prostitution, kerb-crawling, the level of crime and the 'fear of crime'.

It was partly, of course, because of the recognition of the quasi-illegal status of street prostitution and kerb-crawling that it was felt that some extra-legal controls were required and by implication that some form of multi-agency intervention was necessary. Legal controls have always proved a blunt instrument in dealing with street prostitution and related problems. The difficulties stem not only from the vagueness of current legal statutes, but also from the perennial problems of collecting reliable evidence and producing witnesses (Wolfenden 1957). In the case of soliciting, the problems of evidence and victim participation are often overridden as the prostitute, who invariably thinks she has harmed no identifiable person, feels that she is treated unjustly in that she has no realistic defence. In the case of the male kerb-crawler concern is expressed about civil liberties, the 'unfairness' of summary judgments and the problems in safeguarding rights. All these considerations make convictions uncertain. The police, not wishing to spend resources on cases with unpredictable outcomes, may be encouraged to resort to 'irregular' strategies which may themselves be of dubious legal status (Boles and Tatro 1978; Cassels 1985; Edwards 1987; Matthews 1986). These complex problems suggest that legislative change itself is unlikely to resolve the problem and that a broader and more imaginative approach is required. The experience of Finsbury Park suggested that solutions were possible without major legislative changes. The type of multi-agency strategies which were employed in North London have been adopted in modified forms elsewhere, including Luton and Southampton.

3. Multi-agency Interventions: Two Examples

Multi-agency interventions in a number of forms have been applied to the problem of crime control with considerable success (Forrester et al, 1988). In relation to kerb-crawling and prostitution, multi-agency initiatives have been employed with significant benefits in Luton and Southampton.

Luton

As in Streatham, the problems associated with street prostitution grew in Luton during the 1980s, as did complaints from residents. In this case, the Inspector in charge of the Vice-Squad had been informed of the developments which had taken place in Finsbury Park and pushed for a replication of the initiative in Luton. In 1987, a traffic management scheme was implemented and the police prioritised this issue and expressed a clear commitment to reducing or removing street prostitution and kerb crawling from the area. The offensive proved successful. Within a two year period, the level of street prostitution and kerb-crawling was significantly reduced. The number of 'known prostitutes' operating in Luton declined from 75 in 1987 to 25 in 1989. By 1990, there were six or less women working on the streets on any one day. The level of nuisance was reduced and there was a minimum degree of visible displacement. Using a variety of policing strategies, backed up by a relatively high level of fines for both convicted prostitutes (£250-£400) and kerb-crawlers (£150-£250), street prostitution was eventually limited to two principal streets. Residents living in these streets still complained to the police and wanted a further reduction, but there is a general acknowledgement, both amongst the police and residents, that daily life in the area has been significantly improved.

Southampton

The situation in Southampton was very different to both Luton and Finsbury Park. The issue in Southampton was not so much centred around soliciting, but was mostly concerned with the activities of kerb crawlers. This was because prostitutes in one particular street in the town displayed themselves from their windows attempting to attract clients. This, however, produced the familiar problems of noise, traffic and disturbance, albeit in a modified form.

In the 1980s, there was an estimated 40-50 'red light' houses operating in Southampton. A multi-agency approach of a slightly different kind to that employed in Finsbury Park was introduced involving the police, the residents and the local council who served planning enforcement orders against the owners of premises which were being used for prostitution. This was linked to a wider programme of environmental improvement. The designated 'red light' area became part of a Housing Action Scheme. A traffic management scheme was also introduced to restrict the activities of the kerb crawlers (Golding 1991).

By 1991, there were only six or seven prostitutes working from residential premises in Southampton and the level of displacement in the form of street prostitution was reported to be minimal. Again, the employment of a multi-agency initiative appears to have been very successful in reducing the level of both kerb-crawling and prostitution.

Thus, it would seem that there have been a number of attempts to employ multi-agency approaches to reduce problems associated with kerb-crawling and street prostitution. In Tooting, as described earlier, a scheme was introduced which involved a conscious and effective attempt to push the problem into nearby areas. In Finsbury Park, Luton and Southampton, on the other hand, where the initiative was integrated with an intensive policing policy involving close relations with community organisations, a very dramatic reduction in the problem was achieved.

These various initiatives raise a number of issues concerning the level of liaison between neighbouring police authorities on issues of this type. It also seems that the magnitude and the distribution of the problem can make a considerable difference to how the problem is conceived and responses assessed. Finally, it would seem that, although traffic management schemes have in these examples gone some way towards reducing this problem, such an outcome is far from inevitable. As an isolated strategy, environmental schemes are just as likely to 'design in' as to 'design out' the problem. By the same token, intervention by 'active citizens' may well exacerbate problems (Henshaw 1986) and while the police on their own have demonstrated historically that, even at their most vigilant, they are able only to reduce the problem to manageable proportions. There is a growing recognition that an effective strategy requires at least three component parts: the police; the local authority; and, most importantly, the residents; acting in conjunction with each other. Recent evidence, however, indicates that genuine multi-agency approaches aimed at reducing the problems associated with street prostitution are rare (Gelding 1991). These issues are still perceived in many areas as exclusively police matters, despite the clear indication that the police by themselves tend to have only a limited and temporary impact.

4. Sources of Information

The research employed a variety of data gathering techniques in order to examine the various dimensions of the multi-agency initiative set up in Streatham.

i. Residents survey

A residents survey was carried out before and after the multi-agency initiative was fully implemented. This randomised 'panel' survey was designed to provide data on the level and nature of victimisation in the area and to examine its impact upon different groups. Like other surveys of this kind, it included questions relating to a range of crimes and incivilities (Jones et al 1986; Painter 1989). It involved 110 interviews in the first phase and 89 in the second. It included questions relating to a range of incivilities, fear of crime and community safety.

Apart from usual problems of longitudinal research (e.g., keeping variables constant over time), there were a number of problems which arose in the course of conducting the survey which influenced the outcome of the research. First, the fragmented and privatised nature of the area created problems of access and in gaining responses. Secondly, the questionnaire had to be relatively short, since the interviews were carried out in mid-winter mostly on doorsteps. Thirdly, a number of respondents refused to participate in the follow-up interview because of fears of reprisals (despite assurances of absolute confidentiality). Fourthly, even though the survey covered a relatively small area, it was far from homogeneous. The term 'neighbourhood' therefore has to be applied with some caution. Like many other urban centres, significant changes can occur within a few streets (Bottoms et al, 1987, Hough and Mayhew, 1985).

ii. In depth interviews

In combination with the residents survey, 32 in-depth interviews were carried out with prostitutes and the police. A further 22 in-depth interviews were carried out with residents.

These provided more detailed information on the attitudes of respondents on key issues. The interviews with the police and the residents caused no real problems, but it was decided to interview the prostitutes in the police station. Interviewers were only permitted, however, to talk to the prostitutes as they were leaving the station, after having been detained for an hour or two. Not surprisingly, these interviews were a great deal shorter than was hoped.

iii. Police statistics and data

Information on crime rates and details of police arrests and of kerb crawlers was gathered from Streatham, Luton and Southampton police forces. Police data on the arrest and prosecution rates for kerb crawlers and prostitutes were particularly helpful and the individual details of the kerb crawlers and prostitutes kept on police files

allowed the construction of a profile of these two groups. A computer search was also carried out by the Metropolitan Police, which traced subsequent activities of those women arrested for prostitution in Finsbury Park in 1985 in order to examine the level of displacement.

iv. Data collected by community organisations

STAKC held a variety of information including minutes from meetings and correspondence between members, the police, the local authority, as well as local councillors and political representatives.

v. Interviewers' observations

Interviewers were encouraged to note observations both on the area and on the interviewees. From their unique vantage point, interviewers were able to provide independent assessments, not only of particular developments, but also of particular respondents.

vi. Newspaper reports and television programmes

The developments in Streatham attracted a certain amount of media attention. Newspaper reports were examined in terms of their representation of the issues and in particular in relation to their propensity to affect the 'fear of crime'.

