

# Effective Responses to Juvenile Delinquency

Charlotte Gill  
George Mason University  
April 29, 2013



# Overview

- What do we know about juvenile offending?
- What are the effective intervention strategies?
- Why community policing at juvenile hot spots?

# What do we know about juvenile offending?

Part 1

Juvenile  
crime is  
highly  
concen-  
trated at  
small  
places

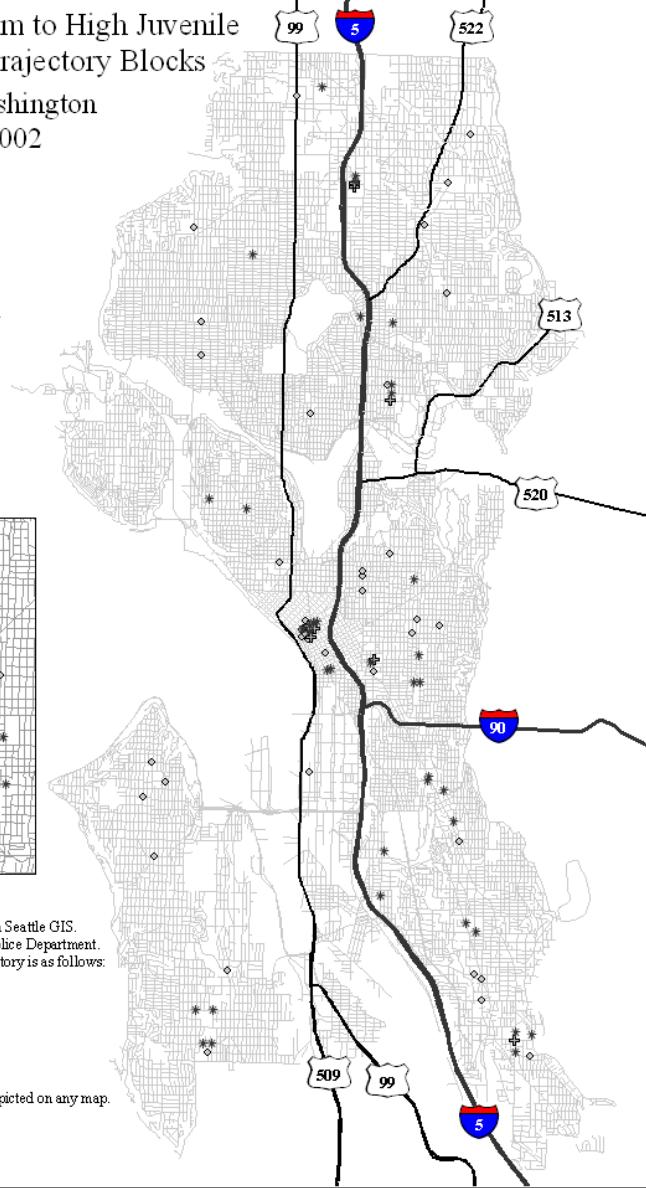
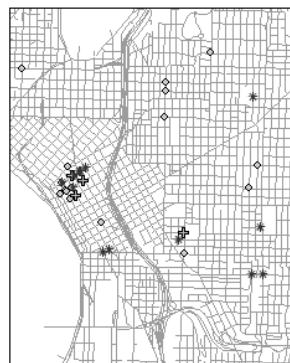
Point Map of Medium to High Juvenile  
Arrest Incident Trajectory Blocks

Seattle, Washington  
1989 - 2002

Trajectory Groups

- ◊ Group 6
- ◆ Group 7
- \* Group 8

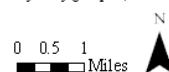
Downtown



Source: All base files were obtained from Seattle GIS.  
Crime data was supplied by the Seattle Police Department.

The number of street blocks in each trajectory is as follows:  
Group 1 N = 296  
Group 3 N = 2,553  
Group 4 N = 336  
Group 5 N = 67  
Group 6 N = 40  
Group 7 N = 8  
Group 8 N = 38

Trajectory group 2 (N = 26,067) is not depicted on any map.



