

# WORKING P A P E R

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## Violence in East and West Oakland

### Description and Intervention

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## Preface

This working paper is a descriptive summary of violence in East and West Oakland, California. The information presented here was collected as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, which is a national initiative funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (grant # 2003-GP-CX-0001), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Project Safe Neighborhoods is a comprehensive, strategic approach to reducing gun violence in America coordinated through U.S. Attorneys' offices. Our role is to support the research and strategic planning components of the initiative. The goals of this program are to (1) increase the capacity of Project Safe Neighborhood task forces to design data-driven strategies that produce measurable decreases in firearms-related crime and (2) improve the long-term ability of federal, state, and local agencies to work together to understand, prosecute, and prevent firearms-related violent crime within their jurisdictions.

The primary purpose of this working paper is to provide a brief description of and potential interventions for reducing violence in East and West Oakland for the San Francisco Bay Project Safe Neighborhoods task force, Project Safe Neighborhoods task forces in other jurisdictions, and others interested in violence prevention. This is not a required product by either the funding source or the U.S. Attorney, but rather is a synopsis of our analyses to date.

Points of view are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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## INTRODUCTION

Homicide is a serious issue facing urban California. An examination of homicide rates from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports over the last ten years illustrates that, like the U.S. homicide rate, the rate of homicides in California fell from 1993 until about 1999. However, from this point until 2002 (the most recent year available), the U.S. rate leveled off as the California rate started climbing. This trend is even more pronounced in urban areas such as Oakland, which as of 2002 had a homicide rate (26.1 per 100,000 residents) that was almost five times the national average (5.6 per 100,000 residents) and ranked as the fifth most violent city in California in terms of homicide.

As part of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), we are charged with providing research assistance in an effort to develop data-driven strategies to reduce gun violence in the San Francisco Bay area. In this capacity we have been working with the Oakland Police Department (OPD)<sup>1</sup> to collect data for use in examining violence. This working paper represents a brief summary and analysis of the data we collected to gauge violence in Oakland, California.<sup>2</sup>

## METHOD

### Target Area

Given that violence is a local phenomenon and given the practical need to focus our inquiry (for data requirements and resource issues), we asked OPD to select two areas of the city that were particularly violent on which we could focus our analysis. OPD selected East and West Oakland. East Oakland corresponds to three reporting districts (beats): 30X, 33X, and 34X. West Oakland corresponds to one reporting district: 6X. Unless otherwise noted, all analyses refer to these specific areas.

### Data

We examined several types of data to assess violence in East and West Oakland. These are discussed in turn.

#### *Homicides*

We chose homicide data as our primary indicator of violence because of the time and attention homicide incidents receive and because they are a good proxy for other types of violence, especially gun assaults. The difference between a homicide and an attempted homicide or an aggravated assault, for example, rarely depends on the intent of the offender but rather on the location of the wound and the speed of medical attention. Information on the nature and causes of homicide can therefore offer insights into other types of violence in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> We offer thanks to Deputy Chief Michael Holland, Lieutenant Jim Emery, Officer Leroy Johnson, and the investigators of the homicide unit, who were particularly instrumental in assisting this research process.

<sup>2</sup> For a similar analysis of Los Angeles see Tita et al. (2004).

To analyze homicides we examined data on each incident from January 2000 through August 2003<sup>3</sup> as listed in the books maintained by the OPD Homicide Unit. These books contain a short narrative on the means and motivation for each attack; information on victim and offender age, race, sex, and gang affiliation; incident date, time, and location; and other variables.

### *Calls for Shots Fired*

We examined the frequency with which OPD received calls for service pertaining to potential gunshots fired. These data include monthly counts in each target area from January 1999 through July 2003.

### *Aggravated Assaults*

We assessed the number of aggravated assaults from January 1998 through August 2003. We were able to break these down by month for both total aggravated assaults and the subgroup of aggravated assault with a gun. The subgroup data were available for all reporting districts except 30X in 1998.

### *Robberies*

Similar to the aggravated assault data, we examined the monthly frequency of robberies from January 1998 through August 2003, and we were able to break these down to determine those involving a firearm. The subgroup data were available for all reporting districts except 30X in 1998.

### *Investigator Interviews*

To complement the quantitative analysis, we interviewed OPD homicide investigators. Using a semi-structured approach, we asked the investigators, on an individual basis, a common set of questions. In all, we gathered insight from six of the ten investigators, all of whom carry the rank of sergeant. Although the sample was nonrandom, the information was nonetheless valuable for understanding violence in these areas from an investigator's perspective. Moreover, the information provided by the investigators was consistent.

## **RESULTS**

### **Homicides**

From January 2000 through August 2003, there were 66 homicides in East Oakland and 22 homicides in West Oakland (see Table 1).<sup>4</sup> The frequency of East Oakland homicides remained stable from 2000 to 2001, dropped in 2002, and has increased considerably in 2003. So far, the number of homicides in 2003 (20) is already higher than any other year, and it does not include those that occurred between September and December. Comparing homicides from January

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<sup>3</sup> All data sources account for the time period between January 2000 and July 2003. We extended the data collection period where additional information was readily attainable.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 52 percent of the East and 50 percent of the West Oakland homicides were still "open" at the time of data collection. Data gathered from these files represent the best information at the time and may not necessarily be completely accurate.

through August illustrates that the 2003 frequency (20) is twice as high as 2002 (10). The number of homicides in West Oakland fell greatly in 2001 relative to 2000, but then increased in 2002. The number of homicides in this area in 2003 will likely be close to the 2002 figure because the January through August frequency in 2002 (5) is only slightly greater than that of 2003 (4).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. Homicides, 2000-2003**

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>East Oakland</b>	17	17	12	20	66
<b>West Oakland</b>	10	1	7	4	22

<sup>a</sup>Figures for 2003 are through August only.

### *Demographics*

In both East and West Oakland, homicide victims were, on average, older than the offenders (see Table 2 for demographic information).<sup>6</sup> In addition, victims and offenders tended to be slightly younger in West relative to East Oakland. Of all offenders where information was known as to their age, which was 80 percent of the cases, only one (from West Oakland) was under the age of 18. Of all victims, only two (from East Oakland) were under the age of 18. This suggests homicide violence in these areas is largely an adult phenomenon.

It is not surprising that most known victims and offenders of homicide were male. Roughly nine out of ten offenders were male. About the same number of victims in West Oakland were also male. However, almost one out of five victims in East Oakland was female.

