

Comprehensive Law Enforcement Review: Police-Led Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategies SUMMARY

Police are expected to respond to and prevent a wide array of violent and nonviolent crimes and other disorderly behaviors. Violent crimes in urban areas—including homicides, nonfatal shootings, and crimes associated with gangs and drug market crews—tend to be the top concerns for police and the public alike. Since the mid-1990s, many communities across the United States have benefitted from sustained and significant drops in crime. In crime prevention and reduction, evidence-based strategies are critical for enabling police to effectively and efficiently carry out their crime reduction mission while also sorting strategies that work from those that do not.

In this summary, we highlight innovative crime prevention and reduction programs and practices led by police agencies. This overview includes programs and practices that have demonstrated effectiveness through rigorous research and evaluation; those that have shown promise based on some other levels of empirical evidence; and those that are widely used by U.S. police agencies, as well as programs and practices that are just emerging.

1) EFFECTIVENESS OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

Description

The term “place-based policing” is closely associated with the popular term “hot spot policing.” Indeed, most place-based policing approaches that have been rigorously researched are variations of hot spot policing. There are, however, other types of place-based policing that have been implemented and researched. These include approaches designed around and targeted to particular types of places where crime and disorder are known to concentrate as well as those associated with discrete geographic boundary areas known to have elevated levels of crime.

Evidence

Hot spots

In a meta-analysis of nine rigorous academic studies evaluating police enforcement strategies deployed in hot spot areas,¹ noteworthy and statistically significant reductions in crime or disorder were found in seven of the nine selected evaluations.² Findings from a second meta-analysis of 25 studies on hot spot policing strongly affirmed findings of the first: police focus on places with high crime and calls for service can effectively be used to prevent or reduce crime in those locations.³ The same meta-analysis found

little evidence of crime displacement and, indeed, there was evidence suggestive of spatial diffusion of benefits (positive spillovers of reductions in neighboring areas) found in eight of the 25 studies.

Targeting an entire precinct

One study focused at the precinct level found considerable decreases in gun crimes in Detroit, Michigan, precincts where an aggressive enforcement program was implemented, while at the same time, the number of gun offenses in the comparison precinct rose.⁴ Similarly, a study of a directed patrol strategy found that increased use of arrest in targeted beats resulted in improved outcomes whereas increased use of traffic stops resulted in no significant reductions in crime.⁵

Policy inferences and challenges

Moving forward, three key issues deserve careful attention when hot spot strategies are undertaken. These include (1) the implications of different approaches in hot spot policing to minority overrepresentation in the criminal justice system, as well as issues of police legitimacy and public trust; (2) general cost-benefit considerations for the practice; and (3) potential equality of service complaints associated with additional resources devoted to high crime areas.

2) EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP-BASED APPROACHES

Description

Group-based programs and practices are interventions designed to address groups that are collectively engaged in crime or disorder. The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) at George Mason University defines this category as “interventions which target gangs or other co-offenders (individuals who offend in concert).”⁶

Evidence

Focused deterrence strategies

Focused deterrence strategies involve criminal justice stakeholders and researchers or analysts in determining groups, subgroups, and individual actors in a criminal network most at risk of violence. A systematic review of 10 evaluations of focused deterrence strategies concluded that focused deterrence strategies resulted in statistically significant crime control benefits.⁷

Emerging strategies

Several group-based approaches integrate social network analysis (SNA) into programmatic efforts. Specifically, agencies and programs are using existing police data—or are collecting new data—on the relationships (e.g., alliances and conflicts) among criminal groups as well as their behaviors (e.g., patterns of co-offending or shootings) to determine which groups are most active within jurisdictions. Another group-based notification approach, “custom notifications,” represents an effort to identify and notification *specific individuals* who are group members or part of violent crews or networks. Lastly,

gang score cards assess persistent gang shootings and the role of various street crew or gangs in those shootings. The Boston Police Department (BPD) developed and implemented this tool in the mid-2000s as a way to understand the contribution and role of various groups in gun violence.

