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8 NYC police impersonators accused of torturing, robbing drug dealers

NEW YORK (AP) — A gang of police impersonators abducted and tortured cocaine traffickers, forcing them to hand over multimillion-dollar stashes by holding their families hostage or threatening to squeeze their testicles with pliers, authorities said Tuesday.

An indictment unsealed in federal court in Brooklyn charged eight men with robbery conspiracy, drug dealing and an array of other crimes.

Since the spring of 2003, the gang injured about 100 people while committing 100 holdups targeting large-scale traffickers in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida, investigators said.

The take: \$4 million in cash and more than 1,650 pounds of cocaine worth \$20 million, which authorities say the men sold on the streets of New York. Sometimes abduction attempts led to shootouts between the robbery crew and associates of the drug dealers, authorities said.

The scheme "was breathtaking in the scope" of its crimes "and in the danger it posed to our communities," said U.S. Attorney Benton Campbell.

Authorities seized several kilograms of cocaine, more than 20 handguns, handcuffs, police scanners and vehicles equipped with lights and sirens.

The men, court papers said, "were particularly sophisticated in their tactics," often conducting surveillance on the drug dealers for weeks before arming themselves with handguns and making "a police-style car stop" in cars equipped with lights and sirens. Other times, the gang gained entry into victims' homes by identifying themselves as police officers, then holding entire families hostage at gunpoint for days on end.

The victims were handcuffed, bound with duct tape and subjected to various means of torture during interrogations, including "simulated drowning through repeated submerging of victims' heads in water for extended periods of time," the court papers said.

One victim told investigators that during a 2005 abduction, two of the defendants "applied a pair of pliers to the victim's testicles and threatened to squeeze the pliers if the victim did not talk," the papers added.

Bronx District Attorney Robert Johnson described the crime spree as "a dangerous dance of alleged criminals preying upon alleged criminals, who themselves profited from the desperation of drug abusers."

The defendants, all from the Dominican Republic, were ordered held without bail after pleading not guilty Tuesday in Brooklyn. If convicted, each faces a sentence of 40 years to life behind bars.

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