vii. Local authority data

The data collected by the local authority was of a significantly different kind than that collected by the other agencies or groups. In particular, the records of council meetings and other relevant documents produced by the Council helped to locate the issue within a wider social and political framework.

viii. Attendance at public meetings

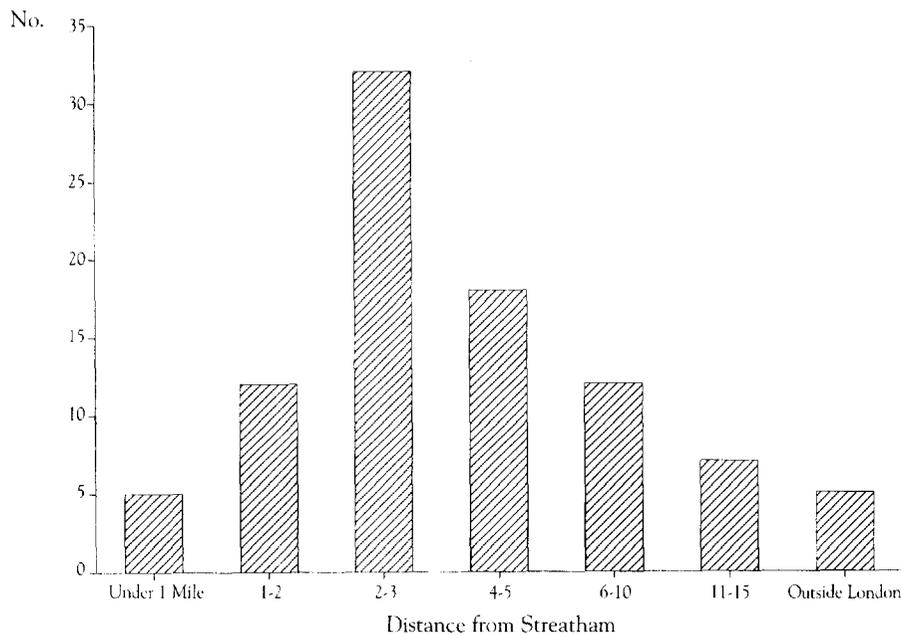
A series of public meetings were called on the issues of street prostitution and kerb-crawling. Observing these meetings provided some degree of sensitization to the level of public feeling on these issues, as well as giving some insight into the dynamics of community organisation and the processes of policy formation.

5. The Prostitutes and the Clients

The Prostitutes

It is estimated that there were between 30-40 female prostitutes working on the streets in the St Leonard's area of Streatham in 1989-90. The ages of the women ranged from 16 to 48, - 50% were between 20 and 30 years old; 27% were under 20, and 23% were over 30. The majority, according to police records, were White (76%), with 16% Afro-Caribbean, 4% Indian/Asian and 1% Mediterranean. Very few were resident in the Streatham area itself. The majority lived between two and five miles away from Streatham (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Place of residence of arrested prostitutes in Streatham



Most of the women lived in areas which have easy access to Streatham, but did not have any direct associations with the area. In some cases, they visited the area from the West Midlands and elsewhere, but they only appear to have stayed for a short period. Thus, it could not be said that the prostitutes were local women who attracted outsiders into the area. These women were, for the most part, outsiders themselves.

Besides the geographical and other quantitative data collected on the prostitutes from police files, twelve of the women were also interviewed in the police station. There

were considerable operational difficulties in carrying out detailed interviews in this setting, but some indication of the prostitutes' views were gained. The small sample size needs to be kept in mind, however.

A number of common themes emerged from these interviews. First, almost all of the women expressed fears for their personal safety. Some related accounts of beatings they had suffered at the hands of both clients and pimps. As a consequence, most of the women claimed to be 'fussy' about clients. A number stated that they would not go with 'scruffy' men or 'weirdos'. One said that she avoided 'Iraqis and Blacks', while another said she always tried to find 'men in suits'. Two of the women worked together (one black and one white) for security, as well as for the provision of 'specialist services'.

The second general theme which emerged from the interviews was that the majority of the women said that they had been in care or had been sexually abused as a child, or raped. They identified these experiences as conditioning their decision to become a prostitute.

Thirdly, most of the women saw themselves as having little choice of employment. In terms of their education and experience, they pointed out that there was nothing which could give the level of remuneration which they earned as prostitutes. Those women who were willing to say anything about their earnings claimed to earn in the region of £100 per day, but few worked every day. The average cost of the services provided was £25 in the house or flat or £10 in the car. These figures suggest that prostitutes are 'servicing' four or five clients per working day. A few had jobs in the past, but they felt that 'the money was no good'. Interestingly, when asked what they would do as an alternative to prostitution, a number said that they would like to work with children and old people, whilst one woman said that she would like to work for the Salvation Army. The majority, however, did not see any realistic option and felt that, for better or worse, they were tied to prostitution for the foreseeable future.

Fourthly, virtually all of the prostitutes interviewed expressed ambivalence toward the social organisation and effects of prostitution. On one side, there was a strong commitment to a laissez-faire approach which argued that they had as much right as anyone else to work on the streets. On the other hand, one of the women interviewed, whilst insisting on their right to perform this 'necessary and useful' social service, stated when asked what she thought about the effects of street prostitution on the residents in the area replied: 'I can understand how they feel: I mean, I wouldn't want prostitutes working outside my home.'

Another woman in a slightly more philosophical tone claimed that 'everything you do upsets somebody'. One prostitute, in order to avoid 'trouble' from the local residents, paid a friend £40 per day to walk around beside her with two Rottweillers. She claimed that she 'wasn't offending anybody' and had a right to work in the area.

The prostitutes interviewed also expressed a certain ambiguity about how they thought prostitution should be organised. Again, most of the women expressed a laissez-faire attitude endorsing a 'live and let live' philosophy, whilst simultaneously arguing for the legalisation of prostitution and the creation of state-run brothels, as in Amsterdam. They seemed to oscillate between decriminalisation and legalisation without fully understanding the implications of either. What they seemed to be suggesting in pursuing these ultimately incompatible options is that they wanted both the ability to operate freely, while having some security and protection (see Venemar and Visser, 1990).

A fifth theme which emerged from the interviews was that the lives of many of the women were organised around court appearances and paying off fines. They felt that they were tied into a vicious circle of court appearances, fines, and prostitution.

A final theme which emerged was that a number of women stated that they had regular clients who they met on certain days. Some of them also stated that they worked from home, as well as from the street. The availability of regular clients seems to indicate that, although the majority of these women see themselves as 'career' prostitutes, they are able and willing to operate in other ways than from the street. Thus, in terms of regulation which is designed to limit the nuisance level of street prostitution, there seems to be the possibility of encouraging other less problematic forms of organisation.

In Streatham, it would seem that the prostitutes working in the area live a relatively precarious life in which they try to avoid the attentions of violent clients, angry residents and police officers. Much of their daily life is orchestrated by court appearances and by earning the money to pay off outstanding fines. There is little prospect, for most of these women, of any realistic alternative in the foreseeable future. Most feel that they have a long-term commitment to 'the game' and that, if they are careful and take the right precautions, they can avoid disease, illness and violence. Most of these women have been in care and have been sexually abused. There appears little real possibility of dissuading them from prostitution, but there does appear to be some latitude for influencing their modus operandi.

