

Focused Deterrence Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence

Prepared for the

Causes and Responses to Violence in America Conference

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Arizona State University
April 18, 2008

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Executive Summary

Since the mid-1990s, a number of initiatives intended to address gang, gun and drug-related violence have arisen and demonstrated promise in reducing levels of violent crime. These initiatives have employed some combination of focused deterrence and problem-solving processes. These strategies formed the basis for Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), a national program implemented by the Department of Justice and coordinated by U.S. Attorneys Offices. This paper focuses on the origins of these initiatives, their key components, and the evidence of impact on violent gun crime. Review of a series of studies of these interventions suggests they offer promise in reducing levels of violence.

The promising strategies share a set of common components including:

- A specific focus on gun crime and the people, networks, locations, and contexts driving gun crime in the local jurisdiction.
- Local analysis of the gun crime problem.
- A variety of mechanisms to communicate a deterrent message focused specifically on illegal gun possession and illegal gun use. These include street-level contacts such as:
 - directed police patrol focused on illegal guns
 - probation/parole/police home visits focused on illegal guns
 - most violent chronic offender programs
 - warrant service with a focus on illegal gun possession and use.
- Enhanced threat of federal and state prosecution for illegal gun possession and gun crime to reinforce the deterrence message.

Additionally, several of the promising strategies include the following components:

- Direct communication of a deterrence message through face-to-face meetings with groups involved in violence.
- Parallel communication of a social support message and linkage to opportunities through face-to-face meetings with groups involved in violence.
- Multi-agency collaboration to enhance the resources brought to bear on gun crime.

An optimistic read of the research suggests that combinations of these strategies implemented with sufficient dosage can have a substantial impact on the level of gun violence. The results also indicate that such approaches are challenging to effectively implement and to sustain. Consequently, if positive results are to be achieved, committed leadership and continued renewal are required to produce a sustained focus on the factors driving gun violence.

Problem Solving Responses to Reducing Gun Violence

For decades the United States has suffered from exceptionally high levels of gun related violence (Zimring and Hawkins, 1999). Although the U.S. experiences lower levels of certain types of crime than many other western democracies, rates of gun related homicides, robberies, and assaults are much higher in the U.S. (Farrington, Langan, and Tonry, 2004; Langan and Farrington, 1998; Zimring and Hawkins, 1999). Homicide is the second leading cause for U.S. citizens ages 14-30 and the leading cause of death for African-American males ages 14-30 (Center for Disease Control, 2008a). The costs incurred through firearms violence are staggering with estimates ranging from \$63 to \$158 billion per year (Miller and Cohen, 1995; Center for Disease Control, 2008b) and \$1 million per gunshot injury (Cook and Ludwig, 2000). The emotional and economic costs incurred by families of victims and offenders, neighborhood residents, police and criminal justice actors, and communities are similarly substantial.

The good news is that the country has experienced an unexpected and substantial decline in homicide and gun violence since the early 1990s (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2008). In 1991, the U.S. homicide rate was 9.8 per 100,000 population. By 2000 it had declined to 5.5 per 100,000 and has remained relatively flat at 5.5 to 5.6 per 100,000. This represents a drop from over 24,700 homicides in 1991 to just under 17,000 in 2005. The total violent crime victimization rate also fell from 51.2 per 1,000 in 1994 to 21.0 per 1,000 in 2005. Similarly, non-fatal firearms victimization declined from 6.0 per 1,000 in 1994 to 2.0 per 1,000 in 2005. This translated into impact in the nation's trauma centers as the number of gunshot wounds treated in emergency rooms declined from over 64,000 in 1993 to under 40,000 in 1997 (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2008).

The question of why the nation experienced such a significant decline in homicide and violent crime has been the subject of significant scholarly debate (Blumstein and Wallman, 2000; Blumstein, 2006; Symposium, 1998). A variety of factors including improved economic conditions, increased rates of incarceration, the decline of the crack cocaine epidemic, and improved policing have been suggested as potential causes, yet there is no consensus within the academic community.

The suggestion that improved policing practices may have been a factor is based on a series of studies that emerged in the last two decades that found that some police interventions were related with significant reductions in some types of crime (Weisburd and Braga, 2006). These studies were striking because they seemed to contradict widely held beliefs that crime was driven by a variety of macro-level historical, cultural, economic, and social structural factors and was largely impervious to planned police intervention (e.g., Bayley, 1994).

