Translational Criminology

SPRING 2024

Promoting knowledge exchange
to shape criminal justice research,
practice, and policy

CEBCP Faculty, Staff, and Students

Research Programs and Other Initiatives

Crime and Place

Evidence-Based Policing

Systematic Reviews

Criminal Justice Policy

W/B HIDTA

International Summer School for Policing Scholars

Advisory Board

Translational Criminology Creative Partner

Anne Schulte Design LLC

Translational Criminology

Promoting knowledge exchange to shape criminal justice research, practice, and policy

SPRING 2024

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

From the Editor in Chief

Let me briefly visit the past for those who might not know about the history of *Translational Criminology* magazine. The magazine had humble beginnings as the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy's (CEBCP) newsletter when we first organized in 2008. Once we started placing short features into the newsletter about examples of research translation and implementation of science into practice, we realized that a more formal outlet was needed; at the time, no such outlet existed.

Hence, *Translational Criminology* was born in 2011. Since its formal debut, the magazine has been a labor of love. Many of you might be surprised that a publishing house does not produce the magazine. Rather, it is published "in-house" in the CEBCP and, like all of our products, tools, translations, briefings, and symposia, is provided freely to the community. David Weisburd (CEBCP's Executive Director) and I have always had the same goal for the magazine as we do for the CEBCP—to provide examples of research being developed, translated, and implemented in the field. It is meant to give readers ideas and inspiration on how others implement evidence-based crime policies in their organizations. Although it is difficult to estimate, we believe at least 3,000 people read the magazine, which is also passed on to many not on our mailing list. The magazine is also indexed in EBSCO, and academics and policymakers often cite individual articles in their work. It is an excellent way for teams of researchers and practitioners to convey their findings and experiences to the field in much more digestible ways than academic journal articles.

Some of you may have noticed that we did not publish an issue of *Translational Criminology* in 2023. Last year, I decided that the magazine had grown so substantially since its debut that I needed help putting together the issues, which are published twice a year. If there is one thing that the CEBCP is never short of, it is talented individuals who are well-connected in their areas of expertise. On the following pages, you'll see the eight superstars—long connected to CEBCP—who now make up the editorial team. New senior editors include Henry Brownstein, Preeti Chauhan, Charlotte Gill, Christopher Koper, Anthony Petrosino, and David Wilson. Our senior research associate, Catherine Kimbrell, will be the managing editor of *Translational Criminology*, and Anne Schulte & Co. will lead design and layout services. With this powerhouse group, we hope to curate more exciting and informative features for the magazine and push it to its next level. If you would like to contribute to the magazine, please get in touch with one of the senior editors or myself with your ideas (see next page for instructions). We would love to hear from you and hope to expand our magazine's readership and contributors.

And now for some exciting CEBCP news: The next CEBCP Symposium will occur on June 20, 2024. The symposium's theme will focus on several "**Hard Questions for Evidence-Based Crime Policy**," which can be found on the symposium website (https://cebcp.org/cebcp-symposium-2024/). In addition to the provocative speakers and panels, we will be recognizing the 2024 inductees into the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame and the winners of the prestigious Distinguished Achievement Award in Evidence-Based Crime Policy. It will be a time for us to reconnect and reaffirm our commitment to doing rigorous science and ensuring that it is impactful and implemented in criminal justice policy and practice. You are all welcome to the symposium (registration is free and now open).

Thank you for your continued support of *Translational Criminology* and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University. As the Center celebrates its 16th birthday this year, we are proud to continue serving researchers, practitioners, and the community as we advocate for greater use of science in criminal justice policy.

Cynthia Lum
Editor-In-Chief, *Translational Criminology*
& Director, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

"*Translational Criminology* is the official publication of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBPC), published twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. The magazine seeks to advance the overall goal of the CEBCP by showcasing examples of how research is translated and institutionalized into criminal justice practice.

The magazine enjoys a wide readership of thousands and is freely available for download from the CEBCP website. It is also indexed in *Criminal Justice Abstracts (EBSCO)*. In 2023, *Translational Criminology* rebooted to include a full editorial team and more content."

Senior Editors

Henry H. Brownstein, PhD, Distinguished Research Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, West Virginia University

Drug use and misuse, drugs and crime, illicit drug markets, policing and drug trafficking interventions

Editor in Chief

Cynthia Lum, PhD, Distinguished University Professor, Department of Criminology, Law and Society; Director, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University

Evidence-based policing, police operations, technology, program evaluation, translational criminology

Preeti Chauhan, PhD, Professor, Department of Psychology, John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY

Policing, pretrial detention, bail reform, and case processing

Charlotte Gill, PhD, Associate Professor Department of Criminology, Law and Society; Deputy Director, George Mason University

Community-based crime prevention, crime and place, community policing, program evaluation, research synthesis

University Professor, Department of Criminology, Law and Society

Meta-analysis, systematic reviews, program evaluation methodology, juvenile justice policy, offender rehabilitation

Christopher S. Koper, PhD, Professor, Department of Criminology, Law, and Society; Principal Fellow, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

Policing, firearms policy, program evaluation, evidence-based crime policy

Managing Editor

Catherine S. Kimbrell, PhD, Senior Research Associate, Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason University

Adult and juvenile evidence-based programs and policies, research synthesis, restorative justice

Design and Layout Services

Anthony Petrosino, PhD, Director, WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center; Senior Fellow and Affiliated Faculty, George Mason University Center for Evidence-based Crime Policy

Evidence-based policy, school safety, program evaluation, systematic reviews

David B. Wilson, PhD, Distinguished

Anne Schulte and company provides the design and layout services for *Translational Criminology*. She has over 30 years of experience developing advertising and branded marketing solutions for clients. (www.aschulteco.com)

To Contribute

Translational Criminology is a curated magazine. Features are approximately 1800 words (2-3 magazine pages) and are carefully selected by the editorial team. If you have an idea or feature that might fit the magazine, please contact one of the editors above whose expertise is closest to your subject area. Ideal magazine articles and features are usually written collaboratively between researchers and practitioners, showcasing examples of translation, implementation, institutionalization, or building receptivity of scientific knowledge and evidence into practice. Features are written in a casual magazine style that discourages esoteric references, jargon, and overly technical, statistical, or methodological language.

Operational Guidance for Enhancing Hot Spot "Koper" Patrols

BY CYNTHIA LUM AND CHRISTOPHER KOPER

Cynthia Lum and *Christopher S. Koper* iare professors of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University and the authors of *Evidence-Based Policing: Translating Research into Practice (Oxford University Press, 2017).*

Cynthia Lum   Christopher S. Koper

Patrol commanders and supervisors often ask us, "Are we doing Koper hot spot patrols correctly?" For those unfamiliar, this type of hot spot patrol is based on the "Koper Curve" principle, discovered by the second author, which suggests that officers can optimize the deterrent effect of their visits to hot spots (including their effects while present and after) by lingering for about 10 to 15 minutes rather than by just driving through.[1] While not the only strategy that can effectively mitigate hot spots, many agencies use this evidence-based strategy to prompt patrol officers—at a minimum—to show visibility in hot spots of crime, disorder, or even traffic problems. However, when working with agencies on institutionalizing evidence-based practices in patrol, we often receive several questions from supervisors trying to implement Koper hot spot patrols: "How many times should we go to hot spots?" "What do we do when we get there?" "How do we get officers to stay for 10 to 15 minutes?" "How do we know if our efforts are working?" Here, we provide an operational guide for enhancing Koper hot spot patrols with some important caveats for agencies to consider.

How Many Times Should Officers Carry out Koper Patrols? More is Better Than Less.

Agencies may have multiple hot spots they ask patrol officers to visit once, twice, or even three times a shift, depending on the availability of officers. While we still lack evidence on the optimal number of times officers should visit a hot spot (which likely varies based on the type of locality and the severity of its crime problems), and while we recognize human resource constraints may drive some decisions, the general rule we suggest is that more is usually better than less. More frequent patrols should create a stronger perception among residents, workers, and others in a hot spot that police are paying close attention to the location and will be coming regularly. Getting officers to visit assigned hot spots at least twice during their eight, ten, or twelve-hour shift may be particularly important in high-crime environments. This may be challenging, but we argue it is reasonable for

---

1   Koper, C.S. (1995). Just enough police presence: Reducing crime and disorderly behavior by optimizing patrol time in crime hot spots. *Justice Quarterly, 12*(4), 649-672. For a summary of Koper's 1995 article, see https://cebcp.org/wp-content/onepagers/KoperHotSpots.pdf.

at least two reasons. First, despite officers' perception that they are going call-to-call with no time to do anything else, empirical studies of non-committed time, even in high-crime jurisdictions, indicate that it is very reasonable and possible that an officer can take 10 to 15 minutes to visit a crime hot spot when not answering a call for service. Second, the purpose of these visits is to reduce call volume in the first place. If an agency has excessively high call volume—emanating substantially from hot spots—then preventing and sustaining declines in those calls is a key reason for sustaining patrols (and other interventions) at those places.

When Should We Go to the Hot Spots? Timing and Uncertainty (or Surprise) Matter.

Crime concentrates in both time and space; sending officers to hot spots when no one will see them or when criminal activity or disorder is not occurring lessens the likelihood of creating a deterrent effect. Supervisors do not need to be overly specific here; they might tell officers to try to hit hot spots during the most active hours (e.g., "between 5 and 9pm" or "11pm and 1am"). Additionally, deterrence is also created through an element of surprise. Officers know very well that community members get used to their comings, goings, and patrol habits. Changing up the timing of visits and how officers enter a hot spot can enhance a deterrent effect. For example, if Patrol Officer Smith usually enters Hot Spot X by car northbound on Main Street, she might sometimes instead enter the location on foot through the alley off Broadway Avenue. Similarly, showing up at different times each day and varying the time between visits (making them more intermittent) should also create more uncertainty about patrol patterns, which may further boost deterrence. And while we recommend following the 10 to 15-minute guideline as a rule of thumb, it might help to sometimes stay longer in a hot spot to be less predictable and to foster more community engagement or problem solving (note that from a deterrence standpoint, Koper's study

suggested that visits shorter than 10 minutes were less effective and that visits longer than 15 minutes brought diminishing returns). Officers can perhaps hit the sweet spot of optimal deterrence if they can increase the community's certainty that they will be coming to the hot spot while also creating uncertainty about exactly when, how, and for how long.

What Should Officers Do When They Get to Hot Spots?
The Basics: The "4Gs" of Basic Hot Spots Patrol

There are many evidence-based approaches that police can take at hot spots, from simply showing visibility to carrying out more complex problem-solving or other collaborative initiatives. However, for Koper patrols, officers only have about 10 to 15 minutes to make an impact. One of the basic "plays" we suggest to patrol officers who may not be familiar with other evidence-based approaches is something we have been calling the "**4Gs**": **Go, Get out, Go up to, Go in.** "Go" establishes basic visibility in hot spots – officers must go to hot spots for hot spot policing to work. "Going" may sound simple, but pro-active directed patrol is not often a regular, expected deployment within uniformed patrol and must be prompted, supervised, tracked, rewarded, and monitored to happen. "Getting out" of the patrol vehicle is the next essential step for several reasons. First, it encourages officers to not just drive through hot spots but to stop and get out. Second, we believe when officers exit their vehicles, they increase their display of commitment (and authority) to the problem place, which in turn can enhance community members' cognition of their presence. Further, getting out of their vehicles can prompt them to engage in the third and fourth "Gs."