The majority of homicide victims and offenders were black, and these proportions were higher in West Oakland. About 80 percent of victims and offenders in East Oakland were black, while these individuals represented about 90 percent of victims and offenders in West Oakland. Latinos were more represented in East Oakland homicides. About 15 percent of victims and 8 percent of offenders in East Oakland were Latino, while only 5 percent of victims and no offenders in West Oakland were Latino.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that these are raw frequencies and are not adjusted for population changes.

<sup>6</sup> In multiple offender cases, which composed 38 percent of East and 41 percent of West Oakland homicides, the primary offender was chosen to determine offender demographic information. For 21 percent of homicides in East and 23 percent of homicides in West Oakland we had to arbitrarily choose the offender for demographic purposes.

**Table 2. Homicide Victim and Offender Demographics**

	<u>East Oakland</u>		<u>West Oakland</u>	
	Victims	Offenders	Victims	Offenders
<b>Mean age<sup>a</sup></b>	32	28	30	25
<b>Gender</b>				
<b>Male</b>	82%	89%	91%	91%
<b>Female</b>	18%	2%	9%	5%
<b>Unknown</b>	0%	9%	0%	5%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
<b>Black</b>	80%	79%	91%	91%
<b>Latino</b>	15%	8%	5%	0%
<b>White</b>	2%	0%	0%	5%
<b>Asian</b>	2%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	2%	0%	5%	0%
<b>Unknown</b>	0%	14%	0%	5%
<b>Employment</b>				
<b>Employed</b>	24%	12%	0%	0%
<b>Unemployed</b>	44%	24%	55%	23%
<b>Unknown</b>	32%	64%	45%	77%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Estimated where exact age was not known, but some age data were available. For example, if an age range was given for a primary offender, its median was used in the calculation of overall offender mean age.

As shown in Table 3, homicide violence in these areas is largely intra-racial, especially in West Oakland. Of all homicides in East Oakland, 74 percent were intra-racial (68 percent were black-on-black and 6 percent were Latino-on-Latino); and of all homicides in West Oakland, 91 percent were intra-racial (86 percent were black-on-black and 5 percent were white-on-white). Of all the homicides of a black person in East Oakland where the race of the offender was known, every offender was black. In all, 12 percent of homicide victims were black but the offenders' race was unknown. It is therefore likely that at least a portion of these offenders were black, thereby increasing the true percentage of intra-racial violence in this area.

Both victims and offenders were much more likely to be unemployed than employed (see Table 2). Victims and offenders in East Oakland were about twice as likely to not have a job than to have one. Approximately 44 percent of victims and 24 percent of offenders in East Oakland were known to be unemployed. In West Oakland, none of victims or offenders were known to be employed, whereas about 55 percent of victims and 23 percent of offenders were known to be unemployed (given the known distribution, it is likely that a fair number of those whose status was unknown were unemployed).

**Table 3. Victims and Offenders by Race**

<u>Victims</u>	<u>Offenders</u>					
	<b>Black</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Unknown</b>
<i><b>East Oakland<sup>a</sup></b></i>						
<b>Black</b>	68%	0%	0%	0%	0%	12%
<b>Latino</b>	8%	6%	0%	0%	0%	2%
<b>White</b>	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Asian</b>	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Unknown</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i><b>West Oakland<sup>a</sup></b></i>						
<b>Black</b>	86%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
<b>Latino</b>	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>White</b>	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Asian</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Unknown</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

### *Probation and Parole*

A moderate proportion of victims and offenders were known to be on probation or parole at the time of the offense (see Table 4). About one in five victims and one in ten offenders in East Oakland were known to be on probation, whereas almost one in three victims and offenders in West Oakland were under this form of control. About the same proportion of homicide victims (12 percent) and offenders (14 percent) in East Oakland were known to be on parole. In West Oakland about 18 percent of homicide victims were on parole, but the proportion of offenders on parole was about the same as East Oakland. A small proportion of victims and offenders were on both probation and parole. However, a fair proportion of victims and a large proportion of offenders do not have a known probation or parole status. This could be because the information was not available at the time of the analysis, or, in the case of offenders, because the identities were not known.

A homicide investigator intimated that probationers, parolees, and the unemployed who sell drugs or engage in some other form of illegal activity largely commit the violence. If this is the case, many of those whose status was unknown were likely to be on probation or parole. If we assume that those whose status is known closely reflects those whose status is unknown, we can obtain a better estimate of probation and parole status simply by comparing those with a known status.<sup>7</sup> This calculation is depicted in Table 5. With the exception of parole status of offenders, these findings show that victims and offenders in West Oakland were, on average, more likely than those in East Oakland to be under these forms of state control. In either area, offenders were generally more likely than victims to be on probation and/or parole. Victims overall and offenders in West Oakland were more likely to be on probation than parole, whereas the opposite was true for

<sup>7</sup> These estimates will be conservative if the true proportion of those on probation and parole is higher or liberal if the true proportion is lower.

offenders in East Oakland. When both forms of status were combined, we find that over half of all offenders overall and victims in West Oakland were under at least one of these forms of state control. In East Oakland, about 36 percent of victims were on probation and/or parole. Based on this examination of those with known statuses, a fairly large proportion of victims and offenders were under probation and/or parole.

**Table 4. Probation and Parole Status of Homicide Victims and Offenders**

	<u>East Oakland</u>		<u>West Oakland</u>	
	Victims	Offenders	Victims	Offenders
<b>Probation</b>				
On probation	20%	11%	27%	27%
Not on probation	59%	27%	45%	23%
Unknown	21%	62%	27%	50%
<b>Parole</b>				
On parole	12%	14%	18%	14%
Not on parole	64%	24%	59%	36%
Unknown	24%	62%	23%	50%
<b>Both Probation and Parole</b>	3%	3%	0%	5%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 5. Known Probation and Parole Status of Homicide Victims and Offenders**

	<u>East Oakland</u>		<u>West Oakland</u>	
	Victims	Offenders	Victims	Offenders
On probation	25%	28%	38%	55%
On parole	16%	36%	24%	27%
On probation and/or parole	36%	54%	56%	60%

### *Relationships*

The relationships between victims and offenders in East and West Oakland somewhat differed. As illustrated in Table 6, the most frequently occurring (known) relationship in East Oakland was one pertaining to drugs. The victims and offenders in almost one in four homicides in East Oakland were known to have a drug relationship, whereas such an association characterized only about one in ten cases in West Oakland. Acquaintances represented the most frequently occurring relationship of homicide victims and offenders in West Oakland. Characterizing about 27 percent of homicides, this type of association occurred more frequently in this area than in East Oakland where it represented about 15 percent of homicides. Victims and offenders were either current or ex-intimates in about 5 percent of homicides in both areas. Victim and offenders were much more likely to be friends in East as opposed to West Oakland. However, compared with East Oakland, they were more likely to have a gang relationship or be strangers in West Oakland.

