Homicide in the LASD Century Station Area

Developing Data-Driven Interventions

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Preface

This working paper is a descriptive analysis of homicides from January 2000 through December 2003 in the Century Station area of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. It complements an earlier analysis (Tita et al., 2004) on homicide in the adjacent 77th Street Area of the Los Angeles Police Department. Both analyses are part of a series RAND Corporation researchers have completed on behalf of Project Safe Neighborhoods, a national initiative funded by the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (grant # 2003-GP-CX-0001). Project Safe Neighborhoods, coordinated through U.S. Attorneys’ offices, is a strategic, coordinated approach to reducing gun violence in America. The role of RAND in the Century Station area is to provide research and support for the 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 purpose of this working paper is to describe homicide violence in the Century Station area of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. The analysis described here should be of use to Project Safe Neighborhoods task forces in the area and across the nation as well as to others interested in issues of crime and safety. Readers should understand that this document is a synopsis of analysis done to date and is not a final product prepared for either the funding source or the U.S. Attorney. All opinions expressed 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**

After decreasing through much of the 1990s, homicide rates across the nation have increased slightly since 2000 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, annual). Similar trends are evident in metropolitan areas, which have long had far higher homicide rates than other areas in the nation. Between 2000 and 2003, the most recent year for which complete nationwide data are available, the U.S. homicide rate increased from 5.5 to 5.7 per 100,000 persons, while that in the Los Angeles metropolitan area increased from 8.1 to 10.6. Within some portions of metropolitan areas, homicide rates are even higher, and have risen more sharply. In the Century Station area of the Los Angeles Sheriff Department, the homicide rate is about three times that for the Los Angeles area and about five times that for the nation. In 2003, homicides in the area increased by half the 2002 level.

One response to violence in urban areas such as the Century Station area has been Project Safe Neighborhoods. Project Safe Neighborhoods participants focus resources and efforts on areas with particularly high rates of gun crime and with endemic problems of gang violence. As part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, RAND Corporation researchers are charged with analyzing relevant crime data and suggesting possible policy directions for the Project Safe Neighborhoods task force.

**Methods**

To understand the nature of violence in the area and how it changed over time, we extracted data from Sheriff Department files for 193 homicides that occurred in the Century Station area from January 2000 through December 2003. The Century Station area covers about 13 square miles in southern Los Angeles County and comprises more than 180,000 persons in the city of Lynwood and unincorporated areas of Florence, Firestone, Walnut Park, Willowbrook, and Athens Park. The area is predominantly Hispanic and has a higher poverty level (28 percent) than Los Angeles County (18 percent) (United States Census Bureau, 2001, 2002).

The data we analyzed included information regarding time, place, motive, and method of homicide, as well as characteristics of victims and, where known, offenders. We present some Census 2000 data to compare the demographic characteristics of homicide victims and offenders with those of the total population in the Century Station area. Basic mapping of homicide incidents demonstrates that few patrol areas are untouched by lethal violence.

We chose to analyze homicide for several reasons. The detailed incident descriptions available in homicide reports help in understanding the broader nature of violence in a given area. The difference between homicide and an attempted homicide or an aggravated assault, for example, rarely depends on the intent of the offender but on the location of the wound and the speed of medical attention. Because homicide rates are often a good indicator of other types of violent crime, the detailed homicide data can yield insights that can also help in devising solutions to broader problems of violence. Practices in reporting homicide (as opposed to other types of crime) are also quite unlikely to vary between jurisdictions. Analyses of homicide in the Century Station area

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1 Detailed incident data were not available for two homicides in 2001 and another two homicides in 2002 that are excluded from this analysis.
Station area can therefore be used with those that RAND researchers have conducted in other California jurisdictions—including Oakland (Wilson and Riley, 2004), San Diego (Wilson et al. 2004a), Hayward (Wilson et al., 2004b), and the adjacent 77th Street Area of the Los Angeles Police Department (Tita et al., 2004)—to yield comparative insights on violence prevention.

Results
There were 45 homicides in the Century Station area in 2000, 24.6 for each 100,000 residents enumerated in Census 2000. There were 42 homicides in 2001, 44 in 2002, and 62 in 2003. The demographics of homicide victims and offenders in the area, like those in other jurisdictions, are distinct from the general population. Many homicides have some form of gang involvement. Homicides also have distinct patterns by time of occurrence and weapon used.