The intent of this paper is not to address the broad question of the reasons for the decline in homicide and violent crime since the early 1990s. Nor is it to engage the specific question of whether improved police practice was a factor in the decline. Rather, the intent is to review a series of studies of police interventions, sharing some common features, that were developed with the hope that they would lead to reduced levels of violence at a community level.

The prism from which this review is undertaken comes from research associated with the U.S. Department of Justice's gun crime reduction program known as Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN). PSN represents a major initiative that was implemented in 2001 and has received an estimated \$1.5 billion in federal funding (Project Safe Neighborhoods, 2008). PSN was developed from a foundation of police and criminal justice strategies that emerged in the

1990s and that had received some degree of research support for having reduced levels of violence.

This paper will review the studies that served as a foundation for PSN. It will then review a series of case studies that have been conducted in specific PSN sites. An attempt will be made to identify the common elements of these strategies that can serve as guides to police and criminal justice officials seeking to find new patterns of practice intended to reduce community violence. The paper will also note the considerable gaps in our knowledge base and suggest that “cookie-cutter” or “off-the-shelf” program development and intervention is not warranted. Rather, the “take-away” conclusion is that there does appear to be a set of principles from which police and criminal justice officials can construct interventions, experiment, assess, and revise in a continuous quality improvement effort to reduce violent crime.

Foundations of Project Safe Neighborhoods

Although there are likely many programs and factors (e.g., weed and seed, community policing, community prosecution) that influenced Department of Justice (DOJ) officials as they constructed the anti-gun crime that came to be known as Project Safe Neighborhoods, several policing interventions with varying degrees of empirical research support appeared to be influential. These included a series of studies supported by the National Institute of Justice of programs utilizing directed police patrol in high gun crime areas. A second influence was Project Exile that was developed by the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Richmond, Virginia. Indeed, the U.S. Attorney from Richmond had moved to the Attorney General’s Office at DOJ and was one of the principal architects of PSN. An additional key influence was the Boston Gun Project,

that was then extended through the Department of Justice's Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative.

As will be discussed, these programs had varying components but had a common theme of trying to focus police and criminal justice resources on some combination of those individuals, social networks, locations, and contexts thought to be driving the violent crime problem. This is consistent with, and several of these studies influenced, the findings of a National Research Council report that found that police strategies that are most focused on specific problems have the most impact on crime (National Research Council, 2004).

Directed Police Patrol

In the mid 1990s, Lawrence Sherman and colleagues worked with the Kansas City Police Department on a quasi-experiment in which teams of officers were relieved from responding to calls for service and detailed to specific neighborhoods that had experienced very high levels of gun crime. The officers engaged in directed or targeted patrol with the objective of making vehicle and pedestrian stops and identifying and seizing illegal guns. Indeed, a 65 percent increase in seizures of illegal guns was associated with an approximate 50 percent reduction in gun crime when compared to another section of the city (Sherman and Rogan, 1995; Sherman, Shaw and Rogan, 1995).

Aware of these results, police officials in Indianapolis concerned about high rates of gun violence, decided to implement a similar strategy to that developed in Kansas City. A directed patrol intervention focused on gun crime was implemented in two areas of the city and compared to violent crime trends in two similar areas of the city. The specific strategies were left to the district commanders. As a result two similar but varied approaches were implemented. In the

north district, officers were instructed to follow a very specific and focused approach. They were told to focus on specific locations, contexts and people where the officer had some specific suspicion of potential carrying of firearms and criminal activity. In the east district, a more general deterrence strategy was employed that maximized the presence of police patrol and placed a premium on vehicle stops for any type of infraction. Both strategies emphasized attention to illegal gun carrying. The findings from the research indicated that the strategies were distinct as the east district had many more vehicle stops and a larger increase in the seizure of illegal guns. The north district was more selective in the number of pedestrian and vehicle stops but also generated more arrests and more gun seizures per stop, thus suggesting the focused deterrence approach. Although homicides were reduced in both locations, the drop in violent gun related crime was much more pronounced and consistent in the north district (McGarrell, Chermak, Weiss and Wilson, 2001; McGarrell, Chermak, and Weiss, 2002).

