

# Police Officers on Drug Corners in Philadelphia, Drug Crime, and Violent Crime: Intended, Diffusion, and Displacement Impacts<sup>1</sup>

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## SUMMARY

In 2002 the Philadelphia Police Department launched Operation Safe Streets, a problem-oriented policing response to illegal drug activity. This geographically targeted crackdown stationed police officers at 214 of the highest drug-activity locations in the city. This paper examines 121 weeks of pre-treatment and 18 weeks of treatment data, in order to determine if immediate citywide crime reductions followed the program's implementation. Analyses were done to determine if the program was implemented after a crime peak, as well as to see if areas immediately surrounding the target locations became safer. Two questions resulted from examining the geographically localized program impacts: Did this increased safety link to spatial displacement, with the same crime type going up in nearby locations? Or did the increased safety link to a diffusion of benefits, with the same crimes also decreasing in locations somewhat farther away from the intervention sites?

## DATA AND METHODS

Data were provided by the Philadelphia Police Department to the *Philadelphia Daily News*<sup>2</sup>. Interrupted time-series analysis ARIMA was used to analyze weekly counts of homicides, violent crimes, and drug crimes. The dataset included all reported crimes in these categories from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 through August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2002. Operation Safe Streets began the week of April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and took place at 214 locations across the city. Initial ARIMA models examined program impacts across Philadelphia, while additional analyses searched for local impacts on target and adjoining locations. Spatial displacement/diffusion effects were tested for in the areas just beyond each intervention site. Tests for history or local history as threats to potential validity were conducted, with an emphasis on drug-crime activity in high-activity but not "treated" comparison sites (which were demographically similar).

## FINDINGS

Citywide, the intervention failed to have a significant impact on homicides, violent crime or drug crime. However, geographically localized analyses of Operation Safe Streets found that the intervention had a significant negative impact on violent crime within 0.1 mile of the intervention site<sup>3</sup>. A modest diffusion of benefits was also seen<sup>4</sup>. Probable significant spatial displacement for drug crime was also observed.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawton, B. A., Taylor, R. B., & Luongo, A. J. (2005). Police officers on drug corners in Philadelphia, drug crime, and violent crime: Intended, diffusion, and displacement impacts. *Justice Quarterly*, 22(4), 427-451.

<sup>2</sup> Individual data were aggregated to weekly counts of reported crime using Philadelphia's UCR codes. The crime categories include: homicides, violent crimes, and drug crimes.

<sup>3</sup> The intervention prevented, on average, one violent crime a week per km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> At 0.1 – 0.2 miles from the intervention site, the results reveal a significant reduction of approximately 0.3 violent crimes a week per km<sup>2</sup>.