Spatial Distribution of Homicides
For a number of reasons, the mapping of types of crimes have proven valuable to police departments and policy makers alike. When meeting with community members, crime maps serve as simple visual aides that enable the police to convey complicated information quickly and effectively. Crime maps are also used in political forums to highlight the specific geographic areas where crime is over-abundant in attempts to marshal additional resources. Strategically, police use crime mapping to aid them in their effort to reduce crime. Such crime analysis helps them focus their resources on particular types of problems occurring in specific places, often at specific times.

Unfortunately, the spatial distribution of events across the study area fails to isolate a few areas that exhibit concentrated levels of homicide, i.e., homicide “hot spots.” Instead, and consistent with research conducted in nearby areas policed by the Los Angeles Police Department (see Tita et al., 2004), Figure #1 demonstrates that homicide is pervasive throughout the geographic region. Often, homicides with different motivations (gang, drugs, robbery, domestic, etc.) will exhibit distinct patterns from one another. Because such a large portion of the violence is gang-related, we explore whether the spatial distribution of gang versus non-gang homicide differs in Figure #2. Again, consistent with the findings in other parts of Los Angeles, there appears to be no difference in the distribution by event type. Areas that experience gang violence also experience other types of lethal violence as well. Thus, we are prevented from making suggestions regarding geo-graphically targeted policing interventions.
Figure 1.
Gang & Non-Gang Homicide
Figure 2.
Demographic Characteristics

Age
Homicide victims and offenders are concentrated among young adults (see Table 1). Most victims and offenders are 18 to 29 years of age. In 2003, the number of homicide victims at least 30 years of age increased from 13 to 25, while the number of younger homicide victims increased from 31 to 37.

Table 1--Victims, Offenders, and Population by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-17</th>
<th>18-21</th>
<th>22-29</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victims</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Century Station†</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation‡</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offenders</strong>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Century Station†</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation‡</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total population, 2000</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Century Station†</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation‡</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*excludes persons of unknown age
†figures for 2000-2003
‡figures for 2000-2002

National crime data from Federal Bureau of Investigation, annual.

Century Station area homicide victims and offenders are much more concentrated among the young adult population than is the area population as a whole. They are also more concentrated among young adults than victims and offenders are nationwide. The differences between the area and the nation in victims and offenders by age cannot be attributed to differences in the population by age in the area and the nation. Put another way, homicide is a crime that disproportionately involves young adults, and it involves young adults even more in the Century Station area than it does nationwide.

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2 The age for four victims and 49 primary offenders was given as an approximate range. The age for one victim and 61 offenders was unknown. For those for whom an approximate range of age was given, the median of this range was used for analysis. Those with unknown age are excluded from analysis by age.
Sex
Homicide is even more of a predominantly male crime in the Century Station area than it is elsewhere. Between 2000 and 2003, 90 percent of homicide victims in the area were male; across the nation, 77 percent of homicide victims between 2000 and 2002 were male. Between 2000 and 2003, 98 percent of all homicide offenders (primary and other) were male; across the nation between 2000 and 2002, 90 percent were.

Race and Hispanic Origin
Homicide victims by race and Hispanic origin roughly reflect the total population of the area. The area has a large Hispanic majority (79 percent) with a significant number of (non-Hispanic) African Americans (18 percent) as well. Between 2000 and 2003, 106 (of 192 whose race or Hispanic origin was determined, or 55 percent) homicide victims were Hispanic, and 79 (41 percent) were African American (see Table 2). The number of Hispanic homicide victims increased from 19 in 2002 to 40 in 2003.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
<td><strong>79</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>192</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Race and Hispanic origin was unknown in one of the 193 cases analyzed.

When the race/ethnicity of the victim and offender are known, nearly two in three (64 percent) homicides are intra-racial, i.e., “black-on-black” (57 of 192, 30 percent) or intra-ethnic, i.e., “Hispanic-on-Hispanic” (66 of 192, 34 percent). Ethnic and racial patterns of area homicides roughly reflect the pattern of homicide in the 77th Street Area of the Los Angeles Police Department, where more than three in four (78 percent) homicides are intra-ethnic or intra-racial (Tita et al., 2004).3

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3 One reason Tita et al. (2004) cite for the intra-racial and intra-ethnic nature of homicide may apply here as well. Hispanic gang members are reputed to control the state prison system, and African American gang members do not wish to have to fight Hispanic gang members in prison. Still, it is noteworthy that “Black-on-Hispanic” (8 percent) and “Hispanic-on-Black” (10 percent) homicides are twice as frequent here as in the adjacent 77th Street Area.
Incident Characteristics

District
Homicides were concentrated within districts of Century Station. By district, the highest number of homicides from 2000 to 2003 occurred in:

- District 2140, 15 homicides
- Districts 2112 and 2115, 12 homicides each
- Districts 2116, 2172, 2174, and 2175, 11 homicides each

At least one homicide occurred in 28 of the 32 different districts during the review period.