$\frac{1}{3}$  of  
incidents  
at just 86  
Seattle  
blocks

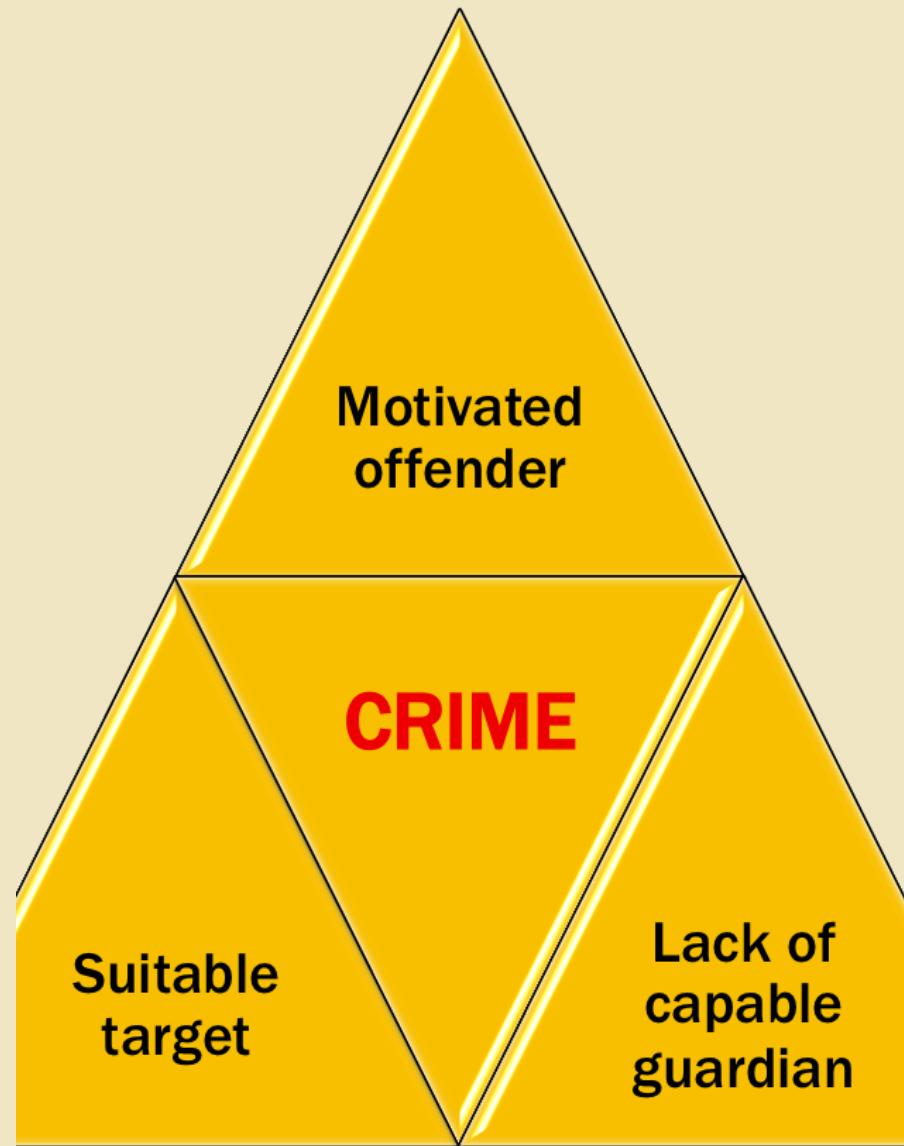
# Juvenile “activity spaces”

Group Location of incident

Group	School, youth center (%)	Shops, malls, restaurants (%)	Street, alley, public spaces (%)	Private dwelling (%)	Bars, clubs, taverns (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
1	1.9	10.2	32.1	47.3	.2	8.3	100.0
2	1.8	2.1	53.7	34.3	.1	8.0	100.0
3	2.9	4.8	43.3	40.1	.3	8.6	100.0
4	3.9	14.3	42.5	29.8	.2	9.3	100.0
5	6.5	26.0	40.7	14.3	.4	12.2	100.0
6	17.1	34.3	32.5	5.2	2.5	8.4	100.0
7	12.7	75.4	8.8	.2	.1	2.9	100.0
8	30.7	38.9	21.5	.7	.0	8.0	100.0