**Table 6. Relationship Between Victims and Offenders**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Current intimate</b>	3%	5%
<b>Ex-intimate</b>	2%	0%
<b>Friend</b>	11%	0%
<b>Acquaintance</b>	15%	27%
<b>Stranger</b>	9%	14%
<b>Gang relationship</b>	3%	9%
<b>Drug relationship</b>	23%	9%
<b>Other</b>	6%	14%
<b>Unknown</b>	29%	23%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

### *Motivation*

The examination of homicide files illustrated that a single or even a few primary motives did not characterize most homicides. As shown in Table 7, the primary motive was not identified (i.e., was characterized as “other” or “unknown”) in about 68 percent of the homicides in East and West Oakland. Most of these contained an identifiable motive, but they were not similar enough to warrant the creation of a specific category. About one in ten homicides in West Oakland resulted from some sort of gang dispute, with the dispute being just as likely to be intra- as inter-gang. Relatively few homicides in East Oakland resulted from a gang dispute. Homicides were about twice as likely to result from a robbery or property crime in East (11 percent) relative to West (5 percent) Oakland, but were approximately three times as likely to result from domestic violence in West (9 percent) relative East (3 percent) Oakland. Of the identified motives, escalation of violence occurred most frequently. About 15 percent of East and 9 percent of West Oakland homicides resulted from this motive.

**Table 7. Primary Homicide Motive**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Dispute between gangs</b>	2%	5%
<b>Dispute within gang</b>	0%	5%
<b>"Where you from?"</b>	2%	0%
<b>Robbery or property crime</b>	11%	5%
<b>Domestic violence</b>	3%	9%
<b>Escalation of violence</b>	15%	9%
<b>Other</b>	41%	50%
<b>Unknown</b>	27%	18%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

### *Weapons and Modus Operandi*

Most homicides involved some type of firearm: almost nine out of ten in East Oakland and just over eight in ten in West Oakland. Table 8 shows that almost 65 percent of homicides in each area

involved some type of a handgun. Semi-automatic handguns were the most prevalent by far. Also noteworthy is the fact that about one in ten homicides in East Oakland involved an assault weapon, while no such weapons were utilized in West Oakland.

**Table 8. Frequency of Weapons Involved in Homicides**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Handgun</b>	18%	27%
<b>Semi-auto handgun</b>	47%	36%
<b>Hunting rifle</b>	6%	5%
<b>Shotgun</b>	0%	9%
<b>Assault weapon</b>	12%	0%
<b>Unknown gun</b>	6%	5%
<b>Knife</b>	5%	9%
<b>Own body</b>	5%	5%
<b>Other</b>	2%	5%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

An examination of the modus operandi of homicide offenders provided some illustrative findings. Regardless of the area, offenders were more likely to walk up and shoot a victim than drive by and do so (see Table 9). Of homicides committed with a gun, about four in ten in East Oakland and six in ten in West Oakland were “walk-bys.” These are twice as common as “drive-bys” in East Oakland (20 percent) and six times more common than drive-bys in West Oakland (6 percent). There are some differences between the areas, however. Drive-by homicides are about three times more likely to occur in East Oakland, while walk-bys are about 50 percent more likely in West Oakland. While the majority of gun homicide victims were shot at point-blank range, the likelihood was much greater in West (67 percent) as opposed to East (51 percent) Oakland.

**Table 9. Homicide Modus Operandi**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Of gun homicides</b>		
<b>Drive-by</b>	20%	6%
<b>Walk-by</b>	39%	61%
<b>Point-blank range<sup>a</sup></b>	51%	67%
<b>Of all homicides</b>		
<b>Drive-by</b>	18%	5%
<b>Walk-by</b>	35%	50%
<b>Point-blank range<sup>a</sup></b>	47%	55%

<sup>a</sup>Either a drive- or walk-by can be committed at point-blank range.

### *Gangs*

As described below, Oakland does not have formally defined gangs. As opposed to Los Angeles, which has large, formally structured gangs (Tita et al., 2004), Oakland has small, loosely knit

neighborhoods groups. As such, the homicide files did not contain information that would permit a formal analysis of the extent to which victims and offenders were associated with gangs.

*Location, Month, Day, and Time*

Overall, the majority of homicides in East (52 percent) and West (68 percent) Oakland occurred on a street or street corner, but the proportion of total homicides is quite a bit larger in West Oakland (see Table 10). The proportion of homicides occurring at a business was also greater in West (9 percent) relative to East Oakland (5 percent). By contrast, homicides in East Oakland were much more likely to occur in a residence or vehicle. An East Oakland homicide is about five times more likely to occur in a residence (24 percent) and about three times more likely to occur in a vehicle (15 percent) than a West Oakland homicide (5 percent for each). No homicides occurred in a park or school during this period in either target area.

**Table 10. Location of Homicides**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Residence</b>	24%	5%
<b>Business</b>	5%	9%
<b>Street/street corner</b>	52%	68%
<b>In a vehicle</b>	15%	5%
<b>Park</b>	0%	0%
<b>School</b>	0%	0%
<b>Other</b>	5%	9%
<b>Unknown</b>	0%	5%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

In both East and West Oakland, homicides were most frequent in the month of August and least frequent in the month of February (see Table 11). The month with the second most frequent homicides that was common between the areas was November. As depicted in Table 12, some interesting differences occurred in terms of the distribution of homicides by the day of week of their occurrence. Homicides in West Oakland most frequently occurred on Sunday (32 percent), and the second highest number occurred on Saturday (27 percent). By contrast, Saturday (21 percent) was the most frequent day for homicides in East Oakland, and this day was followed closely by Tuesday (20 percent). If we consider Friday, Saturday, and Sunday as the “weekend,” we see that 47 percent of East Oakland homicides occurred on the weekend, whereas 68 percent of those in West Oakland occurred during this period.