"Going up to" people is the next crucial element of the 4Gs, but one that comes with significant caveats. Whether approaching individuals for enforcement purposes or friendly exchanges, those interactions must be lawful, legitimate, procedurally and distributively just, purposeful, and respectful. Indeed, Weisburd and colleagues (2022) recently found that procedural justice training is important for officers to be

effective in hot spots.[2] These caveats also apply to the final "G": "Going into" places. Hot spots often have public places within them that generate large amounts of calls for service. For example, a pharmacy within a strip mall that suffers from high levels of shoplifting or smash and grabs; an abandoned house or a corner store that drug dealers duck into when they see the police coming; or even a portion of a park where juveniles tend to congregate and fight. Going into those locations, rather than patrolling around them, can enhance an officer's deterrent effect in hot spots.

Expanding Officer Toolkits.

The 4Gs is just one activity that officers can carry out while doing Koper hot spot patrols. We developed *The Evidence-Based Policing Playbook*[3] to provide officers with many other ideas ("Plays") that are grounded in good evidence and that can be applied to specific conditions. For example, officers might conduct simple follow-ups on previous complaints or reports of victimization (see *Follow-Up Play*). This might involve the officer checking in on the welfare of victims, asking if any additional evidence was found, or providing further assistance with a victimization or problem. Officers could conduct the *Burglary Prevention Play*, which involves contacting residents to let them know that a burglary (or even auto theft or theft from an auto) has occurred near their home and advising them about preventative measures to protect themselves and their property. Other plays might also be modified to fit into the 10 to 15 minute time period for a Koper patrol. For example, the *Focused Deterrence Play* may be too involved for a 10 to 15-minute patrol stop. However, "mini" or "custom" notifications (See Gramaglia and Phillips, this issue) may be feasible. Other plays can be used for hot spots of traffic accidents. The point is that there may be several plays that officers can do within 10 to 15 minutes to enhance their visibility, deterrence, and engagement with the community.

How Do We Know if Officers Are Carrying out Patrols, and How Do We Assess Effectiveness?

Lawrence Sherman emphasizes that "tracking" is one of the important "Triple T's" in implement-

---

The 4Gs of Basic Hot Spot Koper Patrols

Go. Hots spots patrols require that officers to go to the hot spots regularly. Going to hot spots also involves crime analysts accurately identifying hot spots, and doing so dynamically, as hot spots might change over time or during different times of the day.

Get out. When officers go to hot spots, getting out of their patrol cars can show commitment, authority, and visibility in crime hot spots, and also facilitate the third and fourth "G."

Go up to. Engaging with people is one of the most powerful tools in policing. Once officers go and get out of cars, when going up to or approaching individuals for enforcement purposes or for friendly exchanges, those interactions must be lawful, legitimate, procedurally and distributively just, purposeful, and respectful.

Go in. Hot spots often have public places within them that generate large amounts of calls for service. Going into those locations, rather than patrolling around them, can enhance an officer's deterrent effect.

---

2 Weisburd, D., Telep, C.W., Vovak, H., Zastrow, T., Braga, A.A., & Turchan, B. (2022). Reforming the police through procedural justice training: A multicity randomized trial at crime hot spots. *PNAS, 119* (14) e2118780119.

3 See https://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/the-matrix/matrix-demonstration-project/playbook/.

ing evidence-based policing, and rightly so.[4] Tracking allows supervisors and agencies to maintain command and control over deployment, adjust strategies when needed, and create positive effects in hot spots while managing and monitoring possible adverse consequences. Computer-aided dispatch systems (CAD) probably provide the easiest and best means of tracking hot spot patrols that use the Koper principle, because officers can record the time in and time out of hot spots (thus ensuring that officers stay long enough to create a residual deterrent effect). CAD can also help record what officers did at those locations; for example, officers might record that they did the "4Gs" or the burglary play in the narrative portion of the CAD. Some agencies have also developed unique codes for this type of hot spot patrol that officers can use when they are engaged in them.

What Role Do First-Line Supervisors Play in Koper Hot Spots Patrols?

Supervisors play essential roles in Koper hot spot patrols. At the most basic and traditional level, first-line supervisors charge their squads with doing proactivity and ensure that officers carry out their patrols daily. But officers may also need mentorship in mastering the 4Gs or other plays. For example, newer officers may struggle with the "Go up to" of the 4Gs. They might need guidance on how to do so—especially for non-enforcement reasons—in polite, respectful, and interactive ways. While formal training is always needed, supervisors can help show others what procedural justice looks like in an everyday exchange or how to carry out an investigative follow-up. Supervisors or field training officers can do various plays with newer officers and then provide constructive suggestions on how to improve.

Conclusion

Hot spot policing is a cornerstone of evidence-based policing and one of the most powerful approaches police can use to reduce crime. Various approaches in crime hot spots can be effective, and Koper hot spot patrols are only one of many strategies that can be used. However, the details matter; the quality and approach of preventative patrol can determine the magnitude of the crime prevention effect and the community's reactions.

---

4 Sherman, L.W. (2013). The rise of evidence-based policing: targeting, testing, and tracking. *Crime and Justice, 42*, 377-451.

What is the Regression Discontinuity Design and How Can it be Used to Evaluate Crime and Justice Interventions?

BY JONATHAN NAKAMOTO, ALEXIS GRANT, TRENT BASKERVILLE, AND ANTHONY PETROSINO

Jonathan Nakamoto (Senior Research Associate), Trent Baskerville (Research Associate), and Anthony Petrosino (Director), are from WestEd's Justice and Prevention Research Center. Alexis Grant (Research Associate) is from WestEd's Resilient and Healthy Schools and Communities Area.
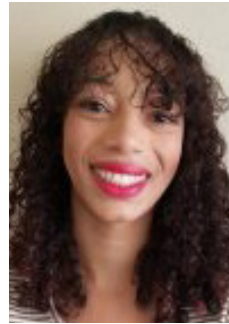
Jonathan Nakamoto   Alexis Grant   Trent Baskerville   Anthony Petrosino

There are many ways to evaluate an intervention, program, or policy to see if it works. It would be wonderful if all of these different approaches, or "research designs," came to the same conclusion. In an ideal world, our approach to evaluating a program would not matter. However, it turns out research is not so simple. The results we observe can often be confounded by, or due to, the evaluation design we use to determine whether something worked. A weak design could result in a false positive, in which an ineffective intervention is incorrectly credited with a good outcome. The converse is also true: a weak design could result in a false negative, in which the intervention is wrongly determined to have been unsuccessful.

Fortunately, researchers have been toiling for decades on developing and promoting more rigorous methods. The most commonly known approach to increase our confidence and reduce our skepticism is a randomized controlled trial (RCT), in which individuals or groups of individuals (e.g., prison units, neighborhoods) can be assigned using the play of chance (randomization) to either receive an intervention or to a control group that does not receive an intervention.

Another such approach, which is less well known, is the Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD). We reviewed the crime and justice literature to examine the prevalence of RDD studies and found that it has been used less often than other methods, such as the RCT. In this brief, we provide an overview of RDD, including what it is and why it is a powerful approach to evaluation. We highlight one example and conclude with a call to action to promote its greater use.

What is Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD)?

RDD allows us to examine the impact of an intervention when individuals or groups are assigned to the treatment and control conditions solely based on a cutoff threshold on a numeric score. In such situations, entities scoring above the cutoff receive treatment and those who score below it do not.[1] These numeric scores can come from any type of data. For example, towns that are assigned to implement a new violence prevention initiative based on exceeding a certain violent crime rate would be one example. Every town above the rate would get the program; every town below the rate would not get it. Another example is assigning incarcerated persons to specific treatment based on a classification score upon intake.

You might ask why is using this numeric score so important to the strength of the RDD? It has to do with how it creates a comparison group. And it has to do with the entities that score just above or below the cutoff. Let's see if we can better illustrate the strength of RDD using a hypothetical example. Let's use a risk assessment score for assigning youth at high risk for violence treatment services; persons scoring 75 or higher are deemed high risk and will receive treatment. We can assume that someone who scores a 99 and someone who scores a 43 are vastly different in their risk levels. But what about the people who score 74 and those who score 75? We would assume that the level of their risks and needs are very closely matched. Although they are assumed to be similar, one will receive

---

1 In other situations, entities scoring below the cutoff may be assigned the treatment while the control group comprises those who score above the cutoff.

treatment, and the other will not.

RDD exploits this cutoff rule. Since we can assume the individuals are quite similar just above and below the cutoff, we can also confidently assume that the difference between the outcomes for entities just above the cutoff compared to those just below the cutoff provides a valid estimate of the impact of the intervention. Researchers would argue that these estimates from RDD are at the high end of causal inference, and we can be more confident about the observed results.

Another benefit to the RDD is that it can be visually compelling. In our example, if there is a positive treatment impact, youth just above the cutoff should do better on criminal offending outcomes than youth just below the cutoff. We should see a "discontinuity" or "break" in the expected outcomes. If there is no program impact, there likely would be no "discontinuity" or "break."

analysis will require a methodologist with experience with the design. There are many excellent resources to guide its use.[2]

What About an Actual Example of How RDD Was Used to Study a Justice Policy?

It is challenging to construct a study to better understand the impact of prison. Most persons sentenced to prison commit offenses that are more serious than those who receive alternative sanctions such as probation. However, Mitchell and his colleagues found an innovative way to do so using RDD.[3] They took advantage of a large historical database in Florida that had over 262,000 individuals convicted of felonies and their sentences. It turns out that Florida assigns points at sentencing, known as "total sentence points." How these points are assigned in Florida is based on several factors including the seriousness of the offense and the defendant's prior criminal record. Cases with