The Clients

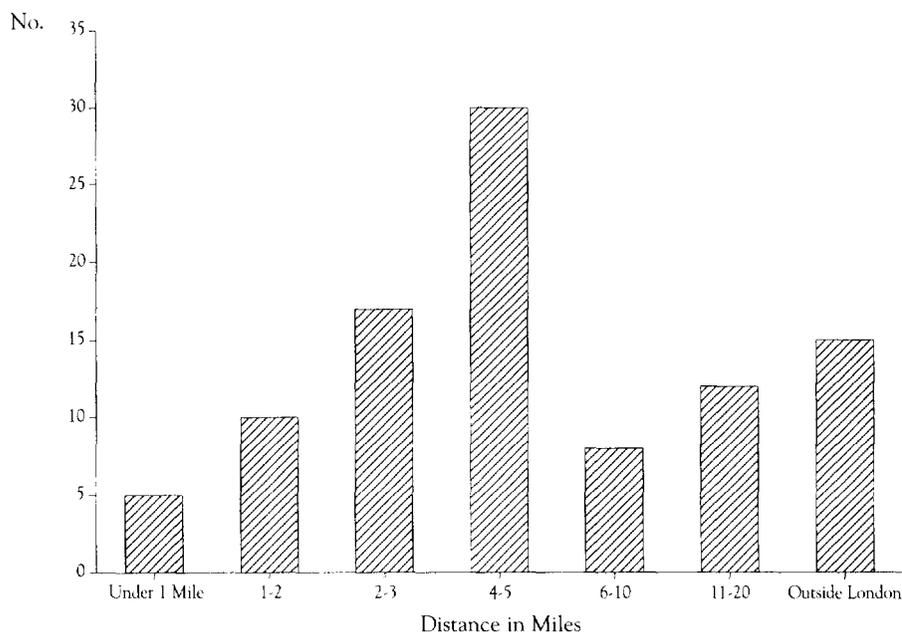
Much less is known about clients than about prostitutes. This is partly because 'the problem' was seen until recently as one of soliciting by prostitutes and partly because various agencies in the criminal justice system feel that investigating male clients is an unnecessary encroachment upon their personal lives and sensibilities. This situation has changed significantly over the past few years, as kerb-crawling in some areas is perceived as being a greater problem than soliciting.

In Streatham, it was found that the sympathy and the tolerance which was on occasions directed by the residents towards the prostitutes was rarely given to the kerb-crawlers. The image of the kerb-crawler was of a rational and well-resourced man

who was probably in his mid-thirties and married and living in the suburbs. Descriptions of this type were offered on a number of occasions by residents who were interviewed. It was one of the aims of the research to investigate the accuracy of residents' (and police) perceptions of the problem.

For that reason, a profile of the clients was constructed out of police records. Although the police discouraged interviews with clients because, as they saw it, of problems of recrimination, the police 'process reports' gave some useful details of the men revolved. Kerb-crawlers, it transpired, came from further afield than the prostitutes and were from a different age group. As Figure 2 indicates, the kerb-crawlers tended to come from locations some 4-6 miles away from Streatham, with some living over 15 miles from the area. Clients were drawn from all over South East London and from outer London districts, such as Croydon, but a significant percentage travelled from outlying suburban regions or, alternatively, may have visited the area after work.

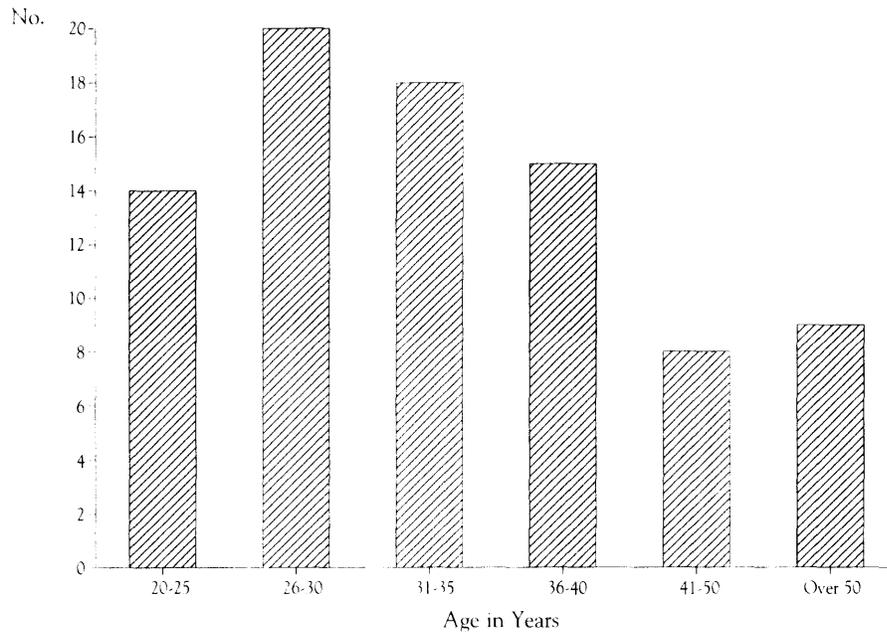
Figure 2. Distance of home address from Streatham of kerb crawlers



The residents' conception of the clients as 'outsiders' and of travelling considerable distances to Streatham was largely accurate. They were less accurate, however, about the average age of the clients. As Figure 3 indicates the majority were in their twenties and early thirties; the youngest was 20, the oldest 59.

The police records do not show the marital status of the kerb-crawlers who are processed, but the nature of the responses from the kerb-crawlers given to the police

Figure 3. Age Distribution of kerb crawlers in Streatham



upon arrest suggest that a considerable number were married. In fact, the immediate responses given to the police officer when approached give a good indication of the concerns and feelings of the kerb-crawlers. The following are representative:

'Not that. I am a married man I have got a small kid.'

'Look, I'm a married man with two children sir. I don't want this trouble sir. Can I speak to you about this?'

'Does my work have to find out?'

'Oh, come on officer. You are a young bloke, you'll understand.'

'Does this have to go anywhere? This is the first time I have done this'

In many cases, it was not the probability of paying a fine which was their concern, but the publicity and shame which they feared. Many expected the police to be sympathetic and some offered thinly-veiled bribes. This evidence suggests that it may well be the kerb-crawlers who are the weak partner in the relation. Increasingly, the kerb-crawler is becoming identified as someone who is relatively easy to deter. Very few of the kerb-crawlers who were cautioned re-appeared on police records. For these reasons, attention has shifted in a number of areas towards the kerb-crawler.

Interestingly, the differences between the female prostitutes and the male clients were that the latter expressed a lower level of commitment, but also expressed a higher

level of shame. The prostitutes for the most part saw themselves as providing some form of 'social service' and as following an underrated occupation. Whereas, the prostitutes were pre-occupied with the level and frequency of their fines; the clients seemed relatively unconcerned about the prospect of paying a fine of £150-250, but were very concerned about their activities being made public. In relation to policy therefore, it would seem that an objective of seeking a strict level of formal equality in terms of punishment, even acknowledging the unit fines system, is questionable.

6. Policing Prostitution

An internal police report entitled 'Prostitution in Streatham' written by M. Wilson in March 1989 notes that:

'Despite intensive periods of arrests and charging of prostitutes this has no deterrent effect on the prostitutes. There is, of course, no power of imprisonment, and the fines which may vary between £20.00 and £75.00 are meaningless. The magistrates appear to be in a dilemma because the imposition of a fine is a direct incentive to earn the money by prostitution – usually the only way a fine can be paid.' (Wilson, 1989; 5).

This statement reflects thinking within the police service. It expresses the general disenchantment which many police officers feel about the cycle of arresting prostitutes, taking them to court, seeing them fined and then returning to the street to earn money to pay it off. Within the police force itself, there is a great deal of ambivalence about policing prostitution. For the majority, it is considered low status work and not 'proper' police work.

In Streatham, a vice-squad was set up in April 1988 with a rotated team of five officers. The officers who were interviewed considered that the month spent on the vice-squad was a generally undesirable but unavoidable duty. One of the reasons why the rotational selection of the vice squad was introduced, no doubt, was to minimize the dangers of 'fraternization'. It is clear from the nature of the work and the clientele that officers and prostitutes tend to rapidly move to first-name basis and develop a 'working relationship'.

Residents who were interviewed complained endlessly of this apparent 'fraternisation'. They repeatedly gave accounts of prostitutes sitting in police cars, or of officers laughing and joking with the women on the street. The only thing which annoyed the residents more than this was to see police cars passing by groups of prostitutes actively soliciting on the streets. This occurred because the uniformed officers normally left these problems to the vice squad. The prostitutes, who tended to know the vice squad officers by sight, felt safe and the residents interpreted this as police indifference.