**Table 11. Homicides by Month**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>January</b>	7%	11%
<b>February</b>	2%	0%
<b>March</b>	11%	0%
<b>April</b>	7%	6%
<b>May</b>	11%	6%
<b>June</b>	7%	6%
<b>July</b>	11%	6%
<b>August</b>	15%	22%
<b>September</b>	7%	11%
<b>October</b>	9%	11%
<b>November</b>	11%	17%
<b>December</b>	4%	6%

NOTES: To ensure that data are compared based on whole years, this table is limited to homicides occurring from 2000 to 2002.

Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

**Table 12. Homicides by Day of the Week**

	<b>East Oakland</b>	<b>West Oakland</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	14%	32%
<b>Monday</b>	14%	5%
<b>Tuesday</b>	20%	9%
<b>Wednesday</b>	6%	9%
<b>Thursday</b>	14%	9%
<b>Friday</b>	12%	9%
<b>Saturday</b>	21%	27%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Breaking down homicides by time of day in which they occurred clearly indicated that the majority of homicides took place in the late evening. Overall, at least half of the homicides occurred between 8pm and midnight (see Table 13). More acutely, 28 percent of all homicides in these areas occurred within the one hour time period of 8-9pm. About as many homicides occurred between midnight and 4am as those that occurred between noon and 4pm. The most apparent difference between the areas in terms of time of homicide was that the proportion of those taking place in West Oakland during the hours of 4am to 8am (14 percent) was almost five times greater than that for East Oakland during the same period (3 percent).

**Table 13. Homicides by Time of Day**

	East Oakland	West Oakland
12 midnight-3:59 am	12%	14%
4:00 am-7:59 am	3%	14%
8:00 am-11:59 am	5%	0%
12 noon-3:59 pm	9%	14%
4:00 pm-7:59 pm	11%	9%
8:00 pm-11:59 pm	56%	50%
Unknown	5%	0%

NOTE: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

### Calls for Shots Fired

From 1999 through July 2003, there were 699 calls for service for “shots fired” in East Oakland and 289 such calls in West Oakland (see Table 14). The number of these calls in East Oakland has generally increased. Relatively large increases took place from 1999 through 2001, and then remained almost the same in 2001 and 2002. Comparing the number of these calls occurring between January and July of 2002 (99) and 2003 (109) suggests the figures for 2003 will be the highest of the years examined. Calls declined in West Oakland from 1999 to 2000, but then rose through 2002. However, this trend will likely end in 2003 (at least temporarily), because the number of calls from January through July in 2003 (28) was less than the number of such calls during the same time period in 2002 (43).

**Table 14. Calls for Shots Fired, 1999-2003**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 <sup>a</sup>	Total
East Oakland	128	142	161	159	109	699
West Oakland	72	54	61	74	28	289

<sup>a</sup>Figures for 2003 are through July only.

### Aggravated Assaults

As depicted in Table 15, 921 aggravated assaults occurred in East Oakland from 1998 through August 2003. Of the 737 that occurred from 1999 through August 2003, 170 (23 percent) of these involved the use of a firearm.<sup>8</sup> West Oakland experienced 443 aggravated assaults from 1998 to August 2003, and 103 (23 percent) involved a firearm. From 1998 through 2001, aggravated assaults in East Oakland declined, but then increased in 2002. Data were not yet available for the remaining months of 2003, but it was possible to compare January through August for both 2002 and 2003. During this time period in 2002 East Oakland experienced 118 aggravated assaults, whereas 114 such incidences occurred during these months in 2003. This suggests 2003 figures will likely be on par with, or slightly less than, 2002. In West Oakland, aggravated assaults increased from 1998 to 1999, but then followed a similar pattern as those in East Oakland—decreasing from 1999 to 2001, and increasing in 2002. Comparing aggravated assaults from January through August suggested that

<sup>8</sup> Data were not available regarding aggravated assaults with a gun (or robberies with a gun) in East Oakland in 1998.

the 2003 figures would likely be less than the 2002 figures. In this time there were 55 incidences in 2002 and 44 incidences in 2003.

One disturbing trend, however, is that the proportion of aggravated assaults involving a firearm recently increased (see Table 15). From 1999 to 2003, the percentage of aggravated assaults involving a firearm generally increased from 16 percent to 28 percent in East Oakland (with the exception of a drop in 2001), while West Oakland experienced an increase from 19 percent to 41 percent in this same period. This suggests that incidents of aggravated assaults in these areas were, on average, becoming more violent and potentially lethal.

**Table 15. Aggravated Assaults, 1998-2003**

<i><b>East Oakland</b></i>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Aggravated assault</b>	184	159	157	141	166	114	921
<b>W/gun</b>	-- <sup>a</sup>	26	42	30	40	32	-- <sup>a</sup>
<b>% agg aslt w/gun</b>	-- <sup>a</sup>	16%	27%	21%	24%	28%	-- <sup>a</sup>
 <i><b>West Oakland</b></i>							
<b>Aggravated assault</b>	81	102	71	66	79	44	443
<b>W/gun</b>	16	19	14	16	20	18	103
<b>% agg aslt w/gun</b>	20%	19%	20%	24%	25%	41%	23%

<sup>a</sup>Data are not available.

<sup>b</sup>Figures for 2003 are through August only.

## **Robberies**

From 1998 through August 2003 there were 814 robberies in East Oakland (see Table 16). Of the 689 robberies that occurred in this area from 1999 through August 2003, 318 (46 percent) involved a firearm. West Oakland experienced 352 robberies from 1998 through August 2003, of which 105 (30 percent) involved a firearm.<sup>9</sup> Robberies in East Oakland decreased between 1998 and 1999, but increased since then. From 1999 to 2002 robberies in this area increased from 110 to 170, or 55 percent. In addition, the frequency of robbery in 2003 will likely be higher than that of 2002 because the number occurring between January and August in these years was 133 and 104, respectively. This trend was not repeated in West Oakland. Robberies in this area fell from 1998 to 2000, but then increased in 2001. Since this time, the frequency of robbery was relatively stable, especially since the number of robberies that occurred between January and August of 2002 and 2003 was identical (38).