Scene
Nearly half (48 percent) of the Century Station homicides occurred on a street or street corner (see Table 3). Residences (20 percent), vehicles (19 percent), and businesses (10 percent) were also common scenes. The scene of four incidents was unknown. Most incidents in streets, residents, or vehicles were drive-by or walk-by shootings.

Table 3--Scene of Homicide Incident*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene of Incident</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Drive-by</th>
<th>Walk-by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street or street corner</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*whether incident was "drive-by" or "walk-by" is unknown for 15 cases

Month, Day, Time
Some rough seasonal peaks in homicide appear in the data (see Table 4). By month, homicides appear to peak in January, May, and June, and, especially, from August to October, and are least frequent in March, April, and November.
Table 4--Homicides by Month, 2000-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>193</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homicide patterns by day of week and time of day are clearer. One in four homicides occur on Sunday. Saturday and Monday are the second most frequent days for homicide. Most (56 percent) homicides occur on these three days. Within these three days, the peak periods for homicide is from 8 p.m. Saturday to 4 a.m. Sunday; 35 of the 192 homicides (18 percent) for which incident time is known occurred during these 8 hours of the week.

**Table 5--Homicides by Day of Week and Time of Day***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of week</th>
<th>0000-0359</th>
<th>0400-0759</th>
<th>0800-1159</th>
<th>1200-1559</th>
<th>1600-1959</th>
<th>2000-2359</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68</td>
<td><strong>192</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Time of incident was unknown for one homicide occurring on a Tuesday.

**Weapon**

Firearms of some type were used in nearly all (88 percent) homicides (see Table 6). Firearms are more common in Century Station homicides than they are in homicides throughout the U.S. (65 percent of which between 2000 and 2002 involved firearms, excluding homicides resulting from terrorist events of September 11, 2001).
Table 6--Weapon used in homicide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weapon Type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total firearm</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-automatic handgun</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other handgun</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle or shotgun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-automatic assault weapon</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun of unknown type</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Both semi-automatic handgun and semi-automatic assault weapon used in three homicides

Handguns, both semi-automatic and other (or unknown) types, were used in most (62 percent) homicides. Semi-automatic firearms of any type, whether handguns or assault weapons, were used in almost half the (47 percent) homicides.

Other Incident Characteristics

Most homicides (130 of 191, 68 percent, for which the total number of incident victims was known) involved a single victim, but several involved other victims; 35 involved no other dead but other wounded persons, and 26 involved other dead. By contrast, most (104 of 193, or 54 percent) homicides involved more than one perpetrator (the number of perpetrators was unknown for 23 homicides). Put another way, only 47 of the 152 (31 percent) homicides for which the number of perpetrators and the number of victims are both known involved only a single victim and a single perpetrator.

The distribution of motives follows patterns similar to other parts of Los Angeles. The over riding motivating factor continues to be gang disputes. While gang affiliation and information regarding the motive was not present in all cases, we were able to identify 106 incidents that were clearly motivated by disputes among rival gangs. (In another 12 cases, gang members were involved in the event, but the motivating factor was unrelated to their gang affiliation.) Fifteen incidents had some type of drug involvement (e.g., sale, theft, production of drugs). Seventeen involved robbery or a property crime, and eight involved domestic violence. Arguments unrelated to gangs, drugs and/or romantic relationships served as the precipitating factor in twenty-two additional homicides. Of the remaining thirty-one homicides, it was impossible to determine the motive in seventeen of those cases. The remaining events included the murder of several prostitutes, child abuse, road rage, and cases of mistaken identity.
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.
- Primary identifiable motives for homicide include gang disputes, escalation of violence (i.e., violence developing from arguments), robbery or property crime, and drugs.
- Homicides are concentrated among 7 of Century Station’s 32 districts, but there does not appear to be more specific geographic patterns to homicides generally or gang-motivated homicides in particular.
- Homicides most frequently occur on a street or street corner, but homicides also commonly occur in residences and vehicles.
- As a three month-period, homicides are concentrated from August through September.
- The majority of homicides occur from Saturday to Monday with the largest proportion occurring from 8pm Saturday to 4am Sunday.
- The vast majority of homicide victims and offenders are young adult males.
- For cases where race and ethnicity are known, two-thirds of homicides are intra-racial or intra-ethnic.
- Where known, less than one-third of homicides involved a single victim and offender—most homicides involved multiple offenders.