Figure 1. Results from a Hypothetical RDD Study Examining a Youth Violence Prevention Initiative
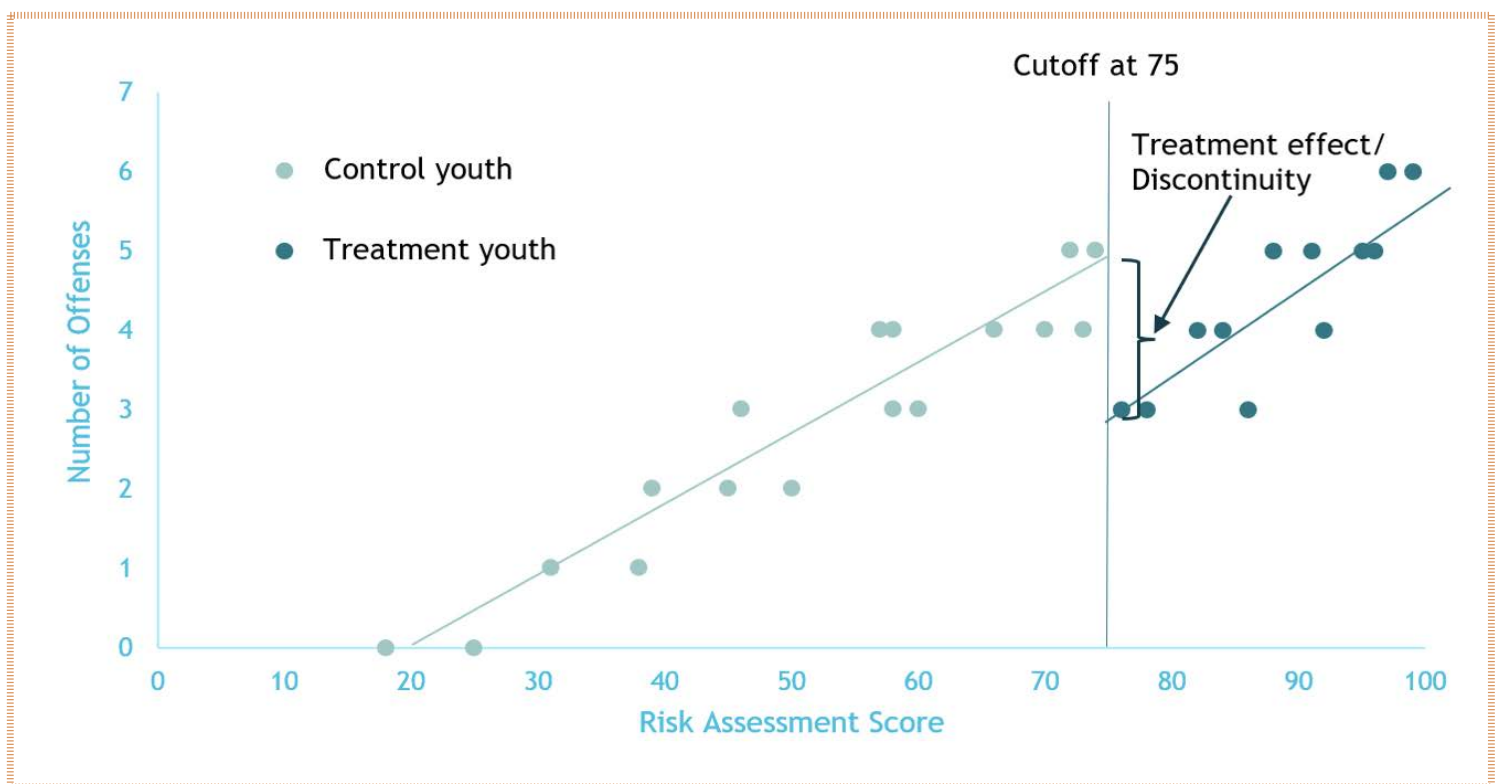
The figure above indicates that the program was successful. There is a discontinuity or break, with the youth just above the cutoff (who received the program) committing fewer new offenses at the end of one year than youth just below the cutoff (who did not receive the program).

Our goal in this article is not to go in-depth into the technical details of RDD. We also do not want to make RDD seem so easy that there are no challenges to implementing it. RDD is fairly straightforward but technical details related to RDD planning and

more than 44 total sentence points are "scored to prison" and cases with 44 or fewer points receive probation, jail, and/or house arrest.

Like every design, RDD can face some challenges in the field. One

2 See appendices in Nakamoto, J., Grant, A., Baskerville, T., & Petrosino, A. (2024). Regression discontinuity design: A method to rigorously evaluate interventions to reduce crime and improve the justice system. WestEd.org.

3 See Mitchell, O., Cochran, J. C., Mears, D. P., & Bales, W. D. (2017). The effectiveness of prison for reducing drug offender recidivism: A regression discontinuity analysis. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 13, 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9282-6

of those challenges is that even if a score like total sentencing points is solely used to determine whether a person gets prison or not, there can be slippage. In Florida, judges are given considerable leeway to override this assignment. And, further complicating matters, it turns out that these overrides happen quite often: 13% of cases just below the cutoff still received prison sentences (when they should have gotten alternative sanctions), and only 39% of cases just above the cutoff actually received prison sentences (meaning 61% who should have gotten prison just above the cutoff did not). Technically speaking, when there is slippage like this, researchers refer to the RDD as being "fuzzy." However, even with this fuzziness, the researchers argued that there is a sufficient sample at the cutoff to allow for valid conclusions to be drawn. Mitchell and his colleagues did a lot of complex analyses, but the overall message was this: For cases near the cutoff, there is no evidence that prison sentences led to reductions in subsequent recidivism over a three-year period.

How Can Policymakers, Justice Leaders, and Researchers Use RDD?

We believe that policymakers (e.g., agency leaders), practitioners, and researchers should consider the use of RDD because it allows for stronger conclusions to be drawn about the impact of an intervention than several commonly used research designs in the field (e.g., the pre-post or before and after design, the non-equivalent comparison group design). RDD is very well suited for many situations in the crime and justice area because the highest need persons, areas, or entities often deliberately receive treatment. In most instances, we would be concerned about the bias of that approach, that persons are being deliberately selected and assigned to treatment. But in this instance, if a numeric score and threshold (i.e., the cutoff) are used to assign the intervention, we can turn that bias around and use it in a powerful way in RDD to increase causal inference and our confidence in the findings.

We urge agency leaders to prospectively plan RDD studies with researchers. An example would be when an evaluation is needed for a particular program. Let's say it is for a treatment program for high-risk people. The agency leaders and practitioners could collaborate with researchers to identify an existing instrument for classifying risk or develop a new one. In some cases, minor changes to existing practices (e.g., developing a more formalized risk assessment system) would allow for the use of RDD. Policymakers and practitioners could also collaborate with researchers to identify the cutoff score they would be comfortable with, that those above would receive treatment and those below would not. Planning an RDD prospectively in this way can have several benefits, such as selecting the right factor to assign entities (the assignment variable) with enough variation in scores (e.g., we would not use a 1-2-3 scale), selecting the best cutoff threshold that is not too high or low (e.g., a scale of 1-100 that assigns only those scoring over 95 to treatment), stressing the

importance of limiting fuzziness (e.g., overrides to the cutoff threshold), and paying attention to sample size (RDD can require a much larger sample size than other designs including the RCT).

But, when prospective studies cannot be done, let's not forget that most RDD studies have been done retrospectively. In our review of RDD studies in crime and justice, we have found that nearly all of them are retrospective. In the Florida study described above, researchers used existing data and were able to distinguish between entities receiving the intervention or not (i.e., the cutoff threshold), and analyze the impact for these groups on selected outcomes (crime or recidivism).

Retrospective studies are also advantageous as they can be cheaper than prospective studies in the field (as the data have already been collected). They are also less obtrusive—the researchers can do the analyses without bothering anyone outside the research team! However, it is critical that researchers be granted access to these data, and that they include, at minimum, the assignment variable (e.g., if age is the assignment variable, the age of each person is available in the data set) and the outcomes of interest (e.g., recidivism). But retrospective analyses such as the Florida example can yield important insights to guide crime and justice policy.

Conclusion

Although the number of published studies that use RDD in the crime and justice field has been growing in recent years, it is still quite low relative to how many evaluations have been published since RDD was first popularized in the 1960s. Our preliminary review of the literature identified less than 70 available RDD studies.[4] We call more attention to the design and encourage its wider adoption whenever possible to improve our claims about the effectiveness of programs and policies to reduce crime and improve the justice system.

Authors' Note

Portions of this article are also published as a research brief posted at https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/JPRC_RegressionDiscountinuity_FINAL-ADA.pdf

---

4 Grant, A., Baskerville, T., Nakamoto, J., & Petrosino, A. (2023, November). Improving evidence on what works: The regression discontinuity design. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Philadelphia, PA.

A Different $230 Billion Question: Bringing Evidence to International Law Enforcement Assistance

BY KEIRA GIPSON

Keira Gipson is Division Chief in the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affair's (INL) Office of Knowledge Management (INL/KM), Division of Design and Learning, focusing on informing foreign assistance with evidence and understanding the results of that assistance.

Each year, the U.S. and other governments spend billions of dollars supporting criminal justice capacity building worldwide. One reason we do this is that crime is transnational, be it the international manufacture and trafficking of the synthetic drugs that killed over 100,000 Americans in 2023 or the $10 billion U.S. citizens lost last year due to cybercrime, much of which originates overseas. In the Fall 2022 issue of *Translational Criminology*, Dr. Liam O'Shea asked why the international community spends so much on police assistance with so little evidence. It is a good question, answered in part by the limited amount of relevant research and reliable data, the challenging operating environments, and the constraints and disinclination of those who manage foreign assistance projects to use research. Happily, research availability and use are both changing. We are ready to ask the next question: what does it look like to integrate evidence into international law enforcement assistance? The State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) is working to do just that.

INL's Role in International Police Assistance

INL works with over 90 countries to advance our mission of keeping Americans safe by countering crime, illegal drugs, and instability abroad. Our top priority is synthetic drugs. In July 2023, Secretary Blinken launched the Global Coalition to Address Synthetic Drug Threats. The Coalition is focused on preventing the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs, detecting emerging drug threats and use patterns, and promoting public health interventions and services to prevent and reduce drug use, overdose, and other related problems. Another priority area for INL, and the U.S. government broadly, is anti-corruption. Building on longstanding bipartisan interest and past efforts, President Biden established the fight against corruption as a core national security interest and released the first-ever U.S. Strategy on Countering Corruption. Corruption is detrimental to the international community and harms individuals in many ways. INL is particularly concerned with its corrosive effects on the rule of law and democratic institutions and recognizes the

Keira Gipson

outsized role corrupt state officials play in transnational organized crime and money laundering. With our annual budget of approximately $1.5 billion, INL works on these and many other issues, ranging from broad engagement to build resilient criminal justice institutions in countries like Colombia or Ukraine, to targeted interventions to build specific skills, like how to interview victims without retraumatizing them.

INL pursues these rule of law objectives through policy and programmatic channels. For example, INL coordinates U.S. engagement in the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which drives international drug policymaking, places drugs and precursor chemicals under international control, and facilitates expert exchanges on counternarcotics. In many countries, INL supports law enforcement advisors who work with counterparts on issues ranging from investigating complex crimes to building diverse, inclusive, equitable, and accessible law enforcement institutions. INL runs six International Law Enforcement Academies that have trained over 70,000 officers to date. In addition to engaging international organizations and criminal justice sector actors, INL works with, for example, private sector industry leaders to counter bribery and corruption, and civil society to promote oversight and accountability.

Seeking Evidence – Educating Ourselves on What Is Known to Work (and What Does Not)

In 2019, INL established an Office of Knowledge Management (INL/KM) to maximize the effectiveness of INL programs and policies. INL/KM houses criminal justice sector professionals, enterprise-wide training platforms, and social scientists focused on understanding the effects of the Bureau's efforts and continually improving them. Using existing evidence to inform INL's strategy and individual project design is one of INL/KM's mandates.

In 2018, Congress passed the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act,[1] which required federal agencies to develop evidence to support policymaking. In 2021, the White House reiterated this commitment to applying evidence across government with its *Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Government Trust through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-based Policymaking*.[2] Secretary Blinken's *Modernization Agenda for the Department of State* also

---

1 See https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4174
2 See https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/

called for data to inform policy.[3]

These efforts set the stage for INL/KM to commission consensus reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) in 2020 to review the existing evidence on promoting the rule of law through evidence-based policing. There is a growing recognition in the U.S. government that evidence is not a luxury available only to certain amenable fields but a requirement of responsible public policy across all sectors. INL/KM is committed to determining the evidence-base for criminal justice sector reform and how that evidence can inform INL's foreign assistance.

The Committee on Law and Justice of the NASEM convened an ad hoc consensus committee led by Professor Lawrence Sherman of Cambridge University to review and assess existing evidence on policing institutions, police practices and capacities, and police legitimacy in the international context. The committee produced five reports, consolidated into a single compilation, *Evidence to Advance Reform in the Global Security and Justice Sectors: Compilation of Reports*.[4] These reports focused on evidence-based approaches to promoting the rule of law and protecting populations; police training; practices and policies to minimize police use of force internationally; practices that build legitimacy; and practices to control high-level corruption. While existing evidence is limited, the committee was able to develop guidance from existing research and identify gaps for more knowledge-building. INL turned next to sharing this guidance internally.