The third key study in this series came out of a directed patrol intervention in Pittsburgh (Cohen and Ludwig, 2003). Pittsburgh police officials implemented a 14-week directed patrol intervention whereby police focused on illegal gun carrying in high crime locations. Similar to the Indianapolis north intervention, the focused strategy did not yield huge numbers of arrests nor the incapacitation of large numbers of offenders but it did appear to have a significant impact on gun crime. Indeed, the research team estimated that the program may have reduced shots fired by over 34 percent and gunshot injuries by over 70 percent.

Several common findings emerged from the three studies. First, there were consistent findings that the directed police patrol focused on illegal gun possession in high crime neighborhoods was associated with large decreases in violent crime. Second, given the extreme costs of gunshot injuries and fatalities, the relatively modest investment in police resources

potentially yielded very significant cost savings. Third, all three studies included attention to potential police-citizen conflict that could emerge through this aggressive form of police patrol and all found evidence of citizen support (e.g., Shaw, 1995; Chermak, McGarrell, and Weiss, 2001; Cohen and Ludwig, 2003). In all three cities, police managers were concerned about generating police-community friction and took steps to emphasize respectful policing.

Project Exile¹

Richmond, Virginia had long experienced high levels of homicide and gun assault. Much of this violence was perpetrated by chronic offenders with prior felony convictions. In the late 1990s, then Managing Assistant U.S. Attorney James Comey decided that these levels of violence were unacceptable and that the full force of federal prosecution would be brought to bear against prior felons possessing or using firearms. Federal prosecutions of gun crime increased significantly. Additionally, the U.S. Attorney's Office worked with a coalition of local law enforcement, local government, and businesses to launch a high profile media campaign to communicate a message that the illegal possession or illegal use of a gun would result in severe federal sanctions. Following the implementation of Exile, homicide levels in Richmond declined significantly from their peak levels (Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Baumer, 2005).

Boston Gun Project

Boston's Gun Project, also referred to as Ceasefire, was a strategic problem solving initiative intended to reduce the high level of youth gun violence in the city. Ceasefire was initiated by a multi-agency working group involving the U.S. Attorney's Office, local prosecutors, the Boston Police Department, probation, youth service workers, and a team of

¹ The sections on Project Exile and the Boston Gun Project draw heavily on an unpublished report to the Department of Justice (McGarrell, 2005).

researchers from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The problem analysis revealed that youth violence was driven by a relatively small number of chronic offenders involved in networks of known offenders. The strategy that emerged was a deterrence-based model whereby the threat of federal prosecution was directly communicated to these groups of known offenders. Following crack-downs on several of the most violent groups, and ongoing communication through meetings with probationers and parolees connected to these offending networks, youth violence declined dramatically. Indeed, Boston went two and one-half years without a youth homicide and youth gun violence declined by approximately 60 percent (Braga, Kennedy, Waring and Piehl, 2001; Braga, Kennedy, Piehl and Waring, 2001; Kennedy, Braga, and Piehl, 2001).²

The Boston Project was characterized by several distinctive features. First, a small working group was convened from multiple agencies and linked to a research team that conducted systematic analysis of the firearms crime problem. Second, the deterrence threat was coupled with attempts to link potential offenders to legitimate services offered by youth service workers, traditional service providers (e.g., jobs, education, drug treatment), and non-traditional providers including the faith community. Third, several distinctive strategies emerged to communicate the deterrence message to potential offenders. These included offender notification meetings and police-probation teams conducting visits to high-risk offenders (Operation Nightlife). Fourth, ATF and the Boston Police Department developed supply-side strategies to disrupt illegal gun markets. Finally, like Project Exile, the U.S. Attorney's Office played a key leadership role by convening local-state-federal resources and bringing the threat of federal prosecution to the issue of illegal gun possession and use.

² Rosenfeld, Fornango, and Baumer, 2006 used growth curve models and controlled for factors that affect city's violent crime rate and report less robust impact of the Boston gun project.

Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI)

The Boston Gun Project resulted in DOJ funding a 10-city crime reduction initiative based on the strategic problem solving approach implemented in Boston. One of the cities that most closely implemented and evaluated the SACSI intervention was Indianapolis. Systematic analysis of gun violence patterns indicated that both homicide victims and suspects involved young men with extensive involvement in the justice system, in concentrated geographic locations, and often involved in gangs or neighborhood crews or cliques. Officials implemented a very similar strategy whereby a crackdown on one gang heavily involved in violence and the drug trade was coupled with a direct communication strategy with groups of offenders believed to be involved in street violence. The communication strategy followed the lever pulling model whereby a deterrence message was coupled with a social support intervention and communicated in face-to-face meetings. Like the situation in Boston, Indianapolis experienced a significant reduction in homicide and gun crime (McGarrell, Chermak, Wilson, and Corsaro, 2006). Other SACSI sites also experienced crime reductions (Roehl et al., 2004).

Common and Distinctive Themes

The directed police patrol, Project Exile, Boston Gun Project, and SACSI interventions shared several features and had some distinctive qualities. These are summarized in Figure One. All moved from responding to crime generally to having a very specific and proactive focus on gun crime. This focus included some degree of analysis of the problem. In the directed patrol of illegal gun crime sites, this involved analysis of the geographic patterns of violent gun crime so that the programs could be focused on areas with high rates of gun crime. It also allowed for the identification of comparison areas for evaluation purposes. It is not clear how much analysis was conducted prior to implementation of Project Exile but the project did operate on the premise

that many gun crime victims and offenders have extensive prior criminal histories and often prior felony convictions. Given that felons and misdemeanor domestic violence offenders are prohibited federally from possessing a firearm, this created a “lever” for the U.S. Attorney to increase the perceived certainty and severity of illegal gun possession. The Boston and Indianapolis projects included careful and systematic analysis of patterns of gun crime including geographic patterns, group and gang involvement, and prior criminal histories. Both involved a combination of analysis of police crime data and systematic incident reviews of gun crimes (see Klofas et al. 2006).

The directed patrol projects sought to communicate a deterrence message through street-level intervention involving traffic and pedestrian stops and specific attention to seizing illegal firearms. Project Exile and the Boston and Indianapolis projects involved communication of deterrence messages through media campaigns including billboards, posters on buses, and posters in the jail. The Boston and Indianapolis projects took this a step further through direct communication with groups of offenders who were called in to face-to-face meetings with criminal justice officials, service providers, and neighborhood leaders. These two programs attempted to complement the deterrence message with social support and linkage to opportunities. Finally, whereas the directed patrol initiatives were largely police driven, Project Exile was driven by the U.S. Attorneys Office and the Boston and Indianapolis projects involved multi-agency collaborations and research partners.

Figure One – Programmatic Components

Intervention Components	Directed Patrol	Exile	Boston Gun Project	Indianapolis SACSI
Specific focus on gun crime	X	X	X	X
Analysis of local gun crime	Geographic patterns	Individual criminal histories	Robust problem analysis	Robust problem analysis
Deterrence focus (perceived certainty & severity)	X	X	X	X
Street level contact	X	?	X	X
Community-level deterrence messages		X	X	X
Direct communication – lever pulling meetings			X	X
Social support & linkage opportunities			X	X
Organizational structure	Police driven	U.S. Attorney driven	Multi-agency collaboration	Multi-agency collaboration

Project Safe Neighborhoods

As noted, PSN built on these foundations. U.S. Attorneys Offices were asked to create local task forces involving local, state and federal police, local prosecutors, probation and parole, and often including local government, service providers, neighborhood leaders, and the faith community. Deterrence and incapacitation was emphasized through the threat of federal prosecution for illegal gun possession and violent, gang, and drug related offenses involving a firearm. Federal funding was provided for development of a communication strategy. Additional funding was provided for a local research partner who was to analyze the local gun

crime problem so that the task force could tailor the national strategy to the local context. The research partner was also to provide ongoing assessment of impact as well as a longer-term evaluation. Additional funding was provided for training as well as for funding local anti-gun crime prevention and enforcement interventions.

PSN Case Studies

DOJ also provided support for a team from Michigan State University (MSU) to support the research component of PSN. The MSU team provided training and technical assistance to PSN task forces on strategic problem solving, the integration of research into the task force, and on promising gun crime reduction strategies. Additionally, the MSU team collected data on the implementation of PSN and conducted a series of case studies of PSN strategies and of specific PSN task forces.

