

Intelligence-Led Policing to Reduce Gang Corners and Crime in Camden

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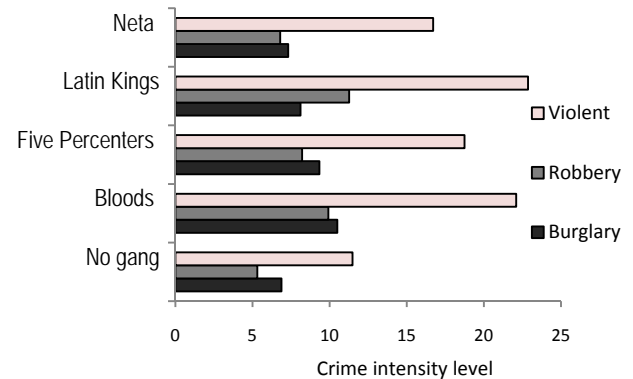
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Camden (NJ) is the second-most dangerous city in America, with some of the most established and violent drug corners in the country. By combining crime analysis and criminal intelligence sourced from confidential informants, covert surveillance, and interviews with arrestees, Professor Ratcliffe reveals recent insight gained into the impact of drug gangs on local crime patterns – and how this information can be used to create safer communities.

Gangs have been persistent social phenomena in the United States. While the nature and extent of gangs has been under study since the 1920s many questions still remain. One of the more recent and prevalent of these has been the relationship between street gangs and the distribution of illegal narcotics, with the often corollary of associated property and violent crime problems. Street gangs are now synonymous with the distribution of illicit drugs and gangs are now blamed for a portion of the street violence that affects inner cities, while the drugs they distribute are blamed for neighborhood property crime levels.

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This study combined identification of gang street corners and drug dealing locations with recorded crime. Drug gang corners were identified from intelligence records based on surveillance, interviews, observations of covert and patrol officers, and arrest information. This unique data set painted a picture of the dramatic extend of the drug operation in Camden, NJ, controlled as it is by often warring factions of drug gangs, including; Latin Kings, Neta, and the largest (and still growing) gang in New Jersey, the Bloods.



As the graph above shows, when compared to the level of crime around non-gang corners (the bottom group), drug gang controlled corners are significantly more violent and local residents have a much greater risk of being robbed or burgled.

The picture for disputed corners is worse. Disputed corners are street corners that were identified as changing gang ownership at some point in the two year study period. Disputed corners that changed gang control had double the intensity of violence in the immediate area.

With this study, we have been able to identify that local targeted operations to impact on a single gang may actually force a local power vacuum and unintentionally create disputed corners. In meetings with the Camden Police Department and the leadership of the Camden County Prosecutor’s Office, we were able to stress the importance of place-based crime prevention as a way to deny good drug-dealing locations to all gangs, and this is the current operational plan of the police department.

Further details from the author (details at top of this page) and from the original study available online through www.jratcliffe.net

Ratcliffe, J. H., & Taniguchi, T. A. (2008). “Is crime higher around drug-gang street corners? Two spatial approaches to the relationship between gang set spaces and local crime levels”. Crime Patterns and Analysis, 1(1), 23-46.