Policy inferences and challenges

While group-based strategies under the rubric of focused deterrence strategies have been used with success to reduce violence related to gangs and drug markets in numerous settings, numerous concerns and qualifications about this approach exist. One of the foremost concerns is that focused deterrence strategies can be difficult to implement and sustain over extended periods.⁸ Furthermore, some police and prosecutorial personnel feel that this approach panders to criminals.

3) EFFECTIVENESS OF INDIVIDUAL-BASED APPROACHES

Description

Individual-based programs and practices are designed to affect the behavior of distinct individuals. These usually are offender-focused but also can be victim-focused interventions.

Evidence

Police responses to domestic violence

One study based on data from the national crime victimization survey (NCVS) found that victims who reported that their partners were arrested were re-victimized less often than those whose partners had not been not arrested.⁹ In contrast, an earlier study in Charlotte, North Carolina, found that arrest of offenders was no more effective than the two other police responses (advising with possible separation and citation to offender) in reducing offender recidivism.¹⁰ Another study, which evaluated the effects of arrest in misdemeanor spouse abuse cases in Colorado, found results that were mixed and dependent on offender status.¹¹ Findings suggested that compared to other responses, including warnings, arrests had an overall deterrent effect for a group of "good-risk" (employed) offenders, who presumably have a lot to lose by being arrested. However, among "bad-risk" (unemployed) offenders, arrest actually increased the likelihood of new violence.¹²

Drug Abuse Resistance Education

The body of rigorous research on drug abuse resistance education (DARE) programs fails to establish that the program meets its primary intended goal of reducing drug use. Six of seven studies that compared children (or schools) who received DARE training against those who did not showed no statically significant differences in subsequent drug use. However, some studies did find positive effects on other program outcomes such as increased in measurements of student self-esteem following the program.¹³

Gang Resistance Education and Training programs

Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) has been evaluated in two large scale studies. The first study failed to find any long-term programmatic effect in students joining gangs (although there were findings suggestive of short term effects). However, students completing the program were found to endorse more pro-social attitudes, including toward the police, than those who did not.¹⁴ The second study was conducted in 31 schools in seven cities and found that students joining the program had lower odds of joining gangs after one-year follow-up.¹⁵ That study also confirmed findings of the first study affirming that the GREAT program generally resulted in more pro-social attitudes among students receiving training.

Policy inferences and challenges

Despite considerable research on the topic, conclusive practice and policy implications on the effect of mandatory or presumptive arrest in the case of domestic violence are hard to come by. More research, particularly research that looks at the effectiveness of various strategies in different contexts, is warranted. The popularity and use of DARE in many police agencies has persisted despite the lack of evidence that the program has an effect on reducing drug use. Both DARE and GREAT maintain popularity because they have “powerful symbolic political and public relations utility” for police and other stakeholders.¹⁶

4) EFFECTIVENESS OF MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND OTHER APPROACHES

Description

Several law enforcement strategies do not easily lend themselves to being discretely categorized as place-based, group-based, or individual-based. Included in this final section are two approaches that are overarching multi-dimensional strategies: (1) data and intelligence sharing and (2) real time crime analysis and predictive policing. This section also examines three additional topics that relate to crime and disorder reduction and which have come to be prime concern to the police and the broader law enforcement community: (1) public health approaches to violence; (2) addressing the unique needs of vulnerable populations, in particular the elderly and the mentally ill; and (3) strategies that are used to simultaneously address crime and traffic safety.

Evidence

Data and intelligence sharing

CompStat, as implemented at the New York Police Department and as adapted across many jurisdictions, has been lauded in many practitioner-oriented publications as a sound management strategy and an effective means to reduce crime and disorder.¹⁷ To date, however, no rigorous research has been published that has established a direct causal relationship between CompStat (or similar programs) and crime reduction, yet there is ample evidence of statistical associations between these programs and reductions in reported crime.¹⁸ A unique program developed by the Milwaukee Homicide