Overall evaluation of PSN as a national program is very challenging. First, because it is a national, full coverage program it is very difficult to identify comparison sites. Thus, if gun crime goes up or down it is difficult to know if this is due to PSN or to some other set of factors. There is also evidence of uneven implementation. Some of this is intentional as PSN is intended to be tailored to local conditions. Beyond this local variation, there is also evidence of variation in the ability to implement effective task force partnerships, in the integration of research, in the level of federal prosecution, and in the scope and intensity of interventions (Zimmermann, 2006). There is also variation in data availability. Many police jurisdictions are limited in their ability to generate data on gun related crime. Thus, it is very difficult to gather timely and comparable gun crime data across sites. The most reliable cross-jurisdiction measure comes from the Supplemental Homicide Reports available from the FBI but there is a considerable time lag before these are available.

Given these limitations, as an initial step in the evaluation of PSN a series of site specific case studies has been conducted. These are not representative examples of PSN task forces but rather the sites were chosen purposively based on evidence that the task force had been implemented in a “serious fashion.” Specifically, utilizing measures of task force partnerships, integration of research partners, increases in either or both federal and local prosecution, a series of sites were selected for case study. The task force also had to be operational for a sufficient time that it was plausible that it could have affected levels of gun crime.

As noted above, one of the real challenges is in constructing a comparison site. One of the districts that was chosen, the Middle District of Alabama (MDAL), reflects this challenge. MDAL included a specific focus on Montgomery, the city generating most of the district’s gun crime. Yet, the task force also established strong partnerships with law enforcement throughout the district and PSN was operational in all communities. Thus, there was no comparable jurisdiction in the state that could be compared to Montgomery. In this case, the trend in gun crime was compared to the trend in non-gun crime as a way of testing the impact of PSN in Montgomery. In other jurisdictions it was possible to compare to other cities and in several large cities it was possible to compare a PSN target area with other parts of the city where PSN was not implemented intensively.

Given these complexities, the focus of the task forces was whether there was any evidence of reduced gun crime in jurisdictions that implemented PSN in a “meaningful fashion.” The results cannot be generalized to all PSN sites but rather this is a threshold test. If these sites show no evidence of reductions in gun crime, there would seem to be little reason to suggest that PSN has had an impact on gun crime.

The data collected from all 94 U.S. Attorneys Offices suggested that PSN implementation fell into three general patterns. The first were sites that struggled to form partnerships and where there was little evidence that criminal justice response to gun crime had changed significantly, at least at the time when the sites were being selected. The second group followed a Project Exile type approach. This strategy emphasized increasing the level of federal prosecution of gun crime and communicating this deterrent message in a variety of ways. The third group followed the Boston Gun Project/SACSI strategic problem solving model. Local patterns of gun crime were analyzed and a variety of strategies implemented to target the sources of gun crime in the local context. This often involved direct communication to populations at risk for gun crime offending and victimization. The case studies focused on task forces representing the Project Exile and strategic problem solving models.

Project Exile Model PSN Task Forces

Particularly given the central role of the U.S. Attorneys Office in PSN, many task forces adopted a Project Exile approach that emphasized increased federal prosecution of felons in possession of a firearm as well as of defendants using firearms in violent, gang, and drug related offenses. This was coupled with efforts to communicate using a variety of media a deterrence based message that gun crime would be taken much more seriously and could lead to federal prosecution involving long sentences in the federal prison system. “Gun crime equals hard time” was a theme running through many of these communication strategies.

Two districts that followed this approach, the Middle and Southern Districts of Alabama (MDAL, SDAL), were included in the case studies. Both districts found that the majority of gun crime was located in their largest cities, Montgomery and Mobile respectfully, and that most individuals involved in gun crime had extensive criminal histories and prior felony convictions.

Officials in both districts believed that overcrowding in the Alabama prison system had resulted in a situation where a felon in possession of a firearm and even offenses involving the use of a gun in a crime were unlikely to lead to a credible threat of imprisonment. Thus, they sought to increase the perception of the certainty and severity of punishment through the threat of federal prosecution.