Disseminating Evidence
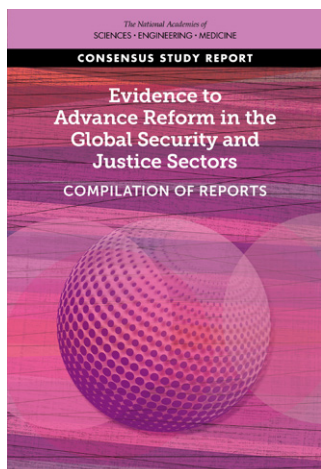
With the 2022 publication of the final INL-commissioned consensus report, INL began translating NASEM's findings for a State Department audience. The National Academies expertly distilled extensive research into relatively short answers to five questions INL posed about police reform. Because few INL staff have the bandwidth to read the full reports, INL/KM identified the most actionable findings, explained them in a style familiar to a State Department audience, and disseminated them through established Department channels. Even as a bureau interested in evidence, working with renowned academics interested in influencing policy, the gap between what evidence producers emphasize and what would-be evidence consumers want to know is substantial. When translating for the internal audience, INL/KM focused not only on the finding, e.g., that proactive, not reactive, policing approaches are more effective at reducing crime, but also on what made the effective programs effective. For example, done right, hotspots policing usually involves identifying locations based on crime analysis, proactively but unpredictably patrolling those areas, developing long-term prevention strategies tailored to the specific problems manifesting in specific hotspots, and community engagement to inform prevention strategies and understand community reaction to police activity in hotspots.[5] It also was important to explain to readers why findings about crime prevention from research conducted mostly in the Global North are relevant to the Global South: crime concentrations are universal, so it is reasonable to hypothesize that interventions responding to that concentration would have positive effects beyond the Global North.

Acting on Evidence

INL is early in the process of becoming an organization that informs decision-making with robust evidence. As we make this shift, we are focusing on two areas of improvement:

- **Prioritize a Few Changes:** As implementation science has taught us, evidence-based policies do not automatically flow from knowing the evidence. INL will be selecting not more than three findings from the National Academies' reports to prioritize for action. Each will require its own plan for institutionalizing. In some cases, substantial adoption could likely be achieved by establishing an implementation mechanism that allows INL staff to offer evidence-based training or guidance to our foreign partners without requiring each INL officer to procure such services independently. In other cases, adoption will require re-examining our implicit theories of change in light of the evidence, which will require a multi-pronged effort.

- **Recruit Advisors Familiar with the Evidence:** INL hires many law enforcement advisors – some work in Washington, DC, but most are based in an INL partner country. Some are full-time positions, and many serve shorter stints helping plan for a new project or providing training. INL has long sought to hire people with relevant operational experience who will thrive in an advising/mentoring role in an international context. We are expanding the qualities we seek to include: knowledge of evidence-based policing.

Final Thoughts

INL understands we maximize our impact when we use evidence to inform our approaches to countering crime, illegal drugs, and instability. We are excited to be part of a growing community of academics and practitioners dedicated to the use of evidence.

---

3   See https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-on-the-modernization-of-american-diplomacy/

4   See https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/evidence-to-advance-reform-in-the-global-security-and-justice-sectors

5   See Lum, C., & Koper, C.S. (2017). *Evidence-Based Policing: Translating Research Into Practice.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice

BY BRUCE WESTERN AND EMILY BACKES

Bruce Western is Bryce Professor of Sociology and Social Justice and Director of the Justice Lab at Columbia University. *Emily Backes* is Deputy Director of the Committee on Law and Justice at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

In 2021, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) convened an expert committee to review and assess existing evidence on racial differences in crime and criminal justice involvement and make evidence-driven policy and research recommendations to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. The expert committee that authored the report, *Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy* (2023), produced the most comprehensive study the National Academies has ever undertaken to understand how racial inequality is perpetuated by the criminal justice system interacting with broader societal forces, and what government should do about it.

The report concluded that policymakers do not have to choose between public safety and racial equity because many policies designed to address racial inequalities also make communities safer. It highlighted two evidence-informed approaches that are needed to reduce racial inequities in crime and justice: (1) implementing comprehensive reform that encompassed each stage of the criminal justice system (e.g., reforms to law enforcement, courts, corrections, and community supervision); and (2) supporting community-led safety efforts and reforms to address racial inequality at the neighborhood level and within adjacent social policy institutions.

Previous National Academies reports have examined research on racial inequality in the criminal justice system, but they have concentrated on specific stages of criminal processing, and racial inequality was never the primary focus. In this committee, racial inequality was the central focus, examining the justice system as a whole and in relation to other social institutions.

Racial Inequalities in Crime and Victimization

As part of its charge, the committee was asked to review the research on racial inequalities in crime, victimization, and criminal justice involvement. It found that significant racial and ethnic disparities exist across the several stages of criminal legal processing, including in police stops, arrests, pretrial detention, and sentencing and incarceration, among others, with Black and Native Americans experiencing the worst outcomes. Notably, recent trends show a decline in the racial disparity in incarceration, and the absolute size of the total correctional population (including prison, jail, probation, and parole)

Bruce Western   Emily Backes

has shrunk in the 12 years from 2008 to 2020. Still, large racial disparities in criminal justice involvement remain and are extremely high in some jurisdictions. For example, Black and Latino people are more likely than Whites to be stopped by police while they are walking on the street or driving. When Black and Latino pedestrians or motorists are stopped, police are more likely to search them. Yet, in most of these stops, police do not make an arrest or issue a summons. Police are also more likely to use force and are more likely to kill minority civilians. Incarceration rates are higher in Black, Latino, and Native American communities, and so are rates of parole and probation supervision, with all the collateral consequences that come with prolonged exposure to the system.

A large body of evidence also shows that Black, Latino, and Native Americans have historically experienced far greater rates of criminal victimization. Robberies, shootings, and homicides have been especially damaging for young Black men. In 2020, for example, Black men aged 16 to 24 were ten times more likely to die of homicide than White men of the same age.

From the committee's perspective, racial inequality in criminal justice involvement results partly from inequality in crime and partly through the operation of police, courts, and corrections. Inequality is not produced by any one stage of the system but is the combined product of each stage in the sequence. In addition to institutional complexity, police, courts, and prisons are deeply embedded in a racially unequal society that has denied opportunity to Black, Latino, and Native American communities. Through segregation, unequal public investment, and a political acceptance of enduring and spatially concentrated poverty, White Americans have mostly lived in vastly different social worlds than people of other racial groups. Differences in crime rates are symptomatic of broader racial inequalities rooted in social and economic policy choices.

To address and mitigate these inequalities and disparities, leaders must coordinate reforms across all stages of the criminal justice system on the local, state, and federal levels. However, criminal justice policy alone cannot solve historically rooted, multidimensional racial inequality. Structural reforms that improve public space, reduce neighborhood inequality, and alleviate concentrated poverty can advance criminal justice reforms by reducing crime and improving

the social contexts in which reforms can operate. Investments in community-based and non-criminal justice policy solutions are also needed. Governments, community organizations, and private firms and foundations should play a role in improving the wellbeing of communities and lessening structural social disadvantages.

Principles for Decisionmaking

The committee outlined a series of guiding principles that decision-makers can use as they consider public policy approaches to reducing racial inequalities in the criminal justice system:

1. **Reckoning and Reconciliation:** Criminal justice policies and reforms should be informed by an understanding of the harms perpetrated by the system against specific racial and ethnic groups.

2. **Participation, Accountability, and Transparency:** Efforts to reduce racial inequalities in the justice system should include public participation and accountability and transparent data collection and evaluation methods.

3. **Impacted Community Voices:** Communities disproportionately harmed by racial inequality in the criminal justice system need to be partners in knowledge generation and implementation of policy solutions.

4. **One Size Does Not Fit All:** Communities have multifaceted needs, diverse perspectives, and unique contexts. Thus, policy-makers must work with communities to understand these differences across jurisdictions and communities and take them into account when considering public policy solutions.

Criminal Justice Reforms to Reduce Racial Inequalities

Drawing on the best available evidence, the committee found the following measures to greatly reduce racial disparities, with little evidence across specific cases of any adverse effect on crime.

Police interactions, arrests, and pretrial detention: Recognizing that Black, Latino, and Native individuals are disproportionately stopped by police, arrested, and jailed under pretrial detention, it becomes clear that reforming the earliest stages of the criminal process is crucial to lessen racial inequalities throughout the entire system.

*   Reduce regulatory police stops and searches.

*   Reduce police response to non-violent behavior and mental health-related incidents.

*   Limit jail detention to only those charged with serious crimes who pose a serious and immediate risk of harm or flight.

*   Remove fine and fee revenue and budget motivations, which currently incentivize fine, fee, citation, and sanction enforcement activity.

*   Eliminate cash bail and replace it with an actuarial system where detention depends on the risk of pretrial misconduct.

*   Invest in promoting local innovation and evaluation, including community violence intervention and harm reduction efforts.

*   Invest in alternative interventions aimed at reducing violence, criminal justice contact, and harm; improving victim restoration, community relations, and cross-system coordination with non-criminal justice agencies; and addressing unmet needs.

Prosecution and sentencing: Reforms to prosecutorial decision-making and judicial sentencing—including, but not limited to, reducing the convictions that yield incarceration, decreasing sentence lengths, and removing enhancements—can greatly shrink racial inequalities in the criminal justice system without adverse effects on crime.

*   Reduce long sentences, such as by ending three-strike enhancements, severely limiting the application of life without parole sentences, and establishing second-look provisions, which offer procedures for review after sentencing.

*   Reevaluate which crimes warrant long sentences and reevaluate the cases of those who are currently serving long sentences.

*   Enact drug reform policies, including the defelonization and decriminalization of certain drug offenses and sentencing reductions.

*   Eliminate the death penalty.

Incarceration and post-detention: Reducing the overall scale and scope of criminal justice involvement and incarceration is a foremost strategy to reduce racial inequalities within the criminal justice system. Due to the much larger presence of the criminal justice system in all its forms in communities of color, such policy changes would produce the largest reductions among Black, Latino, and Native American populations.

*   Reduce the incarceration of individuals under community supervision, especially for technical violations.

*   Reduce the use, intensity, and duration of community supervision, such as probation and parole.

*   Limit the discretion to revoke parole or probation.

Community-driven Safety

Although criminal justice policy reforms are necessary to reduce racial inequality, the committee concluded that such reforms cannot solve these complex inequalities alone. Community organizations, private firms, and foundations can and should play a role in improving the wellbeing of communities and reducing racial inequality in the criminal justice system, rather than relying solely on the police and the legal system. By doing so, those residents who are most harmed by violent crime and racial inequality in the criminal justice system become active partners in making their communities safer and more equal.

The report highlights opportunities and strategies for strengthening the capacity for community organization in ways that build collective efficacy while mitigating harms associated with racial inequalities in criminal justice involvement. Although more rigorous research

evaluating these programs is needed, the report identifies community strategies that hold promise as a means to reduce racial inequality. These include community violence intervention programs, community-driven approaches to police accountability, Indigenous approaches to justice (e.g., restorative justice), and behavioral health diversion efforts.

Expanding the type of evidence from which we judge the success of community-driven solutions is critically needed to identify promising solutions and approaches to such a complex problem as racial inequality. Funding organizations in disproportionately impacted communities and forming public-private partnerships with localities can improve the quality of life in communities and make meaningful changes that can reduce crime and racial inequalities.

