

“The Impact of Project Safe Neighborhoods on Violent Crime”

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Summary: The U.S. continues to suffer from excessively high levels of firearms related violent crime. Homicide is the second leading cause for U.S. citizens ages 14-30 and the leading cause of death for African-American males ages 14-30 (Centers for Disease Control, 2008a). The costs incurred through firearms violence are staggering with estimates ranging from \$63 to \$158 billion per year (Miller and Cohen, 1995; Centers for Disease Control, 2008b) and \$1 million per gunshot injury (Cook and Ludwig, 2000). Launched in 2001 by the United States Department of Justice, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a comprehensive national program intended to reduce gun violence. PSN built on what were viewed as successful approaches utilized in the Boston Ceasefire project, replicated by Indianapolis in the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative (SACSI), and Richmond’s Project Exile. PSN was coordinated by task forces in every U.S. Attorney’s Office. PSN involved several key components including research based problem solving, multi-agency and community partnerships, focused deterrence, communication of the deterrence message, and attempts to link potential offenders to social support.

Data and Methods: A team of researchers from the School of Criminal Justice at MSU have been engaged in a long-term study of the impact of PSN on gun crime. The initial approach to the research involved case studies of PSN task forces in select cities. This was complemented by several case studies conducted by local PSN research partners working with PSN task forces. The research was then extended by examining trends in violent crime in all U.S. cities with a population of 100,000 or larger. The key comparisons involved PSN target cities with non-target cities and by the level of implementation or dosage measured at the PSN task force level.

Findings: The case studies provided seven tests of impact. In all seven cases gun-related crime declined, though in two of the seven cases the findings were ambiguous. Given these promising findings, an assessment of violent crime in all U.S. cities of 100,000 population or greater was conducted. The key test involved comparisons of PSN target cities with non-target cities and by low, medium, and high levels of PSN dosage. Violent crime trends were examined from the 2000-2006 period with 2002 representing the post-PSN implementation period. The findings suggested an impact of PSN. The findings revealed that PSN target cities in high dosage districts experienced a 13.1 percent decline in violent crime. In stark contrast, non-target cities in low dosage districts experienced an increase of 7.8 percent in violent crime. The results held utilizing several analytical approaches that controlled for factors known to influence violent crime.¹

Evidence-Based Policy: These results suggest that highly focused deterrence interventions, communicated to high-risk populations, and including offers of social support, hold significant promise for reducing levels of violent crime. Effective implementation of PSN appeared to be driven by the leadership and commitment of U.S. Attorneys and police chiefs, the integration of research to support problem solving, and partnerships involving local, state, and federal law enforcement, other criminal justice agencies and local government, and social services and community groups.

¹ McGarrell et al. (2008). *Project Safe Neighborhoods - A National Program to Reduce Gun Crime: Final Project Report*. Draft Report submitted to the National Institute of Justice.