An examination of the proportion of robberies involving a firearm over time offered some interesting insight into violence in these areas. Along with an increase in robberies in East Oakland from 1999 to 2003, the percentage of those that involved a firearm increased from 35 percent in 1999 to 52 percent in 2001; the slight reduction in this percentage in 2002 and 2003 still left the total proportion much greater than its 1999 level. This suggested that robberies in East Oakland became both more frequent and more violent. In West Oakland, the percentage of robberies involving a

<sup>9</sup> According to the data we received from OPD, none of the 77 robberies that occurred in West Oakland in 1998 involved a firearm. This is highly unlikely and therefore suggests the total number of robberies involving a firearm was likely a conservative estimate.

firearm peaked in 2000 at 54 percent and dropped to 27 percent in 2001. However, since that time, the proportion of robberies involving a firearm steadily increased (yet was still less than its 1999 level).

**Table 16. Robberies, 1998-2003**

<i><u>East Oakland</u></i>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	125	110	119	157	170	133	814
<b>W/gun</b>	-- <sup>a</sup>	39	48	81	86	64	-- <sup>a</sup>
<b>% rob w/gun</b>	-- <sup>a</sup>	35%	40%	52%	51%	48%	-- <sup>a</sup>
<i><u>West Oakland</u></i>							
<b>Robbery</b>	77	65	50	62	60	38	352
<b>W/gun</b>	0	30	27	17	18	13	105
<b>% rob w/gun</b>	0%	46%	54%	27%	30%	34%	30%

<sup>a</sup>Data are not available.

<sup>b</sup>Figures for 2003 are through August only.

## Homicide Investigator Interviews

### *Gangs and Drugs*

The homicide investigators we interviewed made a distinction between Latino and black gangs. The Latino gangs are much more formal and place a greater value on “pride,” “colors,” and “turf” as an end in themselves. By contrast, the black gangs are small, loosely connected neighborhood associations, that may affiliate with each other, constructed to primarily facilitate their drug trade and ability to make money. Because members of these associations may not be in one gang for a very long time, because of the difficulty of determining who is in charge, and because of the general lack of “colors” and “signs,” the investigators indicated that most of these associations do not fall under the formal definition of a gang as determined by the state.<sup>10</sup> This may explain why very little information regarding gang affiliation was available in the homicide files.

Although the black associations may not be considered formal gangs, the investigators agreed that they are far more violent than the Latino gangs. One investigator described these loose-knit groups as a “Lord of the Flies” situation where the nastiest rise to the top. He characterized the drug trade as being perpetrated by a small number of core dedicated criminals who know each other and the business, who commit the violence, and who use murder to enforce rules, protect turf, and create fear. Other investigators added retaliation as a primary motive for murder—including for the drug trade or over women, greed, lust, or testifying in court.

According to the investigators, the black and Latino gang/associations rarely conflict. This coincides with our homicide analysis, which demonstrated that 74 percent of homicides in East Oakland and 91 percent of homicides in West Oakland had a victim and offender of the same race. Yet, the investigators did not suggest the violence was exclusively between gangs/associations. They noted that the violence was a result of both inter- and intra- gang/association conflict.

<sup>10</sup> We therefore use the term “neighborhood association” or simply “association” instead of “gang” to describe these groups of individuals.

To sell drugs in East or West Oakland, one must belong or have a connection to a specific neighborhood in which the drugs are sold. The drug trade generally occurs out in the open all day long, unless there has been some police presence, in which case the drug trade will move into residences. Some neighborhood associations are known for specific drugs (e.g., heroine). In some areas, one person controls the drug trade and violence (i.e., a “shot-caller”), has underlings who commit the violence, and further underlings who sell the drugs. If a drug seller leaves (e.g., is incarcerated), a power vacuum can occur. Those underlings who are connected to the neighborhood association can replace the drug seller with relatively less violence occurring (depending on how many want to fill the void) than if someone from outside of the neighborhood association attempts to acquire the market. Other sources of violence in these neighborhoods include disagreements over who will control certain sales within the neighborhood and who will handle sales on the fringes of neighborhoods. Likewise, those who are “doing well” in terms of drug sales, those who are shot-callers, and those who do not follow the neighborhood rules are also susceptible to violence. Although the street-level drug sellers must be associated with their neighborhood market, those who supply drugs can be unaffiliated with the neighborhood.

A few investigators also noted that ecstasy is becoming a large problem in Oakland and contributes to the homicide problem.<sup>11</sup>

### *Firearms*

The acquisition of firearms is a relatively easy task according to investigators. Most guns are (1) stolen through a robbery or burglary; (2) purchased on the street through the black market; or (3) purchased by a straw purchaser, usually a girlfriend. Firearms also change hands frequently and often are used in multiple, unrelated homicides. In terms of the utility of gun tracing, one investigator noted that it is not helpful at all and has never helped.

### *Police-Community Relations*

Investigators characterized police-community relations (especially in the black community) as generally tenuous to deeply problematic, which results in distrust, vigilantism, and major witness intimidation. Given these are the most violent areas, the police are more aggressive in them relative to other areas, which further creates a cycle of mistrust. Although there is general contempt for the police, they attempt to develop a rapport with victims and their families, and noncriminals count on the police. One investigator noted that the criminal element does not like the police if they infringe on the criminals’ illegal activity, but the criminals think highly of the police if they are needed. Another investigator suggested police-community relations have their “ups and downs” and distinguished relations among residents by their ages. He claimed that in black neighborhoods the younger generation expresses animosity toward the police, whereas those who are middle-aged and older support the police.

### *Facilitators and Impediments to Investigation*

The investigators identified a number of items that facilitate or impede the investigation of homicides. First and foremost is cooperation of witnesses. However, fear of retaliation (and to some extent the “street code”) makes witnesses unwilling to participate. One investigator noted that

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<sup>11</sup> We did not find indication of this in the review of homicide files.

the police know who perpetrates the murders but cannot solve cases because of fear of witnesses. He explained that offenders commit crime out in the open without a mask, which elicits fear in witnesses as it suggests the offender will stop at nothing. The murder of witnesses in the past creates further fear. Anonymity somewhat offsets the fear of providing information, and many tips are called in to the police from anonymous sources. Witness relocation and reward money also help to secure witnesses. However, even if witnesses appear cooperative, it is often difficult to acquire “good” information from them, which is why corroborative evidence also helps.