These are particular facts around which interventions could be applied. 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. Several types of interventions have been implemented in recent years in communities with problems (including those with gangs) similar to those that affect the Century Station area. We review some of these and discuss how they might be applied to the area.

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. General deterrence involves saturating a high crime area with police presence, including stops of as many persons as possible for all (primarily traffic) offenses. Targeted deterrence focuses police patrol on specific behavior, individuals, and places. Under both strategies, perceptions of the probability of punishment for crime will presumably increase, thereby deterring more individuals from committing crime.

Directed patrol has been demonstrated to be effective in many cities, including Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley and Greenwood, 2003; Tita et al., 2004), Indianapolis (McGarrell et al., 2001; McGarrell, Chermak, and Weiss, 2002), and Kansas City (Sherman, Shaw, and Rogan, 1995). In addition to reducing homicide like general deterrence, targeted deterrence reduced overall gun violence and used fewer resources in Indianapolis. Directed patrol also has the advantage of requiring little coordination with other agencies, and could be implemented swiftly.
Within the Century Station area, patterns of homicide suggest that directed patrol could focus on particular days, times and locations. In particular, the analysis suggests the application of directed patrol could be focused from 8pm on Saturdays to 4am on Sundays, in one or more of the districts where homicides most frequently occur, from August to September.

There may be limits to the effectiveness of directed patrol if the broader community perceives inconvenience resulting from increased police presence and stricter enforcement of traffic laws. Gaining community acceptance to make directed patrol most effective may take a significant effort, particularly if there is a poor relationship between citizens and police, as in the adjacent 77th Street Area of the Los Angeles Police Department. Directed patrol also does not provide the services that may be lacking in poorer communities that could help prevent individuals from engaging in violence. Finally, the costs of directed patrol would be incurred primarily by the Sheriff’s Department, and therefore may be only as effective as department resources allow.

**Offender List**

An offender list can help police and prosecutors focus resources even more directly on the most dangerous individuals in an area and 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 a long criminal history. Atlanta is experimenting with such a list (Meredith, 2004). Given the prevalence of gang-motivated homicides in the Century Station area, an offender list composed of active gang members may be useful.

Such intervention can help incapacitate the most troublesome offenders and thereby immediately (if only temporarily) reduce community violence. It might also, however, induce others to use violence in an attempt to assert power over an area. Such a list may be difficult to construct without consensus among different agencies regarding whom it should include.

**Witness Incentives and Crime Lab**

Some programs can be implemented to better identify perpetrators of homicides and other violent crimes. Witness incentives could include adequate rewards and relocation for persons who provide critical information to police about violence and those who commit it. Crime lab improvements such as additional staff, equipment, and resources to ensure swift and thorough testing of firearms may also help increase identifications of those using guns for street crime. The potential difficulty of such initiatives is their cost, which would be borne primarily by local police.

**Firearms Law Enforcement**

Given the high rate of homicide by firearms in this area, authorities may wish to consider greater enforcement of firearms laws. In the adjacent 77th Street Area of the Los Angeles Police Department, some officers explicitly noted the lack of a penalty for firearm possession as one of the biggest problems contributing to violence in the area (Tita et al., 2004). Vigorous federal prosecution of prohibited possessors of firearms is one means by which violent offenders may be more effectively deterred from crime. Such a 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, this will deter individuals from committing violent acts and incapacitate more that do. Prosecution of firearms cases was a key component of violence reduction strategies in Boston (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga, 1996; Kennedy, 1997, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998; Braga et al., 2001), Indianapolis (McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson, 2004), and Minneapolis (Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998).

“Sweeps” are a related means for seizing illegal weapons and stopping violence. Such a tactic appears to have helped reduce violence in Indianapolis (Horty and Hutchens, 2004). Sweeps entail focusing probation, parole, and law enforcement on a select group of persons in a short amount of time. This could include conducting visits and searches of probationers, parolees, and those with outstanding warrants known to have violent neighborhood associations. Presumably, seizing illegal weapons from such persons and removing them from the street would reduce violence in the area by incapacitating those perpetrating violence and deterring those considering it.

The benefit of such strategies is that, once planned, they can be carried out swiftly and yield immediate results. Effort can also be spread among several agencies, not unduly burdening any. The drawback is that involving more agencies—e.g., coordinating efforts with parole and probation officers and gun law prosecutors—requires time for planning and coordination. In areas with strained relationships between police and the community, gaining community acceptance of such a program may also prove difficult. Finally, this strategy does not provide social services that may help prevent individuals from engaging in violence.