Reform Outside of the Criminal Justice System

Criminal justice policy alone cannot solve historically rooted, multi-dimensional racial inequality. The following are examples of strategies for improving the material wellbeing of communities and addressing structural social disadvantages through non-criminal justice policy approaches that improve the safety and wellbeing of disadvantaged communities:

- national policy approaches, such as Medicaid expansion, and targeted approaches, such as community-based health services;

- high-quality early childhood education programs;

- job placement into high-quality employment with the potential for upward mobility through educational and entrepreneurship programs;

- municipal grants to community organizations for neighborhood improvement projects or services;

- Business Improvement Districts that work to enhance public space through capital improvements, sanitation, and public safety measures; and

- improvements to the built environment through greening and lead remediation programs.

The report concludes that achieving significant reductions in racial inequality in justice requires shrinking the scope of criminal justice involvement, advancing non-punitive anti-violence efforts, and making long-term, robust, and coordinated community investments. Failure to consider larger, societal systemic inequalities will limit the success of policies that focus solely on inequalities within the criminal justice system. Changing the policy landscape will require political leadership and a new public awareness that to achieve public safety, we must reduce racial inequality.

The NASEM committee and its final report can be found at https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26705/reducing-racial-inequality-in-crime-and-justice-science-practice-and

The 4Ts of Building a Successful Researcher-Practitioner Relationship

BY JAMES CHAPMAN, SUE-MING YANG, AND CHARLOTTE GILL

James Chapman is Assistant Chief of the Roanoke County Police Department. Sue-Ming Yang is an Associate Professor and Senior Fellow, and Charlotte Gill is an Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason University.

James Chapman   Sue-Ming Yang   Charlotte Gill

In 2016, the Roanoke County (Virginia) Police Department (RCPD) and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University were awarded a Smart Policing Initiative Grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate an innovative police response to persons experiencing a mental health crisis.[1] After three years, the RCT was completed, but another opportunity emerged in 2020 to continue this partnership with the three contiguous law enforcement agencies surrounding Roanoke County.[2]

Over seven years and two RCTs, we have learned a great deal about the challenges faced by law enforcement officers as they interact with people experiencing a mental health crisis. Research partnerships have the potential to help other practitioners, expand the knowledge of current research, and evaluate the impact of an innovative practice. But we have also learned how to build and maintain a successful researcher-practitioner relationship. Like an intrepid climber traversing her first summit, partnerships take significant planning, energy, and confidence in the assigned team to navigate the rugged terrain. Here, we distill the essential lessons we learned into four "Ts": Trust, Transparency, Training, and Tenacity.

Trust

When researchers and practitioners decide to join forces and chart their path, they will likely experience some initial challenges and cultural differences that must be overcome to establish trust. This begins with researchers understanding that practitioners often work in closed systems where outsiders are suspect and must be vetted. Often, practitioners are "voluntold" by superiors to lead a research

partnership and may not know the researchers at all. Researchers need to understand that practitioners may be unable to prioritize the research over their regular work responsibilities and dealing with emerging crises. In addition, practitioners may be reluctant to share data due to concerns about the security of their information and how it will be used.

From our observation, one of the most critical ways researchers can build trust is to spend time inside the organization. A simple and effective approach for policing researchers is to go on a ride-along. Ride-alongs allow researchers to learn from officers and discuss the project with first-line officers who may be assigned to perform aspects of the research. In our projects, riding with officers allowed the researchers to learn about the officers' perceptions about persons in crisis, as well as the complications and their frustrations with the mental health system. Ride-alongs also let researchers connect with and learn about the community. During one of the co-authors' (Yang) first ride-alongs, she responded to a call for service with a community member who was a high utilizer of the mental health system. This experience provided her with a glimpse into the complex nature of mental health calls, the limitations within the local system, and a chance to better understand and connect with officers.

Other aspects of the research process can be harnessed to immerse researchers in the organization and build trust while also collecting important data. For example, focus groups and qualitative interviews allow officers to have their voices heard and provide answers to researchers about officers' perceptions. During the experiments, the research team conducted several focus groups with officers, patrol supervisors, command staff, and mental health clinicians. These focus groups were done in person and at times that were convenient to the practitioners. Although in-person exchanges are often challenging for researchers due to teaching schedules, budgets, and other restrictions on travel, they are an effective way to connect and build trust within the organization.

1 Yang, S.-M., Gill, C. E., Lu, Y.-F., Azam, M., & Kanewske, L. C. (2024). A police-clinician co-response team to people with mental illness in a suburban-rural community: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Experimental Criminology.* https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-023-09603-8

2 Yang, S.-M., & Lu, Y.-F. (Forthcoming). Evaluating the effects of co-response teams in reducing subsequent hospitalization: A place-based randomized controlled trial. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice.*

Transparency

In private business as in government, transparency can improve productivity, employee engagement, and even brand loyalty. The same holds true for research-practitioner partnerships, which can reap the wide-ranging benefits of transparency. Transparent, direct, and honest communication between researchers and practitioners provides an unfiltered view of each other's intentions and can reinforce trust-building activities. More simply stated, avoid hidden agendas. Instead, at the early stages of the partnership, establish a set of mutually agreed-upon goals and commit to them.

In addition to committing to open communication and goals, parameters should be established that allow researchers to publish their findings and uphold academic freedom while respecting the partnership and confidentiality of the agency, officers, procedures, and data. Academic freedom is important, but it is also important that researchers don't jump to conclusions about things they don't fully understand. It can be extremely helpful for researchers to run the findings by the practitioner partners to validate their interpretations of data and phenomena. Ultimately, transparency helps the researchers draw more reliable conclusions and provide stronger, actionable answers for the practitioner agency.

Training

Even after months of design and preparation for an evaluation, officers still need to be trained on the actual implementation of the intervention. This is a critical step that requires thoughtful execution, especially when a central goal of an RCT is to maintain the integrity of the trial and the fidelity of the implementation.

Successful training requires researchers and trainers to organically fit training into officers' normal schedules. This will minimize costs and disruption to agency operations and maximize the number of staff members receiving the training. Look for natural overlaps. In shift-based organizations like police departments, aligning the training with the timing of shift briefings is not only convenient but can also increase the accountability of officers to training tasks. Further, finding times when multiple squads, platoons, or shifts overlap can also be advantageous. And of course, before finalizing the training schedule, engaging with the organization's leadership in the spirit of collaboration will likely lead to productive outcomes.

Another form of training includes engaging with first-line and mid-level managers during the planning stages of the project. Instead of relying solely on the chief executive or command staff to promote the research, arrange for first-line supervisors to meet the team, ask questions they may have about the project, and receive training on project implementation. Supervisors are an excellent source of feedback about implementation details and protocols that the team may have overlooked during the developmental stages. Focusing early training efforts on this group in an RCT may also help align officers' actions in the field with the random assignment protocols defined in training.

It is important for chief executives or command staff to attend the

training, as their presence validates the importance of the project. When practical, ask the Chief to share a few words about how the research will benefit the community and its importance to the profession. During the training, it is crucial to present a unified message that is supported by the Chief and represents the collaborative process of the research team. Promote the collaborative process by dividing the presentation into sections, allowing researchers, graduate research assistants, and police leadership assigned to the project to jointly contribute to the presentation, and familiarize the officers with all of the team members.

Regardless of how thorough training is, the dynamic nature of law enforcement and human engagement often leads to circumstances not considered. In our projects, officers sometimes forgot to follow the random assignment protocols, while others applied the treatment group protocol during control shifts or vice versa. These types of actions, if left unaddressed, directly impact the integrity of the research and the reliability of the results. Thus, those implementing the intervention require both training and monitoring for quality assurance. Retraining may also be required.

Tenacity

Conducting experimental evaluations in the real world requires a high degree of determination to work through unexpected circumstances. The research team must be willing to work through difficulties alongside the practitioners to achieve the project's stated goals. Tenacity also involves being agile when needed while staying focused on the project's overall goals.

During our RCTs, the research teams faced numerous obstacles. For example, during control group shifts in which there was no follow-up by mental health clinicians, officers responded and, after successfully de-escalating people experiencing a mental health crisis, would then give the individual a card with information about how to participate in the research study. However, the researchers quickly learned that following up with these individuals was difficult. Phone calls by the research team went unanswered or numbers were disconnected. The project team had to take several steps to pivot quickly. First, a phone line was created using a local area code to minimize suspicion of spam or fraudulent callers. Second, the team developed a Facebook page for the project that the graduate research assistants monitored, which allowed the control group participants to communicate directly with the researchers. Third, the team sent out surveys in the mail to increase outreach to control group participants. These strategies helped to modestly boost participation in the study. More importantly, these strategies highlight the persistence and desire of the research team to stay focused on the project's goals.

Tenacity is a valuable trait in following through with research projects, but it's equally crucial to recognize when to turn around or call it quits. Even with the best-laid plans and the most committed team members, researchers and practitioners sometimes face the difficult reality of terminating a project. The time, energy, and money

attached to research projects are often voluminous, not to mention the amount of emotional energy that has gone into building a productive researcher-practitioner relationship. Termination should be a last resort, and the decision to terminate the project prematurely should be based on the consensus of the team. Although we never reached this point in our RCTs, we had to discuss the possibility during some of the most challenging parts of the implementation process and needed to draw on all four "Ts" to ensure it was an honest and productive conversation.

Conclusion

Building a successful researcher-practitioner relationship requires significant effort, compromise, and humility. The "4Ts" provide a framework for navigating this challenging path, emphasizing trust-building, transparent communication, effective training, and unwavering tenacity and determination. As practitioners and researchers continue their collaborative efforts, these lessons serve as a guide to achieving meaningful outcomes in the complex realm of criminological research.

THE 2024
CEBCP SYMPOSIUM
June 20, 2024 | 8:30am – 4pm

Hard Questions for Evidence-Based Crime Policy
For more information and to register for the free symposium, go to https://cebcp.org/cebcp-symposium-2024/

Congratulations to the 2024 Recipients of the Distinguished Achievement Award.

ANTHONY BRAGA
University of Pennsylvania

JERRY LEE
SpotQ and The Jerry Lee Foundation

Congratulations to the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame class of 2024.

SHON BARNES
Madison (WI) Police Department

JONAS BAUGHMAN
Kansas City (MO) Police Department

THOMAS CARR
Washington-Baltimore HIDTA

DAVID COWAN
Victoria (Australia) Police Service

KEVIN HALL
Tucson (AZ) Police Department

SCOTT MOURTGOS
Salt Lake City (UT) Police Department

CHRISTIAN PETERSON
Portland (OR) Police Bureau

KEVIN THOMAS
Philadelphia (PA) Police Department

From Science to Practice: Implementing Hot Spots Policing

BY JOSEPH A. GRAMAGLIA, *WITH SCOTT PHILLIPS*

Joseph A. Gramaglia is the Commissioner of Police of the Buffalo (NY) Police Department. **Scott Phillips** *is a Field Advisor for the Division of Criminal Justice Services (NY). This feature is adapted from Commissioner Gramaglia's keynote speech for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Annual Symposium and his work with Scott Phillips on reducing crime in Buffalo, New York.*

Joseph A. Gramaglia   Scott Phillips

The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Annual Symposium (and other similar events) can be an excellent way for police leaders who want to use research and science to inform their practices to discover, share, and explore new ideas. For example, the first time I learned about hot spots policing was from Dr. Craig Uchida at a DCJS Symposium. Dr. Uchida worked with the Los Angeles Police Department's Newton Division to develop evidence-based approaches to address shootings in that very high-crime locale. That research-practice team developed a crime-reduction strategy using evidence-based data-driven approaches known as hot spots policing, where officers were placed into specific high-crime areas to prevent crime, which they did. In symposia that followed, I also learned about the Koper patrol strategy from Professor Christopher Koper of George Mason University's Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP), which emphasized how spending 15 minutes at hots spots (and doing so unpredictably a few times a day) could prevent crime and create a residual deterrent effect once officers leave.[1]

It was at the 2018 DCJS symposium that I was fortunate enough to be in the kickoff of the first cohort of a new ten-week course on *Evidence-Based Policing*[2] offered by Professors Cynthia Lum and Christopher Koper to policing leaders around New York State. After that symposium, I came away with the idea of using an evidence-based practice known as custom notifications and modifying them to work for the Buffalo Police Department (BPD). Custom notifications was a strategy developed by *Operation Ceasefire* in Boston, Massachusetts,[3] where law enforcement and community members

engage directly with offenders to convey their strategy to reduce violence, the legal consequences to offenders who do not do so, and the impact that violence is having on individuals in the community.

