

Residents' Feelings and Interpretation of the Open-Air Drug Market in Conkey and Clifford Neighborhood of Rochester, New York

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Introduction

Low-level drug dealers thrive where they do not conflict with legitimate businesses, but rather support and are supported by certain elements of their environment (Thomas J. Charron, Debra Whitcomb, & George Ross, 2004, pg. 3). According to T. Charron, D. Whitcomb, & G. Ross (2004), dimly lit parking lots, alleys, abandoned buildings, bars, and roads that allow drivers to slow down or stop are some of the elements of the environment that support low-level drug dealers. Low-level drug dealing in open-air markets generates or contributes to a wide range of social disorder and drug-related crime in the surrounding neighborhood that can also have an effect on the residents' quality of life (Alex Harocopos & Mike Hough, 2005).

The purpose of this paper is to gain an understanding of how residents in the Conkey and Clifford neighborhood in Rochester, New York have been affected by the open-air marijuana market, as well as their view of their neighborhood. The Rochester Drug Free Street Initiative (RDFSI) coalition has been working with residents in the Conkey and Clifford neighborhood to bring to an end the marketing of low-level drugs in their neighborhood. The RDFSI is implementing two approaches, which is led by Ibero-American Development Corporation (IADC), the H.O.P.E project and other committed local partners. The intervention, which is known as INSPIRE (Invested, Neighbors, Seeking, Progress, Inspiration, Restoration, & Empowerment), is being run by RDFSI staff and community members. The RDFSI is applying the two civil approaches to a two- tiered strategy.

First is the Restorative Practices Strategy: working with PiRI (Partners in Restorative Initiatives,) neighborhood residents, and other community providers. RDFSI created what is being known as “Restorative Community Circles”; here people who are currently selling marijuana on the street can meet with other community members who want to help them transition into productive community members. This process creates a safe space for those who

sell marijuana. Residents who live in the neighborhood are able to participate in the circles and inform dealers how drug sales are affecting them and their families.

The second strategy involves a stay-away order. RDFSI staff knows that not all dealers will be receptive to the restorative community circle process, but residents still need to be protected from those who continue to sell marijuana in their neighborhoods. The order will assist in interrupting the sale of marijuana by extricating the dealers from their geographical market.

Residents have asked, “Why haven’t the police done anything about drug dealers?” Police officers have a hard task when it comes to arresting low-level drug dealers. Marijuana has been decriminalized in New York State, which means that any individual found with less than an ounce of marijuana will not be arrested, charged, or face any jail time. These individuals will only face a violation, which is punishable by a fine of \$25.00 or less. Parking on the wrong side of the street is a much more serious violation than that of a violation for marijuana possession of less than an ounce, as alternate parking fines are \$50.00 in the City. This is why police officers have limited power in handling the issues of open-air drug markets.

This paper will highlight the answers to the survey conducted by RDFSI during the Rochester T.I.P.S event. Project T.I.P.S stands for Trust, Information, Programs & Services, the projects include community agencies and law enforcement personnel working together in a selected neighborhood to rebuild trust amongst residents and share information. The answers to the “Your Voice” survey, which was conducted by CPSI (Center for Public Safety Initiative) student researcher. This survey was given to residents who are involved with RDFSI, and the information from the resident’s focus group conducted by the RDFSI.

RDFSI Resident Survey

The RDFSI resident committee is a group of residents who meet once a month with RDFSI staff. Residents are informed about the progress of the coalition and are given the opportunity to input ideas for the coalition. The purpose of the resident committee is to reinforce to residents that they will overtake the INSPIRE initiative once everything has been successfully completed with the RDFSI coalition. Residents also have the responsibility to inform other residents about the initiative. At the meetings, residents also have spoken about the issues they face with the low-level drug dealers, as well as how they are affected by the open-air marijuana market in the neighborhood. The residents involved in the committee are also given the opportunity to be trained as co-facilitators for the Restorative Community Circles or given the option to just be part of the restorative community circles as a community member. Overall, the residents have had the chance to express how they feel about and how they been affected by the open-air marijuana market in their neighborhood to the council members at Rochester City Hall.

Even with having dedicated residents in the initiative, the RDFSI conducted a survey at the TIPS event in hopes of reaching out to residents who they may not usually get input and ideas from. The TIPS events provide a great format for the RDFSI because most people in the neighborhood are drawn in to the event for food and other services that are offered. The RDFSI set up a table at the event to draw in residents who do not participate in the resident committee meeting or were not reached by outreach in the neighborhood. The reasoning for the survey conducted at the T.I.P.S event was to gain information on residents' impression of a drug-free neighborhood, as well as what inspire them to join an initiative like RDFSI. Residents were asked the following open-ended questions:

1. What would the neighborhood look and feel like?
2. Most important to you (from your answers in #1)?

3. What can you do?
4. What will inspire you?

The following charts demonstrate the overall answers that residents provided for each question.

