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National Institute of Justice *Update*

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The Kansas City Gun Experiment

Gun crime has been increasing rapidly throughout the Nation, especially in inner-city areas. To learn whether vigorous enforcement of existing gun laws could reduce gun crime, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored an evaluation of the Kansas City, Missouri, Police Department's "Weed and Seed" program. The evaluation found that the program's success in getting more guns off the street in one violent Kansas City neighborhood reduced gun crimes there by almost 50 percent during a 6-month period. The data indicate that more than two gun crimes were prevented for every gun seized.

Study design

For 29 weeks, from July 7, 1992, to January 27, 1993, police patrols were increased in gun crime "hot spots" in a target area. The researchers identified the hot spot locations by computer analysis of all gun crimes in the target area, patrol beat 144 in the Central Patrol District. An 80-block neighborhood normally covered by one patrol car, the target area had a homicide rate 20 times higher than the national average. The population was almost entirely nonwhite, with more than two-thirds of all residences being owner-occupied, single-family, detached homes.

In the target area, assigned officers focused exclusively on gun detection through proactive, directed patrol and were not required to answer calls for service. The extra patrol was handled by four officers who worked 6 hours of overtime each night (from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.) for 176 nights, with only two officers working an additional 24 nights, for a total of 4,512 officer-hours and 2,256 patrol car-hours.

Guns were found by officers on the directed patrols during frisks and searches and following arrests on other charges. To ensure the protection of civil liberties, every search had to conform to legal guidelines for adequate articulable suspicion and every arrest for carrying concealed weapons had to be approved by a supervisory detective.

To gather information, an onsite University of Maryland evaluator accompanied the officers on 300 hours of directed patrol in the target area. Property room data on guns seized, as well as computerized crime reports, calls for service data, and arrest records, were analyzed over two time periods: the 29 weeks before the program began in 1992 and the 29 weeks while the program was active.

Data for the same time period were also collected for a comparison area (patrol beat 242 in the Metro Patrol District), which had about the same volume of violent crime and drive-by shootings as the target area. In the comparison area no changes were made in the number or duties of patrol officers.

Increased enforcement

During the program period, officers working overtime on the directed patrols reported spending 3.27 car-hours of the 12 car-hours per night (or 27 percent of their time) actually patrolling the target area, for a total of 1,218 officer-hours of potential gun detection. The officers thus spent about 70 percent of their time processing arrests and performing other patrol-related duties.

Despite the limited amount of time the officers actually spent on patrol in the target area, the volume of activity was significant. The officers on directed patrol issued 1,090 traffic citations and made 948 car checks, 532 pedestrian checks, 170 State or Federal arrests, and 446 city arrests, for an average of one intervention every 40 minutes per patrol car.

Guns seized

In the target area, 65 percent more guns were seized in the second half of 1992 than in the first half; gun seizures increased from 46 in the first 6 months of 1992 to 76 in the last 6 months. In the comparison area, however, gun seizures decreased slightly in the second half of 1992.

Related findings include:

- Traffic stops were the most productive means of finding illegal guns, yielding an average of one gun discovered for every 28 stops.
- The ratio of guns seized to actual time spent on patrol in the target area was one gun seized per 84 officer-hours.
- Two-thirds of the persons arrested for gun carrying in the target area were not residents of the target area.

Impact on gun crimes

Data from the first and second halves of 1992 show that gun crimes declined significantly in the target area—83 fewer gun crimes were committed, a 49 percent decline—while they increased slightly in the comparison area.

Related findings include:

- Drive-by shootings dropped from 7 to 1 in the target area, while doubling from 6 to 12 in the comparison area.
- Only gun crimes were affected by the directed patrols. No changes were observed (in either the target or the comparison areas) in the number of calls for service or in the total number of other violent and nonviolent crimes reported.
- After the directed patrols stopped, crimes involving guns gradually increased for the first 5 months of 1993. When the patrols resumed in June 1993, gun crimes decreased again, although not as consistently as in the second half of 1992.
- The decline in gun crimes in the target area did not appear to cause a displacement of crime to adjoining neighborhoods. Gun crimes did not increase significantly in any of the surrounding seven patrol beats.

Conclusion

This study shows that a police department can successfully implement a program to increase seizures of illegally carried guns in high gun-crime areas. Police officers can be very productive when given the opportunity to focus on gun detection in identified crime hot spots without being obligated to answer calls for service. In addition, gun seizures do not appear to require large tactical operations; in the Kansas City high-crime target area, the officers worked in two-officer patrol units and no gun attacks on officers were reported during the directed patrols. Directed patrols were also shown to be, on average, about three times more cost-effective in getting guns off the street than routine police activity.

The researchers note that much remains to be learned about gun detection and seizure by police through evaluations of similar programs. But before such studies are completed, many cities will have to make decisions about how to respond to rising gun crime. A citywide version of this program was implemented (without overtime) in Indianapolis, Indiana in October 1994. Whether a citywide program can replicate the results that the Kansas City experiment achieved in a small area is the next important question to be answered.

Results from the evaluation, supported in part by NIJ grant 91-DD-CX-K056, are reported in an NIJ Research in Brief, *The Kansas City Gun Experiment*, by University of Maryland Criminology Professor Lawrence W. Sherman, who directed the study in collaboration with Dennis P. Rogan and James W. Shaw. The Research in Brief can be obtained from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850, 800-851-3420. Ask for NCJ 150855.

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