Two other conditions increase the likelihood of witness cooperation. One is if the offender was “playing bad” and committed a homicide that was particularly heinous or otherwise offensive (e.g., if the victim was female), but this will not matter if the victim was in the same gang or neighborhood association as the offender. The second condition is whether the witness is in custody for a crime. One investigator suggested that about 80-85 percent of witnesses are criminals, and another noted that about 90 percent of witnesses lie. They have little motivation to cooperate, especially since someone could snitch on them and they could end up in jail. Yet, an investigator claimed that about 90 percent of witnesses would not help unless there is a “hammer” on them. Thus, witnesses generally want to help when they are in custody and are looking for a way to set themselves free.

Another impediment facing Oakland homicide investigators is the time it takes the crime lab to process requests. Investigators told us that the crime lab does not have enough resources and is overwhelmed with cases. Thus, it usually takes months to receive information from the crime lab and, when processed, the lab can only expend little effort. This is problematic. The longer the information remains unknown the more difficult it is to solve the case.

Lastly, graffiti is a useful investigative and violence predicting tool in the Latino neighborhoods, but not in the black neighborhoods.

### *Prosecution of Cases*

Investigators were generally pleased with the prosecution of their homicide cases. They know their cases must be solid with a high likelihood of a successful prosecution as opposed to being in the “gray area.” They characterize their relationship with the district attorney’s office as “great,” and they know the criteria the district attorney requires. One investigator noted that arresting people only when they are known to be chargeable is helpful because it sets the precedence that offenders will not simply be arrested and released. Concern was expressed, however, regarding the effort to construct solid cases and the limited time the district attorney’s office can devote to cases prior to trial. The caseload of the court and its impact on processing offenses was another issue raised. An investigator claimed that if a probationer or parolee committed a new offense, he or she would simply receive a probation or parole violation and not be prosecuted for the new offense.

### *Interventions*

During discussions with the homicide investigators we inquired about the types of violence reduction interventions they believe would be effective. Some maintained that only a multipronged approach that combined several interventions would be effective. The individual interventions are discussed below.

- *Directed Patrol and Pulling Levers.* Investigators believed that focused enforcement through directed patrol and a “pulling-levers” strategy,<sup>12</sup> with an emphasis on guns and anyone who has or uses them, would be effective in reducing violence, but only if resources accompany the intervention. As it stands they believe there are not enough resources to make these types of interventions, or any long-term solution, effective. The lack of personnel across agencies and differences in organizational policy were additional concerns expressed in regard to the implementation of a pulling-levers strategy.
- *General Enforcement.* Several investigators believed an overall greater level of enforcement, from public disorder offenses to narcotics, applied in a consistent manner would be effective in addressing violence. A primary advantage of such a strategy is leverage. Most people do not help the police unless they are in trouble themselves. Thus, arresting more people leads to greater assistance on other cases. The use of grand juries, undercover buys, and sweeps are also considered useful. It is thought that those who are not indicted but believe that they may be will reduce the amount of crime they commit.
- *Offender Lists.* Developing a list of the “nastiest” violent offenders and shot-callers for use in focusing resources to ensure the offenders go to prison was identified as a promising violence reduction strategy. While one investigator claimed everyone knows the identities of these offenders, another warned that the overall intervention must be wide-ranging or else the effect might not last.
- *Witness Incentives.* A meaningful relocation and reward program that could help people get a “new start” was suggested as a way to enhance witness cooperation, which would assist the investigative process.
- *Crime Lab.* According to investigators, enhancing the crime lab would reduce violence through a greater ability to tie criminals to their crimes.
- *Information Sharing and Collection.* Information was cited as important to the reduction of violence. One investigator suggested some sort of mechanism that serves as a nexus of information across units, current and past detectives, and old and current cases.
- *Prosecution.* Investigators agreed that more vigorous state and federal prosecution (e.g., accepting more cases and seeking longer sentences), especially in terms of offenders using guns and those who are “bad guys,” would help reduce violence. One investigator claimed that offenders could be prosecuted three to four times before receiving a prison sentence, while another advised that informants worry about receiving long sentences themselves.
- *Social Programs.* Investigators asserted that a number of social programs could be helpful in addressing violence. These included programs to create jobs with a living wage, to help saturate areas with “decent” people, to provide for education, and to enhance family values. Investigators also maintained the importance of de-romanticizing the “life” or criminal lifestyle.

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<sup>12</sup> Pulling levers is holding a group (e.g., a gang or neighborhood association) collectively responsible for the activities of its individual members.

## KEY FACTS AND POTENTIAL INTERVENTIONS

Several key findings emerge from the analysis as detailed above. Among these include the following:

- Guns, particularly handguns, are almost synonymous with homicide.
- A large proportion of those who commit and are the victims of homicide are unemployed and/or are under either probation or parole.
- Primary identifiable motives for homicide include escalation of violence (i.e., violence developing from arguments), robbery or property crime, neighborhood associations (described above), and domestic violence.
- Neighborhood associations provide an infrastructure for violence and drugs.
- Walk-bys are far more frequent than drive-bys, and most homicides occur on a street or street corner.

These are particular facts around which interventions could be applied. To help initiate discussions regarding strategies to reduce violence, Table 17 offers a matrix of the key facts and potential interventions suited to addressing them. To be sure, no intervention is guaranteed to work. However, the likelihood of their success is directly related to the specificity to which they are applied. Any number of these are worth considering.

**Table 17. Key Facts and Potential Intervention Matrix**

Interventions	Key Facts							
	Guns	Unemployment	Probation & Parole	Escalation of Violence	Robbery or Property Crime	Neighborhood Associations	Domestic Violence	Walk-bys on Street
Directed patrol	X		X		X	X		X
Notification	X		X		X	X		X
Lever pulling	X		X		X	X		X
Sweeps	X		X		X	X		X
Offender list	X		X		X	X		X
Witness incentives	X		X	X	X	X		X
Crime lab	X		X	X	X	X		X
Prosecution	X		X		X	X	X	
Jobs	X	X	X		X	X		X
Training/treatment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dispute resolution	X		X	X	X		X	X

### Directed Patrol

Directed patrol involves increasing police patrol to reduce gun violence in an area. There are two variations of this strategy: general deterrence and targeted deterrence. Directed patrol with a general deterrence strategy would saturate a high crime area with police presence, including stops of as many people as possible for all (primarily traffic) offenses. Directed patrol with a targeted deterrence strategy would focus police patrol on specific behavior, individuals, and places. Under both strategies, perceptions of the probability of punishment for crime generally, and, under targeted deterrence, of violent crime particularly, will presumably increase, thereby deterring more individuals from committing crime. In addition, the strategy focuses on locating and confiscating illegal firearms, thereby reducing the supply of firearms. Searching probationers and parolees as they are encountered and focusing the effort in areas known for high levels of drug trade and violence by the local neighborhood associations can enhance this strategy.