Using the Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) Initiative funding from the DCJS, BPD launched a "mini" custom notification plan for the start of 2019 using GIVE funding. Instead of calling groups of people together like the original Operation Ceasefire, BPD officers would instead be sent directly to the doors of those known to be involved in gun violence to regularly make contact with individuals, sometimes three to four times a week. For each exchange, we tracked who we contacted and how often we met with individuals. In some cases, we met with people five times or more. As change in policing is never easy, we encountered some initial skepticism from some officers. But eventually, this practice became part of their everyday activities.

The results were powerful. In 2019, we saw a 24% reduction in shootings from the previous year, which was a historic reduction for Buffalo. The success of this program was a credit to the officers in the department doing the community-based work and buying into the strategies the commanding officers laid out.

Unfortunately, we (along with many other agencies around the country) lost all of that progress in 2020-2021. In 2020, we were up about 100% in shootings, driven by historic gun violence in the second half of the year, which carried into the first half of 2021. There were likely many reasons for this, such as closed entertainment and other activity outlets, which led to less structured routines and interactions that resulted in crime and disorder. The pandemic also led to court closures and backlogging of criminal justice processes. At the time, we had far too many gun defendants getting released at arraignment with low or no bail because bail laws at that time mandated that judges set bail for the "least restrictive measures." While I agree that something needs to change with the bail system, we also need to make further changes for the safety of our communities. No one should sit in jail because they don't have the money to get out for

---

1   See https://cebcp.org/wp-content/onepagers/KoperHotSpots.pdf for a brief summary of this study.

2   See Cynthia Lum and Christopher S. Koper. (2017). *Evidence-Based Policing: Translating Research into Practice.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

3   See David M. Kennedy, Anthony A. Braga, Anne M. Piehl, and Elin J. Waring. (2001). *Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice. https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/188741.pdf

low-level crimes. At the same time, we are responsible for protecting our community from those who drive the violence.

During the spring of 2021, I had an opportunity to talk about gun violence with a colleague from the Dallas (TX) Police Department—Chief Eddie Garcia. I continued to learn more about the varieties of hot spots strategies. In Dallas, Chief Garcia was working with Michael Smith and colleagues at the University of Texas, Dallas, to develop a grid system to identify and operationalize hot spots.[4] I took what I initially learned about hot spots and evidence-based policing and combined it with ideas from Dallas to implement a similar plan for Buffalo. This also required engaging with the agency's crime analysts and DCJS Erie County Senior Crime Analyst Kevin Schellinger to develop our plan and conduct crime mapping. As with Dallas, we divided the city into 500 x 500-foot grids, mapping the last 90 days of shootings and shots-fired incidents into those grids to identify hot spots. After experimenting with the strategy for about seven months and seeing preliminary success, we formally launched the program in March 2022.

Hot spot grid maps show *where* officers need to go, but evidence-based policing can also help determine *what* they should do when they get there. In Buffalo, we required officers on patrol to call out on "directed patrols," where they not only went to the data-driven grid locations but also turned on their overhead flashers and got out of the car to engage in community policing and talk with residents. This first part of the plan involved being *present, visible,* and *engaged* with the community. Both presence and engagement are important for preventing crime and building bridges with community members when officers are at these locations.

The second part of this plan involved enforcement, where the police are committed to stopping, investigating, arresting, and helping attorneys prosecute those driving gun violence in our community (from those who pull the trigger to those who traffic guns). Research has shown that engagement is critical to sustaining a plan to build community cooperation, trust, and confidence with the police. Officer engagement was also critical. We started a weekly intelligence meeting to carry out this work, but not at headquarters and without the brass. Instead, first-line supervisors, patrol officers, and detectives started meeting at the patrol districts during different weekly shifts. These meetings included detailed officers (those specifically assigned to deal with hot spots) from all five district stations, the Erie County Sheriffs, State Police, FBI Safe Streets Task Force, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms agents, and prosecutors. A detailed intelligence product was put together weekly by the analytic team made up of the Special Investigations Lieutenant assigned to the Commissioners Office and Erie Crime Analysis Center personnel. These reports included updated hot spot grid mapping locations that need focused attention;

those arrested with a gun in the last week and their custody status at the time of the report; and known gang beefs at that time, among many other items. Providing this opportunity for officers and detectives to be engaged in this intelligence process was key. After all, who knows better about what's happening on the streets than street cops? These weekly meetings allowed for real-time information sharing and verification of intelligence. The intelligence briefing was also made available to all officers on an app on their phones.

We started seeing immediate progress with this approach. Our shooting incidents were down 37% in 2022. An evaluation of our hot spots program found that it led to a significant decrease in the level of gun homicides when compared to pre-intervention levels, even taking into account COVID-19 crime declines. There was a similar significant decrease in both the level and trend of calls for service related to non-fatal shootings.[5] Lives were being saved by the direct preventative actions taken by the police department. The response from the community was also positive. People were seeing more officers getting out of their cars and engaging and networking with the community.

As we maintained this hot spots violence reduction plan in 2023, we continued to see historic reductions in our gun violence incidents. We ended the year with the lowest number of persons shot on record—even lower than 2019. From 2022 to 2023, we recorded a 44% reduction in homicides, a 58% reduction in shooting homicides, and a 33% decline in shooting victims more generally.

I'm not foolish enough to think we can rest on our laurels. Preventing crime and maintaining the trust and confidence of our community members takes constant work and adaptation. It requires getting buy-in from both community members and the rank-and-file alike. Evidence-based policing is a significant group effort, requiring local, state, and federal agencies to cooperate to help communities quell serious violence. The mission and goal of every police executive is to provide for safe communities, which includes strong cooperation with the community we serve. How do we accomplish this? We must first recognize that community policing is not just rhetoric but needs to be institutionalized into everything the police do.

We also have to ensure that every member of our department understands that the more they positively engage with good people living in an area plagued by gun violence, the better we can push back against those causing violence in that community. Hot spots policing is not about coming in with strong-handed tactics as a show of force. That can only erode relationships within communities. Instead, the Buffalo Police Department's Hot Spot Violence Reduction Plan is deeply rooted in community engagement, strengthening relationships, and getting public safety resources to those who need them most. As we tell our officers—we all need to be *Present, Visible, and Engaged.*

4   See Michael R. Smith, Rob Tillyer, and Brandon Tregle. (2024). Hot spots policing as part of a city-wide violent crime reduction strategy: Initial evidence from Dallas. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 90(January-February), 102091.

5   The full report from this project, *Micro-Hot-Spot Policing in Buffalo*, is available to download at https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Micro-Hot-Spot-Policing-Buffalo.pdf

How to Use Data Dashboards to Advance Criminal Justice Policy Goals

BY AUBREY FOX

Aubrey Fox is the Executive Director of the New York City Criminal Justice Agency (CJA).

"How many people are on pretrial release in New York City?" This question—and its connection to a second—whether the Rikers Island Correctional Facility should be closed—launched my organization, the New York City Criminal Justice Agency (CJA), into the increasingly crowded marketplace of online criminal justice dashboard designers. As of today, the CJA now has a suite of dashboards that seek to answer the following questions:

- How many people are awaiting a disposition of a New York City case?
- How many criminal cases are prosecuted in New York City?
- How many people are arrested and prosecuted in New York City each year?
- How many people are arrested and prosecuted for a new offense while on pretrial release?
- What do we know about pretrial outcomes using information provided by CJA at arraignment?[1]

Explaining how we got here can shed light on critical concerns about our criminal justice system and the importance of data sharing with the public.

An Ambitious Policy Goal

In recent years, New York City has been pursuing a goal that would have seemed unthinkable not long ago: closing Rikers Island, the largest jail facility serving New York City. To do so, the City has to reduce its jail population significantly by about 6,000 individuals (of which 5,300 are being held pretrial). This goal has become a fixation among policymakers, criminal justice practitioners, and advocates. Yet these same individuals have little idea about the number of people awaiting trial who are released to the community; when asked, their guesses are all over the map.

However, the number of people being released pretrial is crucial to discussions of closing Rikers Island. The larger the proportion of people released pretrial relative to those held in pretrial detention, the smaller the Rikers population. Further, the City's ability to safely supervise people released pretrial will, over time, determine how

Aubrey Fox

much confidence judges have in setting conditions of release that favor pretrial release over pretrial detention.[2]

The answer to the "how many?" question is central to CJA. CJA is New York City's primary pretrial services and research agency and the keeper of essential data related to the pretrial process. Our focus is not so much on the people held at Rikers Island but on those released to the community awaiting trial. We serve those individuals by giving them regular court date reminders and operating an alternative to pretrial detention program called Supervised Release.[3]

As of November 2023, 49,507 people were released to the community in a given month. This means there are over nine times as many people on pretrial release as there are in pretrial detention. We put this information online in a searchable dashboard.[4] The dashboard allows researchers, policymakers, media, and the general public to sort the data by the top charge of the alleged offense (whether it was a violent felony, a nonviolent felony, or a misdemeanor), pretrial release type, the borough where the case was heard, and the number of people arrested for a new charge while awaiting case disposition. The data goes back to 2019 and is updated monthly, quarterly, or annually (depending on the dashboard) with a short time lag. We want our dashboards to provide a comprehensive source of information about how the criminal justice system operates in New York City.

Why Does This Information Matter?

The dashboards show the City's challenges in meeting its goal of reducing the jail population. Part of the problem is a numerical reality. If the City is releasing nine people for every one person it puts in pretrial detention (a much higher rate of community release than other jurisdictions in the country where data is available to compare), it makes further progress harder to accomplish.[5] It also means that the system must continue functioning at a relatively high release rate to keep the jail population at its current level.

The challenge of increasing rates of pretrial release at the margins is most evident when looking more closely at the City's Supervised

---

1   See https://www.nycja.org/nyc-pretrial-data

2   While bail reforms introduced in 2020 have limited judicial discretion to set monetary bail (which leads to pretrial detention when it goes unpaid), they haven't limited that discretion entirely.