# Routine activities

- A specific crime incident requires 3 components
- What is the immediate context?
- “Operating space:” boundaries of our behavior and daily activities



# Juvenile activities are more predictable

- Juveniles are restricted in their activity spaces (the places they go for various activities they need to do)
  - Have to be in school at certain times
  - May be on public transit at specific times
  - No access to certain places (e.g. bars)
  - Parental supervision may limit times/places for socialization
  - Specific locations for unsupervised/unstructured socializing – mall, movies
- Juvenile crime clusters around these places/times

# Unstructured socializing and crime

- Most illegal acts are committed in company of peers (and with encouragement/reinforcement)
- Authority figures (“handlers”) protect against delinquency
- Organized, structured activities provide prosocial opportunities; more likely to have handlers present
- Unstructured socializing is a strong predictor of violence in communities

# Structured vs. unstructured activity

## Structured

- Going to movies
- Community/volunteer work
- Active/team sports
- Shopping

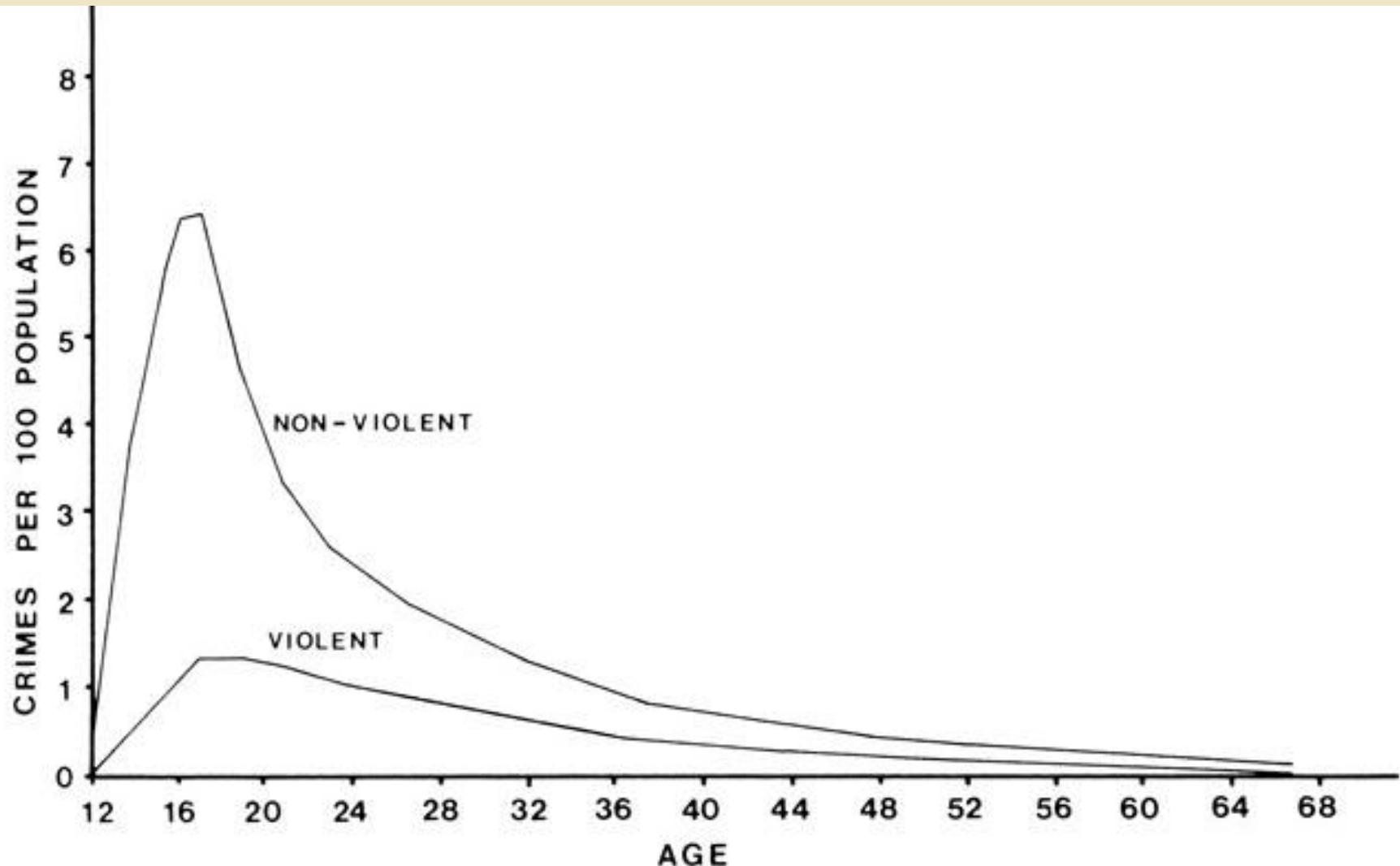
## Unstructured

- Riding in cars
- Spending informal time with friends
- Parties (unsupervised)
- ‘Hanging out’ on street/in public location

# The relationship between age and crime

- Age is the most consistent factor related to delinquent/criminal behavior
- Correlated with crime regardless of social class, race, even country/culture
- 15-18 year olds – 7% of population, 12% Part I violence, 18% property crime
- Peak age for crime: 18
- Risk declines with age

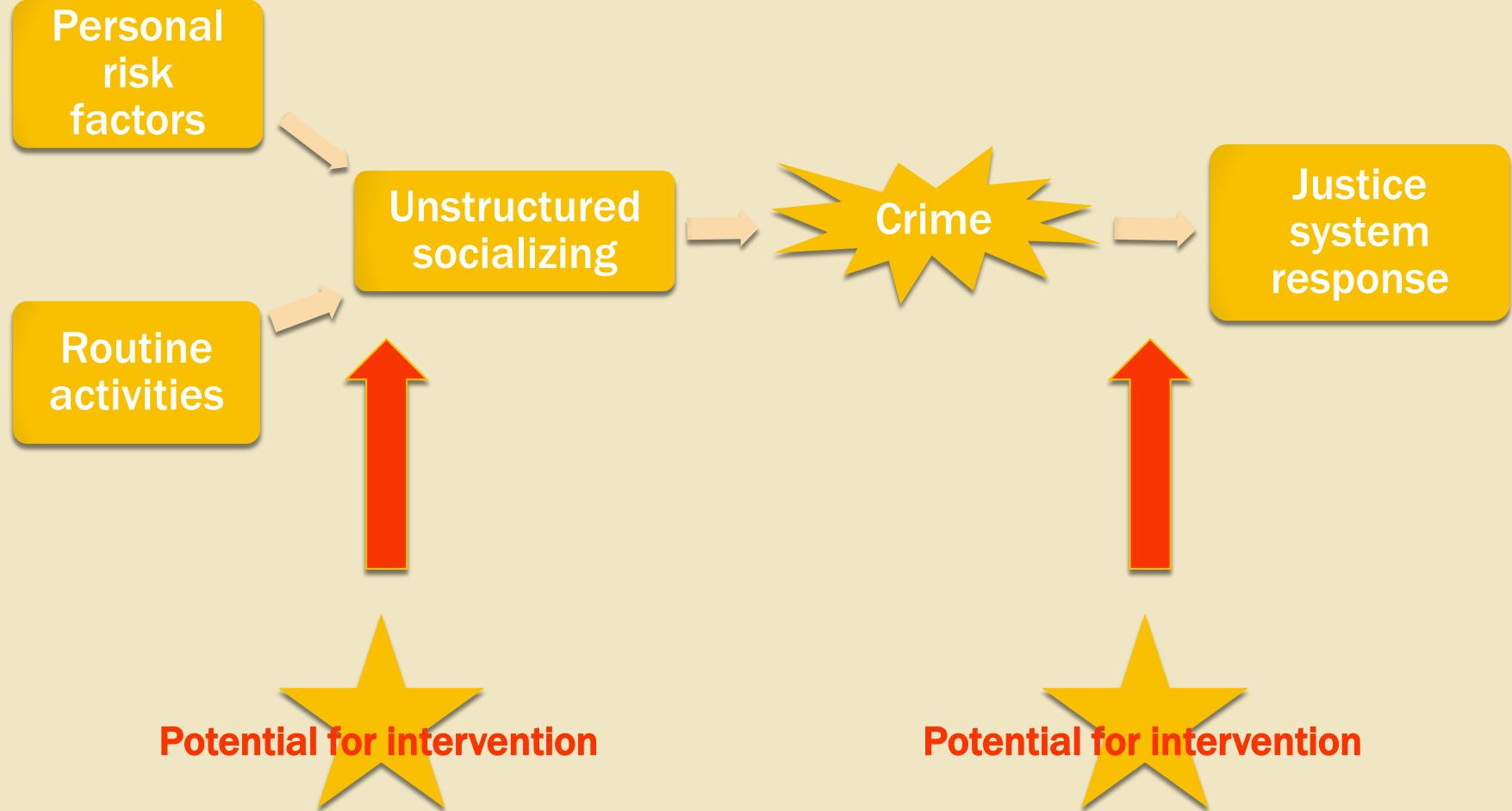
# The relationship between age and crime