**Holding Gangs Responsible for Their Behavior**

Holding a gang collectively responsible for the activities of its individual members could also help reduce crime. This intervention could target particularly violent gangs, for which a list of “vulnerabilities” of each member is collected. These vulnerabilities serve as “levers” that are “pulled” for each individual when any member commits a violent act. Possible levers could include 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,” gang members are also offered “carrots” or social service incentives for desisting from criminal behavior, including job referrals and education. This strategy, too, entails “retailing the message” in which violent offenders learn further violence will not be tolerated and that services are available to help offenders lead law-abiding lives. In addition to curbing homicides, this strategy could help curb robbery and property crime and other offenses that could lead to homicide.

Elements of this strategy have proven effective 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), Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003), and Minneapolis (Kennedy, 1998; Kennedy and Braga, 1998). The strategy offers the advantages of simultaneously encompassing both enforcement and prevention and of costs that could be shared among participating agencies. The multi-agency
group needed for its implementation is also already in place for Project Safe Neighborhoods, although additional agencies may need to be represented.

Possible drawbacks to this approach include the challenges in coordinating agencies participating in the intervention. The time needed for this coordination proved to be a particularly difficult problem in Los Angeles (Tita et al., 2003). Time is also needed to gather the required information about offenders and their vulnerabilities. While available information shows some level of gang involvement in Century Station area homicides, more complete information might show other approaches offering more promise for reducing crime.

**Jobs**

As recognized in the “pulling levers” model of “sticks” and “carrots,” long-term investments are needed to sustain crime reductions. One way to provide long-term investments is through jobs paying a living wage (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003). 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 is an alternative to street crime. The difficulties of such a program are the failure to address some individuals who may be enamored of street “life” and also the problem of 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 investing in such areas.

**Education and Treatment**

In addition to jobs programs, education, skills training, and substance abuse treatment are critical components in a long-term strategy to reduce violence. Through such efforts, individuals (e.g., probationers, parolees, and the unemployed) at risk for committing crimes can learn to lead lawful lives free of substance abuse. Los Angeles has employed these programs in violence prevention strategies (Tita et al., 2003; Tita, Riley, and Greenwood, 2003).

Such programs have the same benefit as more jobs: they assist individuals with daily life and help prepare them for the future. Skills training can also produce results in a short time. The difficulties of this option are twofold. First, such programs can be very costly and beyond the means of local jurisdictions. Second, the reward from such investments can take years to realize, though effective substance abuse treatment may yield immediate benefits.

**Dispute Resolution**

Dispute resolution includes specific training in skills that can help reduce violence. Many gun crimes occur as part of an escalating pattern of violence. Dispute resolution teaches participants how to prevent specific situations from escalating. This training could be offered to probationers and parolees, especially those convicted of domestic violence, as part of their reentry to the community. Proper curricula can be implemented with little expense, though it would remain difficult to train some persons unwilling to learn.
**Intervention Caveats**

Many of these interventions are deterrence-based. This means they are based on the assumption that violent offenders are rational decision makers and will choose not to commit crime once they determine that the certainty and severity of punishment have increased to a point that they outweigh the potential benefit of their crime. There is likely no single intervention guaranteed to reduce gun violence, just as there is not likely any way to determine with certainty beforehand the likely success of any one or more interventions. Interventions will likely need to be iterative, i.e., revised repeatedly after initial attempts. Should there be extensive levels of distrust between police and the community, interventions and their iterations will have to focus on gaining community acceptance, lest they further strain relations between police and the community.

**Further Research**

This analysis of homicide files is a first step in a data-driven intervention. Further insight could be gathered by additional research. Many of the homicide files lack information on motive, gang association, and drug involvement. More complete information on these variables would help in designing proper interventions.

Assuming gangs feature in many area homicides, analysis of the most violent gangs could also help in designing effective interventions. If a relatively small number of individuals are committing the majority of crimes and are instigating others to commit crimes as well, then identifying these individuals and launching a coordinated and concentrated effort against their criminal activities could yield substantial benefits. Conversely, if gangs are large and loosely organized with a large proportion of violent members, then deterring gangs from violence using a “pulling levers” or similar strategy would be more difficult or simply inappropriate.

Identifying and interviewing relevant community leaders would be an effective next step in this research. Perspectives from such leaders could help in implementing a violence-reduction strategy, particularly one that recognizes community sensitivities. Interviews with line officers and detectives would also be needed for a complete perspective.
References