Directed patrol has been demonstrated to be effective in a variety of places. In Indianapolis, both general and targeted deterrence strategies were associated with a reduction in homicide, but the targeted approach also reduced overall gun violence and used fewer resources (McGarrell et al., 2001; McGarrell, Chermak, and Weiss, 2002). Directed patrol has also been shown to be effective in Kansas City (Sherman, Shaw, and Rogan, 1995). Similar efforts were also an effective portion of a recent antiviolence initiative in Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003). Directed patrol also has the advantage of requiring little coordination with agencies other than law enforcement and could be implemented swiftly, because there is little need to gather data prior to the intervention (with the exception of matching comparison areas for evaluation).

Given the poor relationship between citizens and police in these areas, there may be limits to the effectiveness of directed patrol, especially if the broader community perceives significant inconvenience resulting from increased police presence and stricter enforcement of traffic laws. Gaining the community acceptance to make directed patrol most effective in an area may take significant effort. Also, directed patrol, by itself, does not provide the services lacking in these communities that may help prevent individuals from engaging in violence in the long run. Finally, the costs of the intervention would be incurred primarily by OPD and therefore may be only as effective as OPD resources allow. The difficulty rests in garnering patrol resources to sustain a level able to elicit an impact. This must either come from realigning current patrol resources or providing patrol officers overtime for the extra effort in the target areas.

## **Notification**

Notification simply means that potential offenders are warned that criminal justice authorities (e.g., local police; state and federal prosecutors; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms; the Drug Enforcement Administration) know who they are and that the authorities will take full action when they engage in (mostly gun) crime. This can take several different forms. One possibility includes sending letters from local criminal justice authorities to those who purchase firearms. To deter potential straw purchasers, the letter simply advises the purchaser that he or she is responsible for the weapon and for ensuring that all transactions are handled appropriately. A second strategy, commonly known as retailing the message, is usually combined with another strategy, such as lever pulling or prosecution as described below. Here, potential offenders, for example soon-to-be released probationers and parolees about to reenter the community or neighborhood associations and gangs, are advised that gun crime and violence will no longer be tolerated and will elicit a swift law enforcement response. This strategy has been implemented with success in Boston (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga, 1996; Kennedy, 1997, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998; Braga et al., 2001; McDevitt et al., 2003), Indianapolis (McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson, 2004; Horty and Hutchens, 2004), Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003), and Minneapolis (Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998).

The first strategy is highly advantageous because it requires few resources to conduct and can be implemented unilaterally. Once the letter is drafted, it can simply be sent to all new gun owners in the area by a single agency, although it should carry the signatures of those representing several agencies. The second strategy is also relatively inexpensive but requires a little more coordination. Essentially, meetings are held to retail the message, and, to enhance effectiveness, representatives of several criminal justice agencies need to be present and participate.

## **Lever Pulling**

A pulling-levers strategy could also help reduce violent crime. This intervention targets particularly violent groups, for which a list of “vulnerabilities” of each member is collected. These vulnerabilities serve as levers that can be pulled for each individual when any member commits a violent act or a gun offense. Possible levers include the serving of outstanding warrants; seizure of assets; or stringent enforcement of regulations regarding parole and probation, public housing residency, vehicle licensure, child support, or truancy. In addition to these “sticks,” members can also be offered “carrots” or social service incentives for desisting from criminal behavior, including job referrals and education. This strategy can be combined with notification or retailing the message, in which offenders learn further violence will not be tolerated and that services are available to help them lead law-abiding lives. In addition to reducing homicides directly, this strategy could help curb robbery and property crime, thereby eliminating the possibility of the offenses leading to a homicide.

This strategy has been shown to be effective in other cities, particularly Boston (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga, 1996; Kennedy, 1997, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998; Braga et al., 2001; McDevitt et al., 2003), Indianapolis (McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson, 2004), Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003), and Minneapolis (Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998). The strategy offers the advantage of simultaneously encompassing both enforcement and prevention, and its costs would be shared among participating agencies. The multiagency working group needed for its implementation is already in place for Project Safe Neighborhoods, although additional agencies may need to be represented.

Nevertheless, it would likely be challenging to coordinate this intervention across different agencies. Indeed, the time needed for this coordination proved to be a particularly challenging problem in Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003). Time is also needed to gather the required information about offenders and their vulnerabilities. Given the apparent loose structure and small size of neighborhood associations in East and West Oakland, there is some doubt as to how well an intervention based on collective responsibility can work there. Finally, as with the other possible interventions, given the poor relationship between residents and police in this community, gaining community cooperation necessary to implement it could be a substantial challenge.

## **Sweeps**

“Sweeps” can be an important strategy for acquiring illegal weapons and ultimately stopping violence, and these tactics appear to be working in Indianapolis (Horty and Hutchens, 2004). These basically entail focusing probation, parole, and law enforcement on a select group of people in a rather short amount of time. For example, this could include conducting visits and searches of probationers, parolees, or those with outstanding warrants who are known to be part of violent neighborhood associations. The idea would be that seizing illegal weapons and pulling these individuals off the street would reduce violence in the area (at least in the short term) through incapacitating those perpetrating the violence and deterring those considering it.

The benefit is that the sweep itself can be carried out swiftly and the reduction in crime could be immediate. The challenge is the planning required by probation, parole, and law enforcement authorities regarding who will be targeted and when. The drawback is that, by itself, any resulting reduction of violence may be difficult to sustain over time.

## **Offender List**

The idea behind an offender list is to identify the most dangerous individuals in an area and focus law enforcement and prosecution efforts on removing them from the community. These could be individuals with a long, violent criminal history or those who are particularly troublesome but do not have an extensive, formal criminal background. Atlanta is experimenting with such a list (Meredith, 2004).

The benefit of this intervention is that it can help to incapacitate the “nastiest of the nasty” and immediately reduce community violence (at least temporarily). The difficulty is ensuring that the removal of these individuals does not lead to additional violence if others attempt to assert power and control over the area. Another difficulty can be determining and gaining multiple agency consensus on who should be on the list. This could be as informal as simply listing the people “everyone knows” to be truly bad, or as formal as developing explicit criteria for what constitutes the most violent offenders as a function of their past history and known current activities. It will also require inter-agency collaboration to implement this strategy.