Table 1 shows the overall answers for question 1. Out of the 49 residents who responded to question 1, 30.6% felt that the neighborhood will look and feel safe, 12.2% of residents felt that the neighborhood look and feel like a good community, 6.1% felt that the neighborhood will look and feel peaceful, 6.1% felt that the neighborhood be safe for kids to play, 8.2% felt that the neighborhood will look and feel cleaner, and 4.1% felt that the neighborhood will look and feel like there is less violence.

Table 1: Residents Responses to Question 1: N=53, Missing=4, Total N represented=49

What Would the Neighborhood Look and Feel Like?		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Valid	Different	3	6.1
	Safe	15	30.6
	Cleaner	4	8.2
	Safer for families	1	2.0
	Peaceful	3	6.1
	Safe for children	2	4.1
	Opportunities for kids	2	4.1
	Better place	1	2.0
	Good community	6	12.2
	Safe to walk	1	2.0
	Drug free street	3	6.1
	Happy	2	4.1
	Kids can play outside	3	6.1
	Bad	1	2.0
	Less violence	2	4.1
	Total	49	100.0
Missing	System	4	
Total		53	

Table 2 shows the overall answers for question 2. Out of the 31 residents who responded to question 2, 45.2% felt the most important thing from question 1 was safety, 12.9% felt that the most important thing was making the community a better place, 12.9% felt that the most important thing was drug-free streets, 9.7% felt that the most important thing was having a safe neighborhood for kids, and 6.5% felt that the important thing was for the neighborhood to be clean.

Table 2: Residents Respond to Question 2: N=53, Missing=22, Total N Represented=31

Most Important to You (From Your Answer in #1)?		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Valid	Less violence	1	3.2
	Safe	14	45.2
	Better place	4	12.9
	Drug free street	4	12.9
	Good community	2	6.5
	Safe for kids	3	9.7
	Clean	2	6.5
	Schools	1	3.2
	Total	31	100.0
Missing	System	22	
Total		53	

Table 3 shows the overall answers for question 3, which asked residents what they could do to reduce drug activity in their neighborhood. Out of the 47 residents who responded to question 3, 31.9 % felt that they can call the police, 17.0% felt that they can look out for others, 10.6% felt that they cannot do nothing, 8.5% felt that they can just help, 4.3% felt that they can report drugs, 1.9% felt that they can pray, 3.8% felt that they use cameras to help, and 3.8% felt that they can do outreach to help.

Table 3: Residents Respond to Question 3: N=53, Missing= 6, Total N Represented=47

What Can You Do?		Frequency (N)	Valid Percent (%)
Valid	Report drugs	2	4.3
	Help	4	8.5
	Call the police	15	31.9
	Look out for others	8	17.0
	Move	1	2.1
	Hope	1	2.1
	Nothing	5	10.6
	Clean	3	6.4
	Part of community action group	1	2.1
	Do not make problems	1	2.1
	Pray	1	2.1
	Outreach	2	4.3
	Events for kids	1	2.1
	Cameras	2	4.3
	Total	47	100.0
Missing	System	6	
Total		53	

Lastly, Table 4 shows the overall answers for question 4, which asked residents what would inspire them to help. Out of the 47 residents who responded to this question; 23.4% felt that kid safety will inspire them, 17.0% felt that working with other will inspire them, 10.6% felt that their kids will inspire them, 10.6% felt that the police will inspire them, 8.5% felt that nothing will inspire them, 8.5% felt that the availability of drug treatment for people will inspire them, and 8.5% felt that change will inspire them.

Table 4: Residents Respond to Question 4: N=53, Missing=6, Total N Represented = 47

What Will Inspire You?		Frequency (n)	Valid Percent (%)
Valid	Nice people	1	2.1
	Police	5	10.6
	Working with other	8	17.0
	Nothing	4	8.5
	My kids	5	10.6
	Kids safety	11	23.4
	My family	2	4.3
	Change	4	8.5
	More snitch	1	2.1
	No drugs	1	2.1
	Community events	1	2.1
	Treatment for people	4	8.5
	Total	47	100.0
	Missing	System	6
Total		53	

Overall, this information shows that the residents who took the survey do indeed want a change for their neighborhood. Most resident respondents want the neighborhood to be safe and good for the children the area, but we also notice that there are residents that feel that there is nothing that can be done to save their neighborhood. These residents indicate that they have give-up on their neighborhood or just truly feel that nothing can be done because it has been damaged for so long.