# The “teen brain”

- The brain is not fully developed until around age 25
- Impulse control, self-regulation, understanding consequences are among the last characteristics to develop
- Juveniles are more susceptible to peer pressure, influence of others
- Adolescent behavior is characterized by risk taking, experimentation, little attention to consequences of actions

# Juvenile crime “logic model”



What are the effective  
intervention strategies?

Part 2

# Traditional approaches in hot spots

- Arrest, crackdowns
- Why might these be less effective for youth?
  - Different routine activities
  - Potentially harmful effects of arrest and processing through the juvenile justice system
  - Disproportionate response? Only a small proportion of young people continue involvement in crime

# Harmful effects of formal processing

- A review of 29 studies showed arrest and formal processing through the juvenile justice system has no effect on crime
  - No difference compared to doing nothing—may result in more crime overall
  - May increase delinquency compared to diversion with services

# Stigmatization of youth

- Formal processing “labels” youth as delinquent—may limit future opportunities
- Arrest, school suspension/expulsion, incarceration can disrupt prosocial community ties
- “Self-fulfilling prophecy”

# “Aging out” of crime

- Most youth “age out” of crime—only a small proportion continue to offend as adults
- Formal justice system response may be excessive for some
- Early intervention and prevention starts in the community with multiple stakeholders

# Youth respond better outside the formal system

- Family and community centered responses
- Early intervention/prevention
- Prosocial activities
- Mentoring
- Guardianship/place management

# Why community policing at juvenile hot spots?

Part 3

# Community-oriented policing

- Philosophy of law enforcement focused on community involvement
- Police are not limited to traditional law enforcement – should draw on community resources to define, control, and prevent crime
- Encompasses community policing, neighborhood policing, reassurance policing, problem solving
- “Co-production of public safety” to improve legitimacy, effectiveness

# Why community policing?

- Traditional policing strategies (arrest-focused) might lead to negative outcomes for youth
- Community policing emphasizes alternatives to arrest and may reduce these negative outcomes
- Community policing with juveniles at hot spots is a new approach

# Police as “gatekeepers”

- Police are often the first agency to interact with youth regardless of the situation
- Most arrests of juveniles are for low-level delinquent behavior
- Police determine first point of entry into the juvenile justice system
- Non-arrest focused strategies can also enhance police effectiveness and build legitimacy

# A new take on community policing

- Community partnerships, multi-agency working groups and civil remedies:
  - Community integration
  - Build “collective efficacy” among local residents—helps to control crime and suppress effects of unstructured socializing
  - Cross-sector partnerships in policing are evidence-based
- Hot spots focus: maximizing benefits at most problematic location

# Goals of the hot spots project

- Project goal: matching problems, people, and services
- By leveraging these community resources at targeted locations police could make a big (and long term) impact on juvenile crime reduction

# Contact information

Charlotte Gill

Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

Department of Criminology, Law & Society

George Mason University

Tel: (703) 993-6085

Email: [cgill9@gmu.edu](mailto:cgill9@gmu.edu)

Web: <http://cebcp.org>