## **Witness Incentives and Crime Lab**

Two investigative strategies that can work hand in hand to address violence are enhancing witness incentives and the crime lab. Witness incentives could include adequate rewards and relocation for people who provide critical information to the police about violence and those who commit it. Crime lab improvements could include additional staff, equipment, and resources to ensure thorough and swift testing and tracing of firearms. Through these investigative tools, it may be possible to increase the identification of those who use guns for street crime.

When it comes to solving crime, more information is better than less. These strategies give investigators a better ability to track down offenders before they commit additional crimes. The potential difficulty of these interventions is the cost, which would be primarily borne by OPD. These expenses can come in the form of reward dollars and out-of-town relocation expenses for witness incentives, and equipment and personnel for the crime lab. OPD would have to determine the level at which it feels the benefits of the information justify the investment.

## **Prosecution**

Vigorous prosecution of firearms offenses offers another means by which violent offenders may be effectively deterred from crime or incapacitated. Of particular importance would be federal prosecution of prohibited firearms possession and state prosecution of gun robberies and aggravated assaults (which often lead to homicides). Given that the majority of crime guns are not legally owned, another tactic might include seeking prosecution for those who do not properly complete firearms transactions and who provide false statements on firearm purchase applications. This strategy also entails prior and concurrent retailing the message, in which those engaging in violent activity and unlawful firearm possession are made aware that such activities will no longer be tolerated and will result in stiff penalties. Presumably, such prosecution will both deter individuals from committing violent acts and incapacitate those who do. Prosecution was a key component of the violence reduction strategies in Boston (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga, 1996; Kennedy, 1997, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998; Braga et al., 2001; McDevitt et al., 2003), Indianapolis (McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson, 2004), and Minneapolis (Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998).

This intervention would have the advantage of not unduly burdening any one agency, but instead spread the costs of implementation among multiple agencies, including the OPD and prosecutors' offices. This strategy also requires coordination among several agencies that may not always be timely. Furthermore, given the poor relationship between residents and law enforcement agencies in this community, this strategy, too, would require a significant effort to gain community cooperation and participation. Finally, alone it would not provide lacking social services that may help prevent individuals from engaging in violence over time.

## **Jobs**

The interventions described above are primarily law enforcement oriented. They may help to reduce violence, but they must be combined with long-term investment to sustain the lower crime level. One critical way to do this, exemplified in Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003) is through the creation of and referral to jobs providing a living wage. This is particularly important for probationers and parolees who are at a high risk for recidivism. Jobs could help reduce the need and desire for guns and street crime.

The primary advantage of providing an individual with a good job is that it gives him or her a viable alternative to the street. No doubt, this would make little difference to those hard-core criminals who are enamored by the "life," but it would provide an attractive option to someone who is seeking, or at least is willing to find, a better way of life. The difficulty, of course, is creating decent jobs where few exist. Given that the areas in which jobs are needed are not usually attractive to investors and businesses, one option may be to create incentives for them to invest in these areas.

## **Education, Skills Training, and Substance Abuse Treatment**

In addition to jobs, education, life skills training, and substance abuse treatment are critical components in a long-term strategy to reduce violence. Through such efforts, at-risk individuals (e.g., probationers, parolees, and the unemployed) can develop hope for the future, tactics for daily living, and the understanding of how to live a lawful, substance free way of life. Los Angeles has employed these sorts of programs in a violence prevention strategy (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003).

The benefits of education and skills training are very similar to jobs—they assist individuals with daily life and create potential for the future. Life skills training can also produce tangible results within a relatively short amount of time. The difficulty of this option is twofold. First, proper education and training can be very costly and beyond the means of local jurisdictions. Second, the reward from an investment in education can take several years, which makes it difficult to secure sponsors such as politicians who need quick results. Effective substance abuse treatment, however, can result in immediate social benefits.

## **Dispute Resolution**

Dispute resolution is a specific form of skills training that could be particularly useful in reducing violence. Many gun crimes such as aggravated assault, robbery, and domestic violence occur as an escalation process: An offender does X, the victim responds Y, and then the offender responds Z (which is especially problematic if it is something greater than X, such as the use of a weapon). The concept behind dispute resolution is to teach people how to break the pattern of specific situations

so that they do not escalate. This training could be offered to probationers and parolees as part of their reentry to the community, especially those convicted of domestic violence. In addition, this training could be offered to anyone else willing to receive it, such as those in fear of being victimized. Specific lessons could focus on general arguments, domestic violence, and street encounters.

If proper curricula are secured, dispute resolution training could be implemented rather inexpensively. It may be difficult, however, to train those who are unwilling to learn (yet it would still be helpful for others who interact with these individuals).

### **Intervention Caveats**

Several of these interventions are deterrence based. This means they are based on the assumption that violent offenders are rational decisionmakers and will choose not to commit crime once they determine that the certainty, celerity, and severity of punishment have increased so that they outweigh the potential benefit of their crime. There is no single intervention that is guaranteed to reduce gun violence, just as there is no way to determine with certainty beforehand the likely success of any one or more interventions. Interventions will likely need to be iterative, or revised after initial attempts. Above all, given the great distrust of the community toward law enforcement agencies, any current intervention, and iterations of it, will have to focus on gaining community acceptance, lest such interventions further strain relations between the police and the community.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

The purpose of this paper was to offer a picture of violence in East and West Oakland and to initiate a dialogue about potential interventions.<sup>13</sup> No intervention suggested should be considered a “silver bullet” for reducing violence, whether individually or in combination. Moreover, the list of potential interventions is only limited by the imagination of those tasked with developing a violence reduction strategy. Nonetheless, the strategies presented here provide an excellent platform on which further discussion can take place.

Upon reviewing this analysis and discussion, the next steps include the following:

1. Ascertain what, if any, additional information must be known prior to crafting a suitable intervention in these target areas.
2. If necessary, collect and analyze this information.
3. Reach a consensus on the form and substance of the intervention(s).
4. Implement the intervention.
5. Evaluate the intervention.

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<sup>13</sup> For additional information regarding these interventions, contact Jeremy Wilson at [jwilson@rand.org](mailto:jwilson@rand.org) or 310-393-0411, ext. 7382.

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