Your Voice Survey

After taking part in the residents’ committee meetings and acknowledging how residents have been affected by the open-air marijuana market located in Conkey and Clifford area, researchers felt that their voice should be more-fully heard in the study. The purpose of the “Your Voice” survey was to gain more information on how residents felt about the neighborhood as well as the open-air marijuana market in the area. The survey was given to residents who had

already taken part in the RDFSFI resident committee and were also asked to pass one along to neighbors in their area. Residents were provided with a pre-paid self-addressed envelope and with the survey, so they could mail the survey back to the researcher. A total of 8 surveys were mailed backed. The resulting sample is not a random sample of the Conkey & Clifford neighborhood. Despite this, the resulting analysis should give valuable insight into the distress of the open-air marijuana market in the Conkey & Clifford neighborhood.

The survey asked:

1. What do you like about living in this neighborhood?
2. What activities and conditions in particular is a concern to you in your neighborhood? Why? And if you stated any issues what will you do to address these issues?
3. What are some of the most significant changes that have taken place in the neighborhood since you lived here?
4. Do you feel safe in this neighborhood? Why or Why not?
5. Do you consider drug activity as a problem in your neighborhood? Why or Why not?
6. What do you think the police or community agencies could do to address the issues in the neighborhood?
7. Is there anything else that you will like to say about your neighborhood that was not asked above?

Residents were also asked how long they have lived in this neighborhood and their age.

The following is a summary of the answers from the eight residents who completed the survey.

The conveniences of the area, the services of the area, the diversity, the history, public transportation, the houses, and the people who live in the area were all things that people liked and contributed to the positive view of the neighborhood. So, even with the acknowledgment of the drug market, residents still appreciate other qualities of their neighborhood. Besides appreciating the good qualities of the neighborhood, residents indicated that their concerns in the neighborhood were drug sells, prostitution, open-air drug markets, violence and police behavior. It was brought to our attending that the landlords in the area rent establishments to drug dealers, which leads to the open-air market and sale of marijuana in the area. Residents were also

concerned about young kids drinking alcohol. Overall, most residents felt that by working together and brainstorming with city officials something can be done to clean up their neighborhood.

Residents felt unsafe in their neighborhood; therefore most residents are non-active in engaging in helping their neighborhood. Residents feel unsafe because there is a great deal of young kids out on the street. Residents feel that the drug problem contributes to the reason why so many young kids are on the street. Not only does it contribute to the hangout of young kids, but it also brings other elements, like violence to their neighborhoods. The lighting, shootings, and violence in the area are also justifications of why residents do not feel safe in their own neighborhood.

Police are not approaching the drug-market problem in their neighborhood in the right way, according to the residents. Police are entering the neighborhood with an inappropriate attitude. Residents also feel that parents need to be more involved in their kids live, because police cannot do all the work. Generally, residents feel that removing the young drug dealers off the street will enhance the quality of the neighborhood and rebuild the relationships between residents and the dealers. Residents that by bring more opportunities to the neighborhood for young kids and for residents will contribute to a better neighborhood for all.

Resident Focus Group

RDFSI staff conducted a resident focus group with non-committee residents, to gain more information on how to get other residents in the neighborhood involved in the initiative. Even with the number of residents already involved in the initiative, RDFSI staff members feel that more outreach to community residents will lead to larger group of residents. Have a larger

group of residents supporting the initiative will increase the initiative's message in the neighborhood.

The day of the focus group only two residents attended both were females and lived within the targeted neighborhood. The focus group consisted of three parts: 1. Questions to understand current level of engagement. 2. Questions to determine what motivates people to get involved, and 3. Questions to determine if people will become active around the drug issue. Other topics were discussed as well. Notes on the focus group are found at the end of the paper and were provide by RDFSFI staff (Appendix F).

Part I- Questions to understand current level of engagement:

The focus here was to get an understanding of how and why residents participate or volunteer in neighborhood events. The residents who attended made it clear that they take part in events in the neighborhood if it is fun and positive for kids, as well as, if it is close by and free. Not only do the residents feel that events should be productive for children, close by, and free, but that they should create teachable moments for the kids. When deciding in participating or volunteering for an event, both residents felt that it can depend on other factors that are going on in their life. Such reasons relate to child care, being that both residents have children; they feel that it hard to obtain a babysitter so they choose to attend events that welcome children. Overall, form the view of both these residents, events in the neighborhood should be child focus and free, so parents do not have to struggle in participating or volunteering.