Review Commission (MHRC) was evaluated and shown to have a pronounced and statistically significant impact during its pilot phase.¹⁹ Additional indirect research support for data sharing can be found in the evaluation of the Richmond Comprehensive Homicide Initiative, implemented in Richmond, California, in the early 1990s, which was defined as a problem-solving policing approach and was associated with significant reductions in homicides during the post-implementation period.²⁰

Real time crime analysis and predictive policing

No known formal research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of real time crime analysis or fusion centers. Given the recent emergence of the concept of predictive policing, only one formal evaluation of predictive policing exists to date. One of the first formal evaluations of predictive policing focused on a single site—Shreveport, Louisiana—and is based on the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored predictive policing program implemented by the Shreveport Police Department beginning in 2012.²¹ The results of this single study found no program effect for predictive policing as implemented in Shreveport.

Policy inferences and challenges

In simple terms, more sophistication and more complexity does not necessarily equate with better crime reductions. Clear evidence about whether more advanced and automated models necessarily outperform high quality crime and intelligence analysts does not currently exist. As more departments adopt different approaches across different settings and apply them to different types of crime and disorder problems, careful attention must be paid to what analytic approaches work best with which types of crime, in which locations, and in what contexts. Research is an iterative process.

5) OTHER APPROACHES

Public health partnerships

Police and public health practitioners are key stakeholder in efforts to reduce violence. Over the last few decades, there has been a growing sense of collaboration, data sharing, and analytic cross-fertilization directed toward the common goal of reducing violence, particularly homicides, gun violence, and other types of near-fatal violence.

The MHRC, discussed earlier is a public health and problem solving approach to preventing homicides and nonfatal shootings. It is an intensive multi-disciplinary case review process that is derived in part from child death reviews, a common public health and medical model protocol. Other programs building on the police and public health perspective have emerged over the last few years. One notable example with a strong evidence base is a program called the Cardiff model, based on the city in Wales where it was first developed.²² This approach illustrates in practical terms how data about stabbings from two independent sources—trauma admissions at hospital emergency departments and data on assaults from police—have been used strategically to reduce stabbing incidents in that city. Police in East Palo Alto, California, established a Fitness Improvement Training (FIT) Zones program that demonstrated such a partnership.²³ Using shotspotter and crime incident data, the department determined which

areas are most impacted by gun violence. In this effort to increase community safety in the city's most dangerous neighborhoods, some of which had been overtaken by gang members, police and residents took back the streets by jointly engaging in physical activities, including power walking, yoga, and Zumba dancing. A formal evaluation of the project, addressing both potential reductions in crime in the FIT Zones and improvements in police community relations, is pending.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable populations

Police have become increasingly aware of the need to deal with vulnerable populations and have made clear progress in tailoring responses to these needs. For instance, many departments now have special victims units and crisis intervention teams (CIT) trained to deal with the mentally ill. Many have also taken advantage of training in cultural awareness and foreign language skills to deal more effectively with immigrant populations.

Innovative partnerships

The City of Edmonton in Alberta, Canada, has developed its own comprehensive and innovative model which includes a component called the Heavy Users of Service Project (HUoSP). The project centers on a working group that includes social service providers, first responders, justice agencies, and aboriginal and government representatives seeking to meet the needs of Edmonton's most vulnerable citizens.

The concurrence of traffic and crime problems:

Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS) is a relatively recent program that seeks to use mapping and analysis to reduce both crashes and crimes. Launched in 2008 as a partnership initiative of the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), DDACTS "integrates location-based crime and traffic crash data to determine the most effective methods for deploying law enforcement and other resources."²⁴ Drawing on the deterrent value of highly visible traffic enforcement and the knowledge that crimes often involve motor vehicles, the goal of DDACTS is to reduce crime, crashes, and traffic violations across the country. Initial data from DDACTS implementations suggests that there is promise in combining analysis of crash and crime data, particularly through place-based analytics. However, these programs might lead to unintended collateral effects, particularly if designed around aggressive traffic enforcement strategies. If not executed carefully, these approaches could contribute perceptions of profiling and increased minority overrepresentation in traffic and crime incidence.

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² The nine studies included hot spot efforts conducted across five large cities in the United States and in one suburb in Australia.

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