The combination of perceived indifference and fraternisation not only made residents angry, but strained relations between the community organisations and the police. People in the area often felt that the police, despite formal reassurances, did not really take the problem seriously.

An important element in the relationship between the police and the prostitutes is that the police tend to see the prostitutes as a very useful source of information. In fact, some members of the vice squad stated that one of the main purposes of dealing with prostitutes was based on the information which might be forthcoming. For this reason, the police had an interest not only in maintaining these contacts, but also encouraging the co-operation of certain prostitutes.

It was against this background that police practices to deal with kerb-crawling and street prostitution were developed. During the period between 1986 and 1989, the police, under continuous pressure, tried a number of approaches designed to reduce the problem.

The main offensives, despite reservations about their effectiveness, were directed towards arresting and prosecuting the prostitutes. Paradoxically, within the police service, the arrest rate for prostitutes remained the main indicator of police 'success'. The police also felt that it provided a clear indication to the public that they were dealing with the problem. Thus, from 1985 to 1990, the number of prostitutes arrested increased dramatically.

The arrest level in Streatham rose from 94 in 1985 to 1,158 in 1988. This latter figure is even more remarkable when one realises that this involves some 30 to 40 women being continuously rearrested. The steep increase in the number of arrests in 1989 is accompanied by a significant decrease in the number of prostitutes cautioned. In 1987, for example, there were 136 prostitutes cautioned, whereas, in 1988, it was only 3.

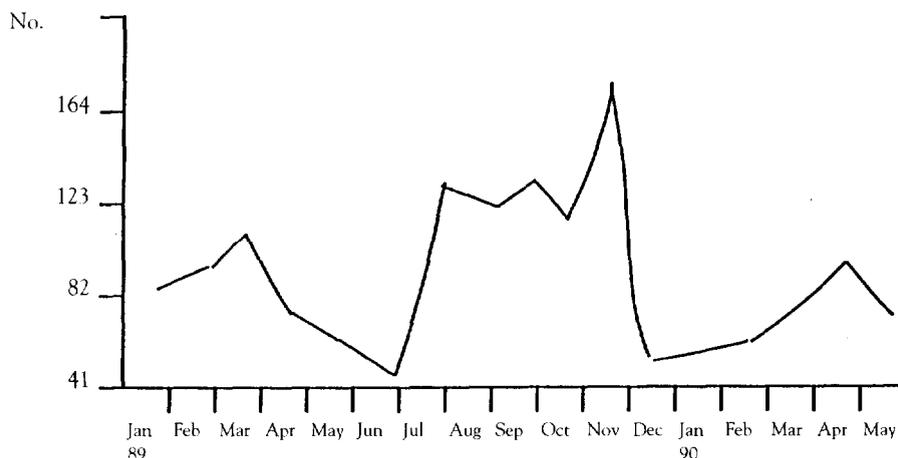
One positive effect of this offensive against the prostitutes was that it seemed to deter new women from coming into the area to work. Visitors to the area were few and the number of women operating in Streatham remained fairly constant over this period.

Of the prostitutes who went to court, the level of fines by comparison with Luton, for example, was quite moderate. In the South Western Magistrates' Court in 1989, 21% of those convicted were given fines of £25 or less, while 63% received fines of £50 or less.

The figures for 1989 indicate that the average prostitute in Streatham was arrested some 30 times and would pay a fine at court of something in the region of £25 - £40. Thus, women were on average paying something in the region of £750 per year in fines. For particular women, the sum could be a great deal more. Considering that prostitutes charge approximately £10-20 for sex in a car, or £20-£30 indoors, it can take a considerable amount of time to earn enough money to cover these costs.

It should also be noted that there was a significant monthly variation in the arrest rate. This is partly due to the number of women working in different times of the year and the intensity of police activity. Looking at arrests, for example, between January 1989 and May 1990, the uneven nature of the process is apparent (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Prostitutes arrested January 1989 - May 1990



These variations in police intervention suggest that the arrest rate may vary with the level of public pressure and that periods of intensity are followed by quieter periods during which time the women re-establish their operation. This, combined with the fact that the five-man vice-squad was only able to cover one shift and worked only certain nights of the week, allowed enough respite and variation for the women to believe that they could accommodate the periods of intense policing and manoeuvre in such a way that they could keep operating in the longer term.

On the other side of the coin, the police attempted to limit the activities of kerb crawlers. Following the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 1985, the police had a mandate to arrest and prosecute the kerb-crawlers, although they claimed, as other police forces have done, that the requirements of the Act are such that convictions are difficult to achieve. The police did, however, from the start of 1987, begin processing kerb-crawlers. In 1987 there were 72; in 1988, this rose to 180 and, in 1989, it dropped back to 129. In 1989, however, some 133 kerb-crawlers, were given a verbal warning, as compared to 13 in 1986.

Of the 180 kerb-crawlers reported for prosecution in 1988, 61 were summoned and 119 received no further action. Of those who went to court, 4 cases were dismissed, 53 were convicted and given fines in the region of £200 (with £50 costs). During this period, the police also tried to deter kerb crawlers by sending the vehicle owners letters of warning. Some 102 letters were sent out in 1988. This practice was dropped, however, the following year, because its effects were felt to be uncertain. The police also employed breathalyser tests to deter suspected kerb crawlers.

Interestingly, in the period after the implementation of the road closure scheme in December 1989, the arrest rates for kerb-crawlers decreased. Taking the figures from

the first quarter between 1988 and 1990, a noticeable decrease occurs which reflects, according to the local police, a decrease in the number of kerb-crawlers visiting the area (see Table 1).

The offensive against prostitution and related problems has, however, been hampered by a lack of clear commitment and strategy. This is partly because there have been three Chief Inspectors in the Streatham division over the last six years and each new person has brought their own style and approach. As a result, there have been fluctuations in the mode of intervention and an overall lack of consistency.

Table 1. Number of kerb crawlers processed January-April 1988-90

| | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 |
|----------|------|------|------|
| January | 6 | 6 | 4 |
| February | 50 | 11 | 7 |
| March | 47 | 16 | 15 |
| April | 68 | 35 | 23 |
| Total | 151 | 68 | 49 |

Thus, by the time the traffic management scheme was introduced in December 1989, the police had 'exhausted' what they saw as the available range of options. Also, the implementation of the scheme met with a mixed response. Some senior officers expressed a dislike for the scheme either because they felt it would displace the problem or because they felt it was a police matter and could not be 'delegated out'. On the other hand, there was a feeling that the traffic management scheme would in itself reduce the problem and that its implementation, in a sense, would let the police "off the hook".

Thus, although there was a police 'crack-down' in the immediate period following the introduction of the traffic management scheme, the police did not really co-ordinate their offensive to take advantage of the dislocating effect of the scheme on the prostitute-client relationship. Since the operation of the street trade requires a location where both parties can anticipate the presence of the other, the removal of such a location can undermine - temporarily at least - the trade. New locations have to be sought out or the trade is stifled. The police, however, did not really take advantage of the moment and, as a result, the trade was able to quickly reorganize itself in the surrounding streets.

More recently, under the direction of a new Chief Inspector, an offensive has been developed which is aimed increasingly towards deterring the kerb-crawler. Attempts have been made to increase the status of the work, to introduce new rotas and to heighten police presence on the streets. The net effect of this offensive has been to reduce the number of women working in the area, as well as the number of kerb-crawlers. This is reflected in a reduction in the level of complaints relating to prostitution received by the police.

A group involving residents, the police, local councillors and representatives of STAKC meet regularly to discuss kerb-crawling, prostitution and related matters. This group, called the Streatham Community and Police Group Against Vice, also considers other matters relating to community safety and crime prevention.

7. The Impact of Intervention

In this section, the aim is to examine the impact of the multi-agency initiative in Streatham. In assessing the effects, the study runs into the familiar problems of longitudinal research. Principally, these include the educational and sensitizing effects of the first sweep of the survey and the problems associated with making allowances for extraneous changes occurring in the area. In addition, this research project attempted to assess a three-pronged initiative, which was implemented in an uneven manner with different elements combining with different degrees of intensity at different times.