An additional component of each task force was establishing relationships with local law enforcement and local prosecutors so that cases involving firearms would be referred for federal prosecution. In both jurisdictions, these efforts appeared to be successful as the level of federal prosecution for gun crime increased significantly. In the MDAL, federal gun crime prosecutions increased from 21 in 2000 to 103 in 2003. In SDAL, federal gun crime indictments increased from 46 and 48 in 2000 and 2001 to 81 in 2002 and to 109 in 2005.

There was evidence of impact on gun crime in both cities. Time series analyses were conducted in both Montgomery and Mobile. In Montgomery, homicides and gun assaults declined 23 percent and 13 percent respectively, both of which were statistically significant. At the same time, property crime was stable (McGarrell et al., 2006). In Mobile, total gun crime, violent gun crime, robbery with a gun, and gun assaults all declined significantly when controlling for the trend in property crime. Additionally, and adding credence to the notion that gun crime declined, gunshot wound admissions to the local trauma center declined significantly (Hipple et al., 2007).

Although it is possible that other factors generated these declines in gun crime, the data are consistent with the hypothesis that this Project Exile-style intervention generated at least a short-term reduction in gun crime.

Strategic Problem Solving PSN Task Forces

As noted above, a number of jurisdictions adopted a model similar to that witnessed in the Boston Gun Project and SACSI. Case studies in the District of Massachusetts, District of Nebraska, Eastern District of Missouri, and Middle District of North Carolina reflected an assessment of this model. In Massachusetts the focus was on the city of Lowell, whereas in Nebraska the focus was on Omaha. St. Louis was the focus in the Eastern District of Missouri whereas there were task forces operating in five cities in the Middle District of North Carolina. Three of these cities, Durham, Greensboro and Winston-Salem, were the focus of the case study in North Carolina.

Key elements of this approach included a systematic and ongoing analysis of the local gun crime problem with local researchers feeding this information to the task force (Klofas et al., 2006). A variety of strategies typically including most violent offender programs, joint local-state prosecution screening, communication strategies including media campaigns and, in many jurisdictions, offender notification or lever pulling meetings to directly communicate with at-risk individuals were implemented (Bynum et al., 2006; Decker et al., 2006; McDevitt et al., 2006). In most of the jurisdictions there was an increase in federal prosecution although in Massachusetts, where state gun crime laws are often as severe as federal penalties, this was less of an emphasis.

The time series analyses revealed declines in all six of the cities. In Lowell, the 28 percent reduction in gun assaults was considerably larger when compared to trends in other Massachusetts cities (McDevitt et al., 2006). In Omaha, the analysis revealed a 20 percent decline in gun crime at a time that property crime was stable (Hipple, et al., 2007). In North Carolina, gun crime declined in Durham, Greensboro, and Winston-Salem. In Greensboro and Winston-Salem the decline was statistically significant but this was not the case in Durham. St.

Louis also experienced a decline in gun crime in its target neighborhoods but it was difficult to interpret because gun crime declined in comparison zones of the city and citywide (Decker et al., 2006). A generous interpretation is that this reflected a citywide impact but a more appropriate interpretation from a research standpoint is that the reduction may have been due to some other factor(s).

Thus, in all six of the cities gun crime declined following the implementation of PSN. In two cities, St. Louis and Durham, the findings were equivocal due to a similar drop in non-target areas (St. Louis) or a decline that was not statistically significant (Durham).

Additional Tests of PSN Impact

One of the most rigorous evaluations of PSN has occurred in Chicago by Andrew Papachristos, Tracey Meares and Jeff Fagan (Papachristos, Meares and Fagan, 2007). Given the city's size, PSN was implemented in one initial target zone, then a second and later a third. This allowed construction of comparison sites in other parts of the city. Chicago followed a strategic problem solving approach with careful analysis of gun crime patterns within the target zone, direct communication through lever pulling meetings with individuals and groups identified as at-risk for gun crime, targeted police patrol in the PSN zones, and increased federal prosecution. Controlling for a variety of potentially confounding factors, and compared to trends in other areas of the city, the evaluation suggested a very significant impact on gun crime in the PSN target areas. Further, the crime reduction has been sustained (Papachristos, Meares and Fagan, 2007).