Part II- Questions to determine what motives people to get involved:

In this portion of the focus group, both residents were asked about neighborhood safety and what type of event or volunteering opportunity will they take part in to make their neighborhood safer. Both residents acknowledged that the drug issue in their neighborhood was a

big issue in their area. The residents identified the RDFS as a project that is focused on the safety of the neighborhood. One resident went on to say, “If you act like they [the drug dealers] aren’t there, then they [are] going to continue to do what they are doing like if they were invisible”. Overall, both residents recognized that the open-air drug market in their neighborhood has contributed to the depression of their neighborhood and the people in the neighborhood.

Part III- Questions to determine if people will become active around the drug issue:

Residents in attendance were asked what will motivate them to specifically address drug sales in their neighborhood. The residents felt that by seeing others residents involved in activities, so will they. So, if residents acknowledge other residents in the movement of deterring the open-air marijuana market, it is most likely that other residents will follow along. To get an understanding of the residents, staff asked “what sets you apart from everyone else?”, Both residents stated that it is about the pride they have for the neighborhood, faith that things will get better and religion, wanting to be an example to their children, and the support for other family members. This is what set them apart from others and the reasons they join events in their neighborhood. Attending residents also specified that they enjoy the public spaces in the neighborhood (The park, trail, and neighborhood garden) and feel that it is great because there are more kids in neighborhood than before.

Conclusion

As evidenced by the results the [T.I.P.S survey, Your Voice, and Resident Focus Group], the residents in the Conkey & Clifford neighborhood recognized the issues of the open-air marijuana market and how it has impacted their neighborhood, as well as the members of the neighborhood. From the analysis of the report, residents typically feel that the most important

thing to address is safety. Residents generally feel satisfied with where they live, because it is affordable, they like people in their neighborhood, and convenient for them. It was also acknowledged that most residents will get involved or be inspired to get in involved in a project like RDFSII if others in the neighborhood get involved (see Table 4: 15% -working with others). Residents understand that if open-air marijuana markets are deterred their neighborhood will be much safer. Not only will it be safer, but it will clean up the neighborhood, produce a healthier neighborhood, and rebuild the quality of life in the neighborhood. To accomplish this residents have pointed out that more opportunities to get are involved are needed in their neighborhood.

References

- Charron, T. J., Whitcomb, D., & Ross, G. (2004, August). Unwelcome guests: a community prosecution approach to street level drug dealing and prostitution. *American Prosecutors Research Institute*.
- Harocopos, A., & Hough, M. (2005, January). Drug dealing in open-air markets. Retrieved December 4, 2013, from http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/html/cd_rom/solution_gang_crime/pubs/DrugDealinginOpenAirMarkets.pdf

Appendix C: Your Voice Survey

Hello,

My name is Pedro Vazquez and I'm a graduate student at R.I.T. I'm conducting research in the Conkey and Clifford neighborhood, and I feel that it is important to hear the voices of the residents who live in the neighborhood. No one knows the ups and downs as good as you, that's why I'm asking residents to take some time to complete the attached survey. The survey will be anonymous, so if you choose to complete this survey please do not write your name on the survey.

With the attached survey you will also find an envelope which you can use to mail the survey directly back to me. (You don't need a stamp!) Also, if you don't want to mail the survey, you can bring back the survey to the project HOPE staff located at 954 Clifford Ave (ask for Jackie Vazquez).

If you have any questions about the survey please feel free to contact me. Remember that this survey has nothing to do with data, but with being able to get your voices heard because the residents are important. Please complete and return the survey by 9/30/13. Thank you for your time.

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Residents Survey 2013 Conkey & Clifford Neighborhood

1. What do you like about living in this neighborhood?

2. What activities and conditions in particular are concerns to you in your neighborhood? Why? For the issues you mentioned, what would you do about them if you could?

3. What are some of the most significant changes that have taken place in the neighborhood since you lived here?

Other side



4. Do you feel safe in this neighborhood? Why or Why not?

5. Do you consider drug activity as a problem in your neighborhood? Why or Why not?

6. What do you think the police or community agencies could do to address the issues in the neighborhood?

7. Is there anything else that you will like to say about your neighborhood that was not asked above?

How long have you lived in this neighborhood? _____

How old are you? _____