A follow-up residents survey was carried out twelve months after the implementation of the traffic management scheme. Within the St Leonard's Ward, some significant changes were recorded between November 1989 and November 1990. In particular, there was a general recognition amongst residents that the level of street prostitution and kerb-crawling had declined in the area. Respondents were given a street map and asked to identify the streets where kerb-crawlers and prostitutes were active. Virtually all respondents indicated that the trade had moved to the periphery of the area and the High Street. In the in-depth interviews, the vast majority of the respondents commented on the reduction of noise, traffic and harassment on the streets.

As was expected, the level of soliciting and kerb-crawling in the area went down significantly. Lower levels of disorder were reported and there was a marked improvement in their overall quality of life. Importantly, there was a significant reduction in the level of residents' victimisation by crime between December 1989 and December 1990. The most dramatic decrease was in the level of burglary. This may, in part, be a result of intensive anti-burglary campaigns carried out by the local police in this period (burglary rates throughout the division fell by approximately 20%). It may also be, in part, a function of the regaining of 'defensible space' and increased public awareness. Importantly, sexual harassment, assault and being insulted or bothered by strangers also fell substantially over this period. There was a significant decline in street robbery and damage to cars which appears to be a knock-on or 'free-rider' effect of reducing the level of disorder.

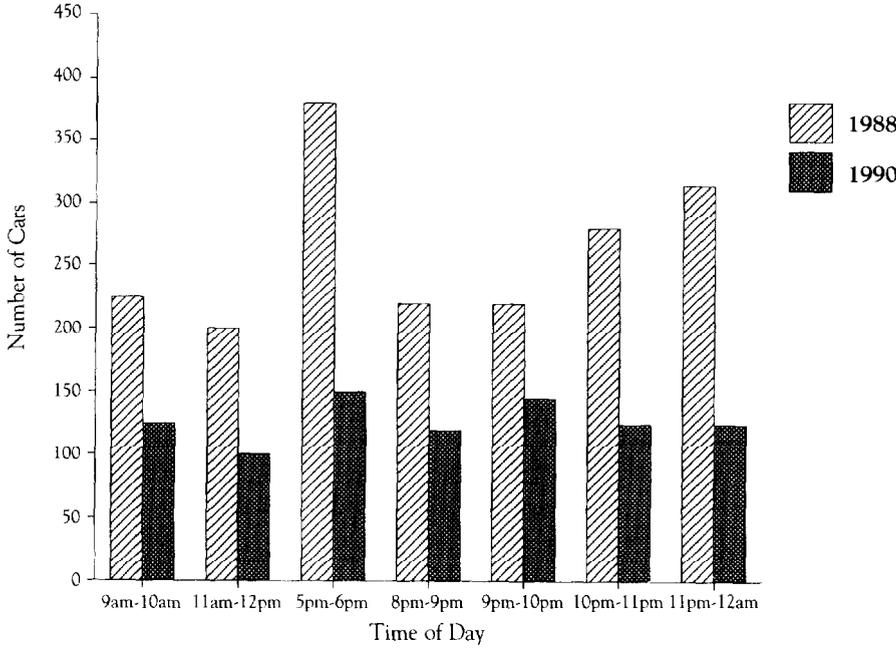
The traffic management scheme, which was developed in two stages, proved very effective in removing kerb-crawlers from the St Leonard's area. The first stage of the plan involved closing the central reservation in Streatham High Road in order to prevent cars turning off into St Leonard's ward (see appendix). The second part of the scheme involved the implementation of a system of 'no-entries' and 'road closures' in St Leonard's itself. According to the Council: "The purpose of the traffic management scheme was to break the circuits and to make it difficult for kerb-crawlers to go around the network of roads." (Environmental and Leisure Committee 1990.)

The initial formulation of the plan for the traffic management scheme was produced by the police. The design which they proposed was, however, 'hardened up' by the

Council, who added two road closures to the original proposals. There were, however, some reservations about the final plans and some residents felt that it was not comprehensive enough. However, not wishing to delay the implementation of the scheme any longer, objections were muted. The main concerns about the traffic management scheme were that it still allowed potential kerb-crawlers to cruise around the area in a wider circuit. As a result, the prostitutes moved to the streets which remained accessible to prospective clients.

In order to convey to those living outside the area a sense of the effects of kerb-crawling in relation to the volume of traffic, the residents undertook a number of traffic counts. The results from traffic counts taken before and after the implementation of the traffic management scheme indicate the effects of the intervention on the flow of traffic. In Woodbourne Avenue, for example, which is located in the north part of St Leonard’s ward, a traffic census carried out in June 1988, identified almost 300 cars travelling along that street between 10 – 11 p.m. In July 1990, this had dropped to 119 cars over the same period of time. (See Figure 5.)

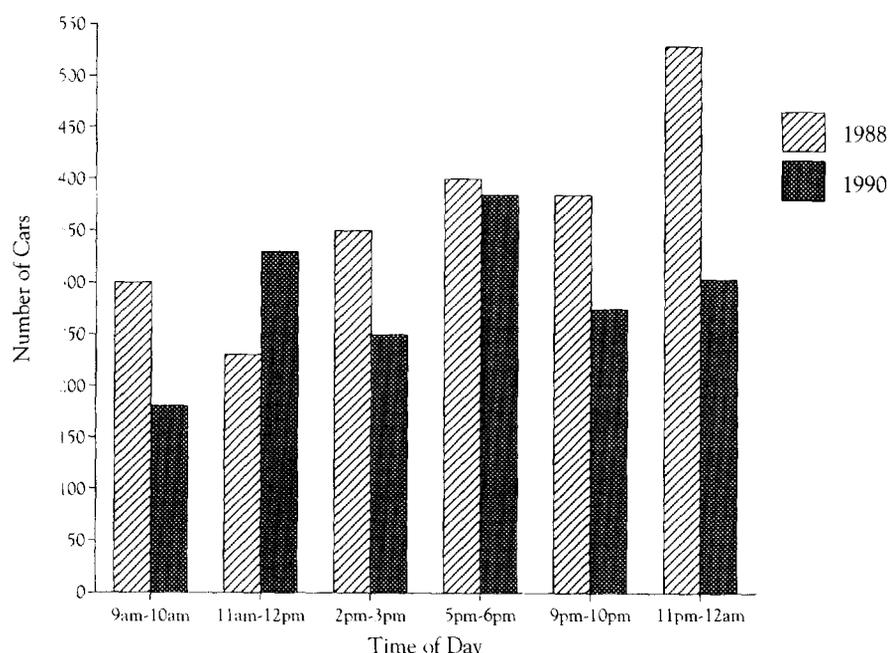
Figure 5. Traffic flow in Woodbourne Avenue 1988-1990



As the figure above shows, there was an overall drop in the number of cars using this street throughout the day. The reduction in the volume of traffic was most pronounced between 5pm and 6pm, and between 11pm and midnight.

Traffic counts were also carried out in nearby Becmead Avenue, which is an open relief road and acts to relieve congestion on the main High Road. The traffic flows in this road are particularly significant since there were no barriers or restrictions put in place. As such, it is reasonable to assume that any reduction of traffic in this road signifies a reduction in the level of 'superfluous' traffic in the area. Again, a count was carried out by residents in 1988 and repeated in July 1990 (See figure 6).

Figure 6. Traffic flow in Becmead Avenue 1988-1990



The traffic count in Becmead Avenue, like that carried out in Woodbourne Avenue, indicates a substantial reduction in the flow of traffic along this street. Indicatively, the volume of traffic during the day was much the same in both periods, but after 9pm the volume of traffic decreased considerably. This reduction from 518 to 312 cars between 11pm and midnight was almost certainly a function of the reduction of kerb-crawling and cruising in the area.

There were, needless to say, some objections to the traffic management scheme; both from residents who feared displacement and those who complained about problems of access. However, the Chair of STAKC, Tom Wilson, summarised the feelings of most residents in the area in an interview in 'The Independent' newspaper:

“The scheme has destroyed the logic of the road system’, said Tom Wilson, who chairs Streatham Against Kerb Crawlers. ‘It has literally become a maze. Of course,

it's a nuisance, but I am getting letters and cards from people saying: "Thank God it is working." Quiet has returned to these spacious streets, to the squat family houses with their glass-fronted porches and bay windows. On a Saturday night, it is police cars that cruise past the garages and the gardens. Only one prostitute – bare thighs mottled in blue with cold – can be seen slowly walking the pavements.'" (The Independent, 9 Feb 1990)

This statement reflects the changing mood of the residents in St Leonard's. There were, however, some residents, both inside and outside the St Leonard's area, who felt that the multi-agency strategy was not as effective as it could have been.

Residents were also asked in the survey whether or not they reported incidents to the police. Their response indicated that, following the intervention, there was a higher level of willingness to report. This may partly have been a consequence of a changed perception in the willingness of the police to deal with these problems. Public confidence in the police undoubtedly increased over this period. Formal channels of communication had been established between the residents and the police and there had been a general improvement in police-public relations.

Residents, however, expressed reservations about police performance. These reservations were forcibly raised at a public meeting (attended by over 200 people) held in December 1990. At this meeting, residents demanded a more concerted approach from the police, who they felt were still not paying enough attention to the issue. Following the implementation of the traffic management scheme, police involvement appears to have subsided and residents believed that the police had failed to take proper advantage of the disruption to the prostitution trade which had occurred. For the residents, prostitution and kerb-crawling remained a priority issue.

8. The Problems of multi-agency approaches

The experiences of Finsbury Park, Luton and Southampton suggest that, when multi-agency initiatives are well co-ordinated, they can be very effective. The application of a multi-agency approach in Streatham was not without some significant gains but, overall, the developments illustrate some of the problems and limitations which can beset multi-agency interventions.

First, the intervention suffered from a lack of co-ordination (Whittington 1983). Elements of the intervention were staggered with the respective agencies contributing in different degrees at different times. The strategy spanned a three year period and a number of interventions were developed by the agencies, but they were not always implemented at the most appropriate time or in the most effective ways.

Secondly, the different agencies had different priorities and commitments. Although they all formally expressed a desire to reduce the problems associated with street prostitution, each agency saw the problem in different terms and accorded it a different priority. Lambeth Council, which was beset with serious financial problems during this period, was unable to implement the traffic management scheme when the commitment of the residents and the police was at its peak. When the scheme was eventually implemented in December 1989, it had to be 'toughened up' in order to have any real chance of achieving its desired affect.

During the period of implementation, the relations between the police and the STAKC were always fragile. On both sides, there were significant reservations and, at times, a lack of trust. The police for their part did what they felt was necessary to placate the residents. Although there was a formal recognition of the problem, there was no clear commitment to removing it. The police response at every level was infused with pessimism which was centred around the firm belief that this was somehow a 'natural' and 'inevitable' problem - the 'oldest profession' - and that nothing much could be done in the long-term. As a result, some senior police officers who were concerned about the allocation of resources felt resentful about committing what they considered to be too much time and effort to this particular activity.

A related issue, which invariably surfaces in establishing multi-agency initiatives, is the question of which agency takes the lead (Kinsey, Lea and Young 1986). It was apparent from the experience of Finsbury Park that an initiative of this kind has to be driven from below by the residents' associations and that they must at the same time act effectively to provide direction and relevant information to the police. Similarly, the police need to be responsive and able to act quickly and effectively when asked. However, when relations between the police and the public are fragile, communication can become distorted. One possible consequence of this is that there is a competition for dominance; alternatively, both agencies may withdraw and refuse to accept overall responsibilities for developments. The next stage in this process is that both sides blame each other for perceived failures (Stephens 1988). This, to some

extent, occurred in Streatham during particular periods; although there were other periods when police-public relations were very good and responses were positive.

A further problem, which has been identified in a number of inter-agency settings, is that relations between agencies are often dependent upon certain individuals and the establishment of informal contacts (Sampson et al 1988). When this works well, it cuts through cumbersome bureaucratic and organisational impediments to change. However, the recurring limitation of reliance upon informal arrangements is that a change of agency representative can quickly destabilise established agreements. In a situation like that found in Streatham, where there was a consistent turnover of senior police management, continuity was difficult to maintain; there were continued changes in style, commitment, and objectives, within the division.

A general feature of all multi-agency arrangements is the pressure towards consensus and compromise. This, in some situations, may be seen as a benefit. However, in other situations, it can lead to dissatisfaction and corner-cutting. In relation to the traffic management scheme, for example, it resulted in the production of a scheme which nobody fully endorsed.

Finally, and most importantly, multi-agency approaches raise issues of accountability and responsibility. The relatively informal nature of much multi-agency decision-making means that it is often not open to formal scrutiny. There is a danger in these situations that no single agency or particular individuals are held formally responsible for decisions which are made. If stated objectives are not being achieved, there is a likelihood that each of the agencies will shift responsibility on to the other agencies. This occurred on more than one occasion.

As in Finsbury Park, the initiative in Streatham was, in a sense, not multi-agency enough. In other parts of the country, multi-agency interventions have taken on a different complexion. In Liverpool, for example, medical and counseling services have been introduced to deal with drug and health problems amongst prostitutes, while in other areas, such as Kings Cross in London, the probation service has provided support services.

A successful multi-agency approach must necessarily attempt to overcome these problems and pitfalls. The experience of the Finsbury Park initiative was that a successful multi-agency intervention is one which is well co-ordinated, with a set of clearly defined objectives, and where there is a responsive, stable and constructive relationship between the key agencies involved. Multi-agency initiatives, in themselves, offer no guarantees; such approaches have to be carefully developed. The more ambitious and wide-ranging the initiative, the greater the pitfalls are likely to be. The development of a multi-agency initiative in Streatham made some of these problems visible. Despite these limitations, however, the intervention was not without considerable benefits. One significant outcome was to improve community safety and reduce what is often referred to as the 'fear of crime'.

9. Fear of Crime

A great deal has been written in recent years on 'the fear of crime', although the concept remains vague and undifferentiated (Crawford et al, 1992; Maxfield, 1987). Discussions tend to be posed in terms of the presumed rationality, or irrationality, of certain fears and anxieties amongst certain groups – particularly women and the elderly. Recent work, however, has indicated that 'fear' is often much more rational and realistic than researchers once imagined, if such fears are taken in context, and the actual experiences of those concerned are examined in detail.

If, as local crime surveys suggest, fear of crime is closely linked to actual experiences of victimisation, the decrease in the level of victimisation in the St Leonard's area could be expected to reduce the 'fear of crime'. All the indications were that this was the case. Residents expressed a greater sense of personal security and a decreased anxiety about the risk of future victimisation for virtually all categories of crime.

The interviews with residents were replete with statements expressing a much more positive view of everyday life in the area following the implementation of the multi-agency initiative. Indicatively, the number of women prepared to go out, either by themselves or accompanied by someone else, increased by over 50% and they seemed more willing to use public transport (the number of women who said that they would never avoid using buses doubled) or walk rather than relying on the car (an increase of over 50%).

Maxfield's (1987) study linked fear with high levels of disorder and incivilities and suggested that, when disorder decreased, it would be likely to reduce fear. This appears to be the case in Streatham. However, it should be noted that this reduction of fear may also be a result of the decrease of crime – particularly burglary during this period – or the consequence of a more visible police presence in the area and a simultaneous improvement in police-public relations (Box, 1988).

The reduction of kerb-crawling and soliciting, as expected, reduced the levels of noise, harassment and disturbance. For women, in particular, these changes were very welcome. Although kerb crawling and street prostitution were not entirely removed from the area, they disappeared from certain streets and were no longer visible outside the homes of many residents in St Leonards.