3   The program operates out of all five boroughs, run by four different nonprofit agencies.

4   See https://www.nycja.org/people-in-community

5   See https://www.nycja.org/assets/CJA_RWM_March_2019.pdf, p10.

Release program. While release on recognizance is the most likely condition of pretrial release, the City has become more and more reliant on Supervised Release (which connects individuals to trained social workers who provide a mix of mandated and voluntary services) to manage individuals who, in the past, would have been held in pretrial detention. There are now nearly 10,000 people mandated to Supervised Release in New York City – almost twice as many peo-
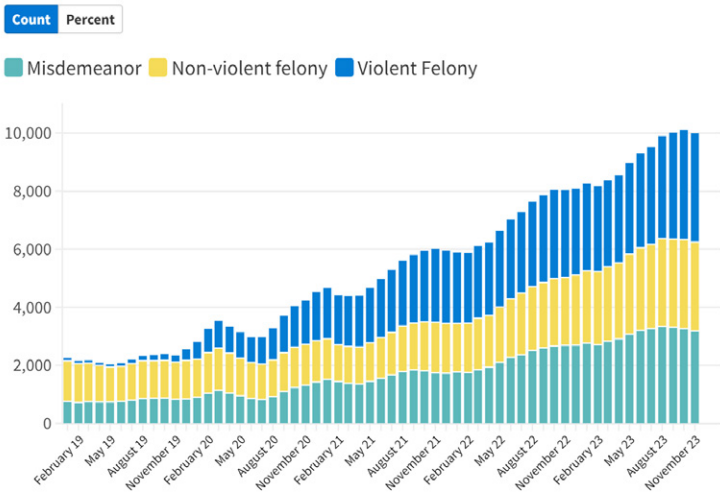
Source: nycja.org

**People on Supervised Release Awaiting Disposition of Their Case**

ple as those detained pretrial. Since January 2019, the number of people in the program has more than quadrupled (Figure 1).

When you look closer at this Supervised Release population, roughly half were charged with a crime in which judges – even after bail reforms introduced in 2020[6] – retain the discretion to set monetary bail. Beyond the charge that led to their assignment to Supervised Release, subsequent dashboards have shown that people mandated to the program are much more likely to have additional pending cases or recent prosecutions than those given a release on recognizance or who have managed to obtain release by paying their bail. In short, the profile of the typical Supervised Release case is similar to those held in pretrial detention but different from the profile of individuals who obtain their release through paying bail or receiving a release on recognizance. This means that judges use Supervised Release as one last chance to give individuals before setting high amounts of cash bail should they be arrested again while in the program.

The City's reliance on Supervised Release to manage high-risk cases came into even sharper focus when we launched another dashboard that shows that a small number of people commit a

disproportionately large share of alleged offenses.[7] While over 90% of individuals are arrested and prosecuted only once (80%) or twice (10% to 12%) in a given year, in 2022 there were 2,505 people arrested and prosecuted in New York City five or more times – a tiny number in a city with almost 8.5 million residents. About 75% of those 2,505 people were arrested at least once on a felony charge (including 40% on a violent felony charge), belying the view of some
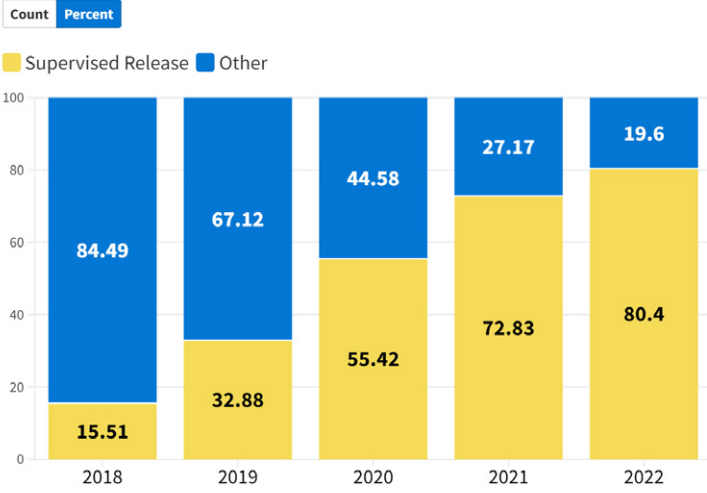
Source: nycja.org

Release Outcomes of People with Five or More Arrests

advocates that so-called "frequent flyers" are coming through the system on only minor charges. When we looked at what types of release conditions this group received, we found that 80% had received Supervised Release. In 2018, when Supervised Release had much more restrictive eligibility criteria, which included not taking any cases with an alleged violent felony offense, only 15% had ever received Supervised Release, which illustrates the increasingly central role the program is playing with this segment of the pretrial population (see Figure 2).

For policymakers, the fact that Supervised Release is focused on a high-risk population of people who otherwise would likely be held in pretrial detention is good news. It means the program, designed as an alternative to pretrial detention, is squarely targeting its intended population. And, policymakers have recognized the critical importance of Supervised Release. In 2023, the programs received increased funding to keep pace with growing caseloads while also launching an intensive case management pilot in two boroughs designed to improve outcomes for the highest risk participants.[8]

Our data dashboard makes the challenge clear. A strongly functioning Supervised Release program is critical to meeting the city's goal of closing the Rikers Island Correctional Facility. Incremental progress is possible with greater investments and trial-and-error

---

6   New York State bail reform uses a charge-based approach and mandates release of individuals arrested for misdemeanors and most non-violent felonies.

7   See https://www.nycja.org/people-prosecuted

8   See https://www.innovatingjustice.org/about/announcements/supervised-release-gets-critical-37-million-boost.

piloting of new techniques to address the highest-risk individuals mandated to the program (those cycling in and out of the courts repeatedly on serious charges). But policymakers will have to complement this with other solutions to bring the New York City jail population down, such as reducing the average time spent by individuals on pretrial detention.

Good Data Collection Has to Be Driven by Local Practitioners

Though many commentators have raised serious concerns about the quality of criminal justice data in this country, the simple truth is that most jurisdictions have a lot of data available. The challenge is making this stockpile of data accessible and analyzable. CJA generates data (through face-to-face interviews with nearly every person who is arrested and prosecuted in New York City) and receives data by agreements from other criminal justice partners, including the New York City Police Department and the New York State Office of Court Administration. Stitching that data together in a single, coherent database is technically complicated. These problems worsen when comparing findings with other cities or the nation. Key measures, such as "failure to appear" in court, can differ from city to city, making comparisons misleading or even deceiving.

Given all these complications, why would any jurisdiction invest in better data collection? The answer is that it must be useful to that jurisdiction. Most of the solutions to the crime data gap fail to consider this fundamental principal-agent problem. Laudable attempts by national nonprofits (funded by philanthropy and government) to fill the data gap sometimes do not benefit the local jurisdictions

studied. Even worse is when third parties take responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and reporting crime data in isolation from the local jurisdiction where the data originates or fail to send the results back to the local jurisdiction. Data collection can't succeed without the full cooperation of practitioner agencies. Partnerships between local jurisdictions and data experts can be challenging, but it's the only way forward.

Our goal in launching a series of publicly available dashboards is to provide an alternative to the typical top-down data collection process. As an agency that links research and practice (including providing pretrial services directly to individuals released to the community), we can put the insights derived directly to work, as in the example of how we're using the dashboards to improve the Supervised Release program. At an even more basic level, CJA's historic commitment to serving the population of people who are released pretrial – and our decades-long reputation as a provider of high-quality criminal justice research – has led us to provide this data in publicly searchable and innovative ways.

We could not have done this work without our diligent Information Technology team and our partnership with Dr. Marie Van Nostrand and her staff at Luminosity, Inc. (one of the nation's leading pretrial data experts). CJA and Luminosity have been on a journey together, starting with a single question (How many people are in the community awaiting disposition of a New York City case?) and uncovering more and more sophisticated, policy-relevant questions as we continue our work. We hope our experience building these dashboards can inspire other jurisdictions that want to use data to address their local problems.

CJA

Reducing unnecessary pretrial detention in New York City.

CRIMINOLOGY, LAW AND SOCIETY
GRADUATE PROGRAMS

RIGOROUS. INNOVATIVE. POLICY-FOCUSED.

MA/PhD in CRIMINOLOGY, LAW AND SOCIETY
The MA/PhD program prepares students for careers in research, academia, criminal justice leadership, nonprofit organizations, and public affairs.

MS in CRIMINAL JUSTICE
The MS program prepares students to aquire a job or advance their career in the field of criminal justice policy and practice.

HIGHLIGHTS
Top 10 program ranking
Washington DC metro area
Leader in evidence-based research
Internationally-recognized department
Award winning, interdisciplinary faculty
Access and outreach to policymakers
Collaborations with justice agencies
Student research and publishing
Doctoral student funding

RESEARCH CENTERS

Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

Modeling Decision-Making in the Legal System

Early Justice Strategies

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

cls.gmu.edu

Prescription Opioid Policy and the Criminalization of Medical Providers

BY CARA L. SEDNEY, TREAH HAGGERTY,
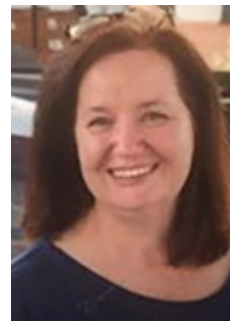PATRICIA DEKESEREDY, AND
HENRY H. BROWNSTEIN

Cara L. Sedney, MD, MA, is an associate professor in the Department of Neurosurgery, Rockefeller Neuroscience Institute, West Virginia University. Treah Haggerty, MD, MS, is an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine, West Virginia University. Patricia Dekeseredy, MScN, RN, is a clinical research specialist in the Department of Neurosurgery, West Virginia University School of Medicine. Henry H. Brownstein, PhD, is a distinguished research professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, West Virginia University.

Cara L. Sedney   Treah Haggerty   Patricia Dekeseredy   Henry H. Brownstein

Today's opioid crisis presents us with an opportunity to study the incongruity between the intended and unintended consequences of an unbalanced drug policy. Throughout history, humans have consumed natural and synthetic drugs. While these substances have been used to treat illness, address acute or chronic pain, or enhance personal well-being, misusing them can have negative health and social consequences, including addiction, illness, violence, and death. In the United States, the challenge for drug policy has been knowing how and when to respond to the use and sale of drugs to maximize their benefits and minimize their harms. This balance has played out between emphasizing medical and public health benefits and risks versus criminal justice prohibitions and punishments. By the early 20th century, advocates for a criminal justice policy prevailed, and legislation and policies were enacted to control drug use and trade. The emphasis of drug policy on control and enforcement of law more than prevention of harm and treatment of harmful effects of drug misuse or abuse has had consequences, both intended and unintended. Here, we summarize a study with colleagues that shows these unintended consequences, specifically, how control policies for prescribing opioids impact the ability of medical providers and their patients to work together to address problems of chronic pain in ways that adequately benefit and do not harm their patients.

Opioids and Opioid Policy in the United States

Historian David Musto[1] describes the late 19th century in the

1   Musto, D. F. (1991). Opium, cocaine and marijuana in American history. *Scientific American*, 265(1), 40-47.

United States as "an era of wide availability and unrestrained advertising" of drugs, with people using whatever drug they thought would help them to relieve illness, pain, or discomfort. These drugs included morphine, which was available in patent medicines and other products and derived from opiates, which were extracted from opium poppy plants. Once evidence began showing that using morphine was highly addictive, scientists began conducting research to identify opium alkaloids that would not have the same effect. For example, in 1898, Frederich Bayer & Co., a German pharmaceutical company that today distributes aspirin, developed an opioid called heroin as an alternative to morphine, which could be used for several ailments (including for children) from cough suppression to severe lung disease. By 1914, Congress passed the Harrison Act to control the availability of heroin in the United States.