A similar analysis was conducted in Stockton as part of the Eastern District of California's PSN task force. Anthony Braga, a member of the research team in the original Boston Gun Project, was the research partner working in Stockton. Braga found that gun crime

in Stockton was largely driven by gang activity and provided a detailed analysis of gang patterns and conflicts. A variety of strategies were implemented including lever pulling meetings with active gang members. Similar to the Chicago findings, Braga found a significant reduction in homicide and gun assaults (Braga, 2008).

A recent extension of the strategic problem solving approach developed in High Point, North Carolina. Here the local police department, working with the U.S. Attorneys Office and the local prosecutor, decided to apply a similar approach to address open air drug markets. Systematic analysis of the drug market was conducted and used to identify the actors involved in the drug market. Undercover operations were implemented to build cases on the individuals involved in the drug market. High level dealers and those believed to be involved in violent crime were arrested and prosecuted. The other individuals were called into a lever pulling meeting where they were presented with the evidence against them. Rather than making arrests, however, the cases were held in abeyance. The police and prosecutors told the individuals that the drug markets were now closed. If drug market activity occurred arrest warrants would be served and prosecutions would ensue. The meetings were also a time to link the individuals to a variety of services including mentoring, employment, drug treatment, housing, and vocational training. Although currently part of a formal evaluation, the PSN research team reported a significant decline in crime in the target areas (Lang, et al., 2007). The apparent success of the High Point intervention has led to adoption in Winston-Salem and Raleigh, NC, Rockford, IL, Providence, RI, and Nassau County, NY with similar reports of impact. Although there is clearly a need for careful evaluation, the initial results are consistent with the case studies reported above.

Summary

Figure Two summarizes the results from these initial foundation studies (Boston, Indianapolis, and the directed patrol sites) as well as from the PSN case studies and related research. In every case examined, there is evidence of impact on gun crime. The two exceptions, St. Louis and Durham, witnessed reductions but the evidence was equivocal about the impact of PSN.

The findings should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, the comparisons utilized are not ideal for assessing impact. Ultimately we would have much more confidence if target areas with a sufficient baseline of gun crime could be randomly assigned to treatment and control sites. Second, the outcome measures vary from site to site based on local data availability and the preference of the local researcher. Third, we have little evidence of the sustainability of the effect. Most critically, what is happening in other sites? Are there jurisdictions that have implemented these strategies with a reasonable degree of fidelity and not experienced a decline, or worse, experienced an increase? It is possible that this has occurred but not come to the attention of the research community.

An additional set of questions relate to the challenges of implementing these types of strategic interventions. The intervention models are relatively straightforward yet experience indicates that they are very difficult to implement and sustain. Boston and Indianapolis have each experienced increases in homicide and gun crime in recent years. Officials in both cities have reported that their violence reduction strategies lost focus following the initial impact. In effect, attention was diverted to other pressing matters.

At a minimum it is clear that these types of interventions required committed leadership. For directed police patrol, support of local government and cooperation with community leaders and residents is imperative. Project Exile interventions are dependent on the cooperation of

local, state and federal law enforcement and local and federal prosecutors. Also required are local partnerships that can establish and implement a communication strategy. All of these relationships are fundamental to the strategic problem solving model. Additionally, this approach necessitates inclusion of service providers, formal and informal community leaders, and the involvement of a research team. Whereas such broad coalitions appear necessary, they are by their nature difficult to manage and to keep on track and sustain over time.

We also need to know more about the specific components of the interventions. Is it the specific and focused deterrence? Is it the incapacitation of key chronic and violent offenders? Is it the combination of a deterrence message coupled with linkage to opportunities? What role does the inclusion of local community members and neighborhood leaders play? Does this community voice create legitimacy for the intervention? What is the impact on individuals as opposed to the impact at a neighborhood or community level? Clearly, we need research to address these questions as well as to increase the scientific basis of the assessment of impact.

Despite these qualifications and lingering questions, it would also be a mistake to dismiss the findings because of these evaluation problems. At a minimum, these appear to be promising findings and to be strategies that criminal justice officials have within their authority to implement. Given the significant costs associated with gun crime, including the fact that this is the second leading cause of death for young adults, and the leading cause of death for young adults in the African-American community, these strategies can provide the basis for ongoing implementation, assessment, and revision as communities, states, and the nation seek to continually reduce the level and impact of gun crime. They also hold promise for creating a base level of community safety that would allow for economic re-investment and community building in the communities most adversely affected by gun crime.

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