All the criteria by which 'fear of crime' is normally measured indicate a clear reduction following the intervention. However, no matter how effective crime reduction policies are, there are limitations in the degree of reduction that can be achieved in the fear of crime in a short time. This is because peoples' fears and anxieties are linked into a complex matrix of expectations and experiences. As one young female resident pointed out:

'I've learnt to handle myself. It makes you hard. I've had to deal with this for some time. I don't trust people now – particularly men. I don't talk to anyone on the street if I can help it. I suppose I will feel this way for some time'.

Peoples' 'Fear of crime' may well incorporate a range of experiences which go far beyond crime itself (Sparks 1992). Most peoples' sense of security and well-being will be influenced, not only by the activities in the area in which they live, but also by what goes on in their places of work and leisure. As Warr and Stafford (1984) have pointed out, the ways in which real experiences of victimisation translate into fear will depend in part on the characteristics of the crimes themselves. That is, different crimes are related to different thresholds of fear amongst different populations, such that the level might have to be reduced to a particular point before a reduction in fear takes place. Different crimes also have what they refer to as different 'slopes of fear'. By this they mean that different crimes may have a different relation between the rate at which changes in the perceived risk lead to changes in fear. Finally, there is a maximum level of fear that each type of offence is capable of generating. Thus, the relationship between victimisation levels, anticipated risk and the level of fear is neither direct nor one-to-one.

One factor which has been identified as contributing significantly to the level of fear is how crime is reported by the media. The recent Home Office 'Working Group on the Fear of Crime' chaired by Michael Grade claimed that:

'The effect of crime reporting by the media is almost inevitably to increase fear. This becomes unacceptable when, as so often, crime is reported in an unbalanced way, with a strong emphasis on violent and unusual crimes, and on particular types of victim (noticeably young women and old people). The public receives only a distorted impression.' (Grade 1989:2)

This view does not correspond with the operation of the media in relation to the situation in Streatham. The members and organisers of STAKC were more than aware that the media have a strong voyeuristic interest in prostitution and related issues. They also have the capacity to advertise Streatham as a 'red light' district, thereby stimulating trade. However, rather than the media working primarily as an instrument of distortion and exaggeration serving to fuel fears, STAKC managed to use different parts of the media to help them achieve different objectives. For example, the media were used as an instrument for mobilising and informing the local population of developments, and in particular they were used for publicising offensives against kerb crawlers in an attempt to deter them. The South London Press carried a series of well balanced articles which were very high on information and very low on voyeurism.

The media were also used to counteract misconceptions of the issue and, on one occasion at least, to put pressure on the police. Television cameras were invited to one public meeting in which the police were heavily criticised for their handling of kerb crawling/soliciting. The effect of this exposure (although the programme was never actually broadcast) was to encourage the police to rapidly rethink their strategy and to introduce new initiatives. Thus, the experience from Streatham is that the media can be a very useful vehicle for simulating public debate, maximising deterrence and exposing problems - if carefully handled.

10. Displacement and Deflection

A great deal has been made of the issue of displacement – particularly in relation to prostitution (see Lowman 1992). On the assumption that 'bad will out', there is some consensus that a high level of displacement is almost inevitable (Cornish and Clarke 1986). Even amongst apparently 'sophisticated' commentators and practitioners, an overly pessimistic perspective is maintained even when it does not accord with the available evidence. In order to assess the extent of possible displacement, a check was carried out through the police national computer on the women who were arrested for prostitution in Finsbury Park in 1985. The data which were gathered produced some interesting results. Of the 253 women for whom there were records, it was found that 65 were still involved in prostitution in the North London area in 1991. 50 women had subsequent convictions for prostitution in other areas; for the remaining 138 women, there was no trace of any involvement in prostitution related activities following the intervention in Finsbury Park. Thus, this evidence indicates that for over half of the women concerned, that their involvement in street prostitution ceased at that time and they did not move elsewhere to work. This evidence suggests, as was indicated in the original survey, that there was a 'hard core' of about 30 to 40 women who lived in the North London area and continued to work as prostitutes wherever it was possible following the 'closing down' of Finsbury Park. Added to this group, there were about 30 'away day' girls² who, after a period of disruption, also continued working. These tended to be the younger women who had begun working in Finsbury Park as teenagers. These figures, although the most comprehensive available, have to be treated with some caution, because a number of the women concerned used one or more aliases and, therefore, it is not always easy to trace them. The computer search included all known aliases for each of the women, but there may be a percentage in which changes of name were not recorded. However, in relation to displacement these findings are significant and do provide the best indication, to date, that displacement is far from inevitable and that, even when it does occur, it may be limited and short-lived.

The commitment to prostitution amongst the women working in Streatham was very different to that of the women in Finsbury Park. Clearly, deterring this group away from street prostitution was never going to be easy. Some of the women interviewed had worked in Tooting prior to 1987. However, before the institution of the traffic management scheme in Tooting, there were approximately 170 women involved in street prostitution in the Bedford Hill area. By 1989, this figure had already decreased to approximately 60. Similarly, in the year following the implementation of the traffic management scheme in Streatham in December 1989, the number of women working as street prostitutes declined slightly. For the most part, however, the trade moved to the north of the area (Woodfield Avenue and Drewstead Road) and onto Streatham High Road. A small number of women continued to operate from the top of Bedford

²'Away day' girls are those who, in this case, commute to London to work on a short term basis.

Hill in the area adjoining Tooting Bec Common. There was also some evidence of temporal displacement. In order to avoid police patrols, some women who were working along the High Road began working later in the evening and through to 3 or 4am. To see this evidence of displacement as a sign of 'failure' would however, be erroneous. In many respects, the initiative in Streatham represented a considerable success. In an attempt to move away from the notion of 'displacement' as an inherently negative process, Barr and Pease (1990) have differentiated between 'benign' and 'malign' forms of displacement. They argue that all patterns of crime "should be seen as the outcome of crime control policies and the distribution of opportunities" (Barr and Pease 1990). Thus, they argue, all forms of crime are in a sense 'frozen displacement patterns'. This points to the fact that there is nothing immutable about crime patterns and that displacement, or 'deflection' as they prefer to call it, is a continuous process. The differentiation between 'benign' and 'malign' forms of displacement alerts us to the possibility that, if a particular activity cannot be prevented, it can potentially be deflected into less harmful locations.

The deflection of prostitution and kerb crawling away from the centre of the residential area towards the High Street and the park can be seen as a form of benign displacement. Certainly, these women who moved to the High Road caused less of a problem and merged to some extent with the busier and noisier surroundings in this main street. The reduction in the level of complaints emanating from the main area indicated that residents felt that the situation had improved. It might be argued, with some justification, that the problem remains on the street causing some level of public nuisance, albeit in a less disturbing form. It might indeed be preferable, as some of the residents argued, to encourage the prostitutes to work 'off street', using advertisements in shop windows or through contact magazines. Whatever specific form it takes, the general consensus which emerged from local discussions was that the aim of the intervention ought to be to deflect street prostitution and kerb crawling away from those areas where it caused the most offence. Thus, the concern was not only about reducing the level of these activities, but also about minimising its social impact.

11 Conclusions

On balance, the intervention which was carried out in Streatham between 1987 and 1989 to deal with the problems of kerb-crawling and street prostitution was beneficial. For many residents living in St Leonard's Ward, the quality of life improved substantially. The level of noise, harassment and damage which they experienced has significantly declined. Streets have become safer and the atmosphere is less tense. However, the intervention was not quite as successful as many residents anticipated. Taking Finsbury Park as its point of reference, the organizers of STAKC felt that a greater reduction of the problem could have been achieved. They thought that the lack of commitment by the police and the limitations of the traffic management scheme were responsible for these shortcomings. The police, on the other hand, saw the relatively low level of social cohesiveness in the area as the reason for not achieving greater success.