Under President Nixon, in 1970, the United States Congress enacted the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), which placed all drugs under regulatory control by categorizing them into one of five schedules based on their medical value, abuse potential, and safety. As a result, some drugs are legally available over the counter, others can be legally purchased when prescribed for legitimate medical purposes, and others are not legal to prescribe or sell. Among opioids, heroin has not been legally available in the United States for any purpose. However, other opioids, such as oxycodone, could be legally prescribed for medical use, particularly in the treatment of pain. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during the early 21st century, the use of prescription opioid pain

relievers increased in sales and use.[2] Other powerful new synthetic opioids such as fentanyl began to emerge, and the number of opioid overdoses and deaths dramatically increased. Combined, this led to the current opioid crisis that policymakers and the public are so concerned about today.[3]

The Complexities of the Opioid Problem in West Virginia

West Virginia was certainly not immune to the opioid crisis and unfortunately had social and economic conditions that fell victim to it. Notably, almost all 55 counties in West Virginia have large seams of minable coal reserves. People who work in the mines experience high levels of chronic pain and other medical problems and are heavily represented in opioid overdose deaths.[4] Among all U.S. states,

West Virginia has the highest death rate from overdoses involving any opioid (90 per 100,000) based upon the most current data available (2021). A 2018 Opioid Response Plan for the State of West Virginia noted, "Driving this public health crisis is the opioid epidemic, a dual challenge involving both prescribed opioids, such as oxycodone and illicit opioids, including heroin and fentanyl."[5]

In a report on the use of opioids to treat pain, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recognized the complex challenge of opioids as an effective treatment for pain, but also its risk as a public health hazard.[6] On the one hand, opioids could be beneficial to pain management, especially in states like West Virginia. On the other hand, knowing how to control dosage and use can be challenging. In partial response to this complexity, the Opioid Reduction

2   Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2011). Vital signs: overdoses of prescription opioid pain relievers-United States, 1999-2008. *Morbidity and mortality weekly report, 60*(43), 1487-1492.

3   Christie, C., Baker, C., Cooper, R., Kennedy, P. J., Madras, B., & Bondi, P. (2017). The president's commission on combating drug addiction and the opioid crisis. *Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1.*

4   Hodges, C. D., Stephens, H. M., & Sedney, C. (2023). Individual and Community Characteristics of the Opioid Crisis in West Virginia. *Journal of Drug Issues*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220426231179211

5   State of West Virginia. (2018). *Opioid Response Plan for the State of West Virginia: Proposed Report for Public Comment.*

6   National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Health and Medicine Division, Board on Health Sciences Policy, Committee on Pain Management and Regulatory Strategies to Address Prescription Opioid Abuse, Phillips, J. K., Ford, M. A., & Bonnie, R. J. (Eds.). (2017). *Pain Management and the Opioid Epidemic: Balancing Societal and Individual Benefits and Risks of Prescription Opioid Use*. National Academies Press (US).

Act was passed by the West Virginia State Senate in 2018 (Senate Bill 273), placing legal limits on medical decisions by establishing "prescribing limits for opioid prescriptions by limiting ongoing chronic opioid prescriptions to 30 days' supply and first-time opioid prescriptions to 7 days' supply for surgeons and 3 days' for emergency rooms and dentists, as well as establishing new opioid-related harms counseling and other requirements of prescribers."[7]

The Criminalization of Medical Providers: An Unintended Consequence

After the Opioid Reduction Act was passed, we and other colleagues conducted a study with funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and data from the state Board of Pharmacy in West Virginia to understand the consequences of the Act for medical providers who prescribed opioids to their patients.[8] We did this by analyzing prescribing data from the West Virginia Board of Pharmacy and by conducting stakeholder interviews with prescribers, pharmacists, and patients who used opioids to contextualize the quantitative data.

The analysis showed that the overall volume of opioid prescriptions was declining before the law was passed. These declines were for ongoing and chronic opioid use, which was excluded from the law. However, after the law was passed, first-time prescriptions—the target of the new law—did not. Stakeholder interviews revealed that the legislation exacerbated providers' fear of prescribing opioids and impacted their prescribing, even for patients who had a legitimate need for opioids and even if the new legislation did not apply to their specific conditions. While the law was trying to respond to unscrupulous pharmaceutical manufacturers, suppliers, and providers who overprescribed or indifferently prescribed, it also impacted those who responsibly prescribed opioids. Most stakeholders interviewed felt that providers were prescribing in the best interest of their patients (although it was not possible in this study to confirm this given the privacy of medical records). Notably, even before the legislation, disciplinary actions against opioid prescribers had already been increasing, making providers fearful of prescribing opioids to patients even when it was appropriate.

Stakeholders felt that the law contributed to some patients being left to manage withdrawal or pain symptoms without medical recourse and transitioning to illicit solutions. This was compounded by the dearth of chronic pain resources in a rural state, along with disciplinary siloing amongst and between medical specialties in the

care of chronic pain, leaving patients with limited options for treatment.[9] Because of changing drug markets, self-treatment with illicit opioids became more dangerous around the same time, as heroin became more affordable than opioids in pill form, and these illicit pills often contained fentanyl, increasing the risk of overdose for these patients. The majority of these patients specifically characterized their use as the typical reasons one would take pain medication: to improve quality of life and maintain functionality rather than to obtain a "high."[10] In effect, the legislative effort of SB273 had unanticipated consequences that were compounded by other environmental and social factors and may have worsened the opioid crisis, which the law was intended to address. Additional concern comes from further data analysis indicating that prescribing was reduced by patients with Medicaid (in contrast to our study assessing patients of all payor types), suggesting that the law may have disproportionately impacted patients of lower socioeconomic status.[11]

Translating Research Findings to Policy

When opioids are prescribed and carefully monitored for legitimate medical purposes, such as treating moderate to severe pain following surgery or injury, or for treating health conditions such as cancer, their use can benefit patients. But misuse and legal restrictions may result in complications with withdrawal or illicit use, overdose, and death. A more comprehensive and balanced policy should respond not only to the need to prevent harms of misuse or abuse, but also to the needs of patients who would benefit from opioid treatment and of trustworthy medical providers who are committed to helping and not harming their patients. If the treatment is to be of value to the patient and if the policy is intended to maximize benefits and minimize harm, policymakers need to be attentive to both the intended and unintended consequences of the policies they propose and enact.

7   Sedney, C. L., Khodaverdi, M., Pollini, R., Dekeseredy, P., Wood, N., & Haggerty, T. (2021). Assessing the impact of a restrictive opioid prescribing law in West Virginia. *Substance abuse treatment, prevention, and policy, 16*(1), 1-12.

8   Sedney, C. L., Haggerty, T., Dekeseredy, P., Nwafor, D., Caretta, M. A., Brownstein, H. H., & Pollini, R. (2022). "The DEA would come in and destroy you": a qualitative study of fear and unintended consequences among opioid prescribers in WV. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy, 17*(1), 19.

9   Haggerty, T., Sedney, C. L., Dekeseredy, P., Nwafor, D., Brownstein, H. H., Caretta, M. A., & Pollini, R. A. (2022). Pain management during West Virginia's opioid crisis. *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine, 35*(5), 940-950.

10 Sedney, C. L., Dekeseredy, P., Davis, M., & Haggerty, T. (2023). A qualitative study of chronic pain and opioid use: The impact of restrictive prescribing. *Journal of Opioid Management, 19*(7), 95-102.

11 Allen, L. D., Pollini, R. A., Vaglienti, R., & Powell, D. (2024, January). Opioid Prescribing Patterns After Imposition of Setting-Specific Limits on Prescription Duration. *JAMA Health Forum, 5*(1), pp. e234731-e234731.

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

How We Got Here

The University

The Center is housed in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, at George Mason University. We are an integral part of the educational mission of our large, public, R1 classified institution.

People

Beginning with just two faculty and two graduate students in 2008, the CEBCP now includes 36 GMU faculty, staff, and students, and dozens of affiliated scholars. Thirteen of our research assistants earned PhDs while at Mason, and we've supported many careers through our synergistic activities.

Research

The total grants portfolio for the CEBCP is over $46 million, which includes over 80 funded projects since 2008. CEBCP faculty and students are highly productive, with hundreds of publications, reports, and practice-based guides developed.

Translation

Known for its translation tools and activities, the CEBCP plays a critical role in advocating for the use of science in justice practice. The CEBCP has also supported free annual symposia, congressional briefings, the *Translational Criminology* magazine, and special awards to advance our translational mission.

Partnerships

The CEBCP has partnered with over 80 organizations and groups for research, training, translation, and educational activities. These include the American Society of Criminology, the National Policing Institute, the Campbell Collaboration, and the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA, among many others.

Find out more at:
www.cebcp.org

Hot Off the Press

Select publications by CEBCP faculty and students 2023-2024

Fissel, E.R., & Lee, J.R. (2023). The cybercrime illusion: Examining the impact of cybercrime misbeliefs on perceptions of cybercrime seriousness. *Journal of Criminology, 56*(2-3), 150-169.

Gill, C., Weisburd, D., Nazaire, D., Prince, H., & Gross Shader, C. (2024). Building "A Beautiful Safe Place for Youth" through problem-oriented community organizing: A quasi-experimental evaluation. *Criminology & Public Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12657

Goodier, M., & Lum, C. (2023). First point of contact: Can procedural justice be applied by emergency calltakers? *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice,* 17, paac102.

Hinkle, J.C., White, C., Weisburd, D., & Kuen, K. (2023). Disorder in the eye of the beholder: Black and White residents' perceptions of disorder on high-crime street segments. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 22(1), 35-61.

Houser, T., McMillan, A., & Dong, B. (2024). Bridging the gap between criminology and computer vision: A multidisciplinary approach to curb gun violence. Security Journal.

Irvin-Erickson, Y. (2023). How does immigration status and citizenship affect identity theft victimization risk in the US? Insights from the 2018 National Crime Victimization Survey Identity Theft Supplement. *Victims & Offenders*, 18(7), 1401-1424.

Irvin-Erickson, Y. & Shariati, A. (2023). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd on victim and third-party reporting of domestic violence to the police in the US. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 90*(January-February), 102141.

Kimbrell, C. S., Wilson, D. B., & Olaghere, A. (2023). Restorative justice programs and practices in juvenile justice: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis for effectiveness. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 22(1), 161-195.

Koper C.S., Liu W., Taylor B.G., Wu, X., Johnson, W.D. & Sheridan, J. (2023). The effects of hot spot policing on community experiences and perceptions in a time of COVID-19 and calls for police reform. *Police Quarterly, DOI: 10.1177/10986111231202433.*

Koper, C., Clary, K., & Lum, C. 2023. A review of patrol techniques to reduce serious injury and fatality crashes. *OnPolicing Blog*, National Policing Institute, May 3. https://www.policinginstitute.org/onpolicing/a-review-of-patrol-techniques-to-reduce-serious-injury-and-fatality-crashes/

Kuen, K., Kwak, H., & Ra, K.H. (2023). Perceptions of police ineffectiveness and street codes by nationality in South Korea: An application of Anderson's code of the street framework. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management.* https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-01-2023-0010

Kuen, K., Lum, C., & Kim, S. (2023). What makes police officers resist research and evidence-based policing? Examining the role of organizational and environmental factors. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 17*, paad051.

Lee, J.R. (2023). Understanding markers of trust within the online stolen data market: An examination of vendors' signaling behaviors relative to product price point. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 22(4), 665-693.

Lee, J.R., & Holt, T.J. (2023). Assessing the correlates of cyberattacks against high-visibility institutions. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 36(3), 251-268.

Lu, Y. F., & Petersen, K. (2023). Effectiveness of psychological skills training for police personnel: A meta-analysis. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 80(10), 590-598.

Lum, C., & Koper, C.S. (2024). Evidence-Based Policing. In B. Welsh, S. Zane