Despite these reservations, the multi-agency initiative in Streatham did achieve a number of useful benefits.

i. A reduction of the volume of traffic in the area

There was a substantial reduction in the volume of traffic and associated noise. The numbers of cars passing through the area decreased significantly between 1989 and 1990. The most significant reductions occurred in the evening with the number of cars travelling through the area late at night decreasing by up to 40%.

ii. A reduction in the number of kerb-crawlers visiting the area

The figures collected for the number of kerb-crawlers processed in the first quarter of 1990 indicates a substantial reduction. In this period, 49 kerb-crawlers were processed compared to 151 in the first quarter of 1988. There was no decrease in police activity during this period and the decline is undoubtedly a result of fewer clients visiting the area

iii. Few new prostitutes working in the area

Once an area becomes an established 'red light' district, there is a high probability that it will attract new recruits. The fact that there were very few new women joining the ranks of the existing body of prostitutes is significant. Although a number of women operating in the Streatham area could be described as 'career' prostitutes, it is likely that for many a 'career' is five years or less and, as a result, there must be a few who are nearing the end of their 'working lives'. If they are not replaced by new recruits, the total number of women operating in Streatham should gradually decline.

iv. A reduction in crime rates

In the year following the implementation of the multi-agency initiative, the recorded crime rates for burglary, assault and street robbery went down. A reduction in the

recorded level of these offences was, however, a general feature of the police division as a whole; but the reduction in St Leonard's ward or what the police refer to as 'sector 6b' was much higher than surrounding areas. Thus, there only have been a significant knock-on, or 'free-rider' effect of reducing the incidence of one kind of offence on other offences.

v. A reduction in the fear of crime

It was not surprising that with the decrease in the activities associated with street prostitution, which had been the major cause of concern in the neighbourhood, that the 'fear of crime' in general should be ameliorated. Thus, the results appear to give some support to the assertion that 'disorder' or 'incivilities' can be influential in affecting residents' sense of security.

In Streatham, however, the lack of community cohesion and associated informal control mechanisms initially may have allowed the problem to take a foothold. Once established, these public order offences undoubtedly affected a downward pressure on house prices and reduced the attractiveness of the area. Fortunately though, rather than destroying the already weak community relations, it encouraged the formation of new community organisations ie it promoted greater, not less, cohesiveness.

Reducing disorder can, within this model, help to reduce the level of crime, but unless a crime itself is also confronted and community cohesion enhanced, there are considerable limitations to the amount that fear can ultimately be reduced. The implication of the process is that the control of disorder is prioritised, not because it is the main trigger of neighbourhood decline, but because its impact upon the whole community can be so immediate and overwhelming. This, of course, does not preclude the simultaneous development of crime control interventions (see Matthews 1992).

vi. An improved dialogue between the police and the public

Prior to the spread of the problems of street prostitution and kerb-crawling into the Streatham area, relations between police and community were weak. After the formation of STAKC in 1987, a more constructive and elaborate dialogue was developed. There were, of course, various tensions and conflicts, but overall the feeling is that, for most of this period, the police had put in a considerable amount of time and effort even though they were not as committed or effective as they might have been.

vii. Improved relations with Lambeth Council

Although it took three or four years to actually implement the traffic management scheme, the residents recognised that Lambeth Council was, in general, operating with financial and resource limitations and that there were a number of other 'deserving causes' in the Borough requiring attention. The very positive response from Council leaders and the efforts of the Environmental and Leisure Committee were

appreciated by the residents of Streatham. Furthermore, the fact that the police and the local authority were working together on the problem was a positive step forward in an area where, in the past, police/council relations have sometimes been poor.

viii. The achievement of 'benign' displacement

Some form of displacement is probable in almost all crime prevention initiatives. Unfortunately, it is often not possible to evaluate the displacement effects of most interventions. In this case, there was temporal and geographical displacement, but it was largely 'benign'. That is it was displaced from a residential area where it caused a great deal of concern and produced a number of undesirable effects to the main road on the northern side of the area and the Common on the southern edge. In both these locations, the nuisance element was reduced and its other negative effects minimised.

ix. An increase in public expectations and confidence

It is often the case that making improvements in peoples' lives makes them more confident and demanding rather than the opposite. In Streatham, the expectations of the residents have been raised. They now believe that the improvements which have been achieved can be extended and consolidated, and the newly-formed 'Streatham Community and Police Group Against Vice' aims to maintain and extend the gains which have been made.

x. An Increase in community cohesion

The recognition that the situation in the St Leonard's area has improved for the vast majority of residents has developed an increased sense of neighbourhood identity and cohesion. The increased level of attendance at public meetings and the discussion at these meetings signals the establishment of new social networks in the area and improved relations.

Finally, it should be clear that replicating initiatives is never easy or straightforward. The situation in Streatham was very different to that of Finsbury Park or Luton or Southampton. Examining the operation of street prostitution in different parts of the country indicates significant differences in terms of the size of the problem, the level of motivation and the organisation of prostitutes. There are also vastly different levels of tolerance in different neighbourhoods and varying degrees of interest and commitment by the agencies concerned. It is clear, however, that is not enough to simply combine certain elements under a multi-agency umbrella. What is critical is how such elements are combined and implemented. The various initiatives examined in this paper indicate that, if multi-agency interventions are to produce the maximum benefits, then they have to be implemented in a particular sequence with a great deal of thought, care and commitment.

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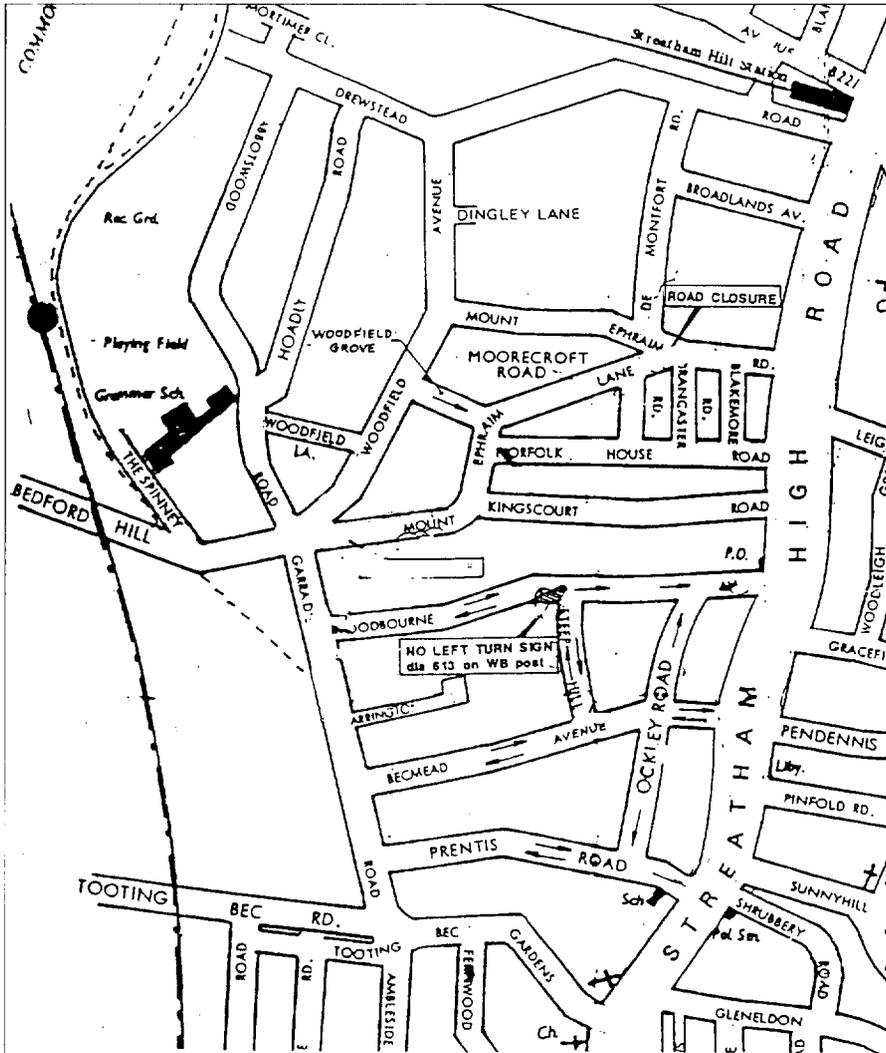
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Appendix

Map of St Leonard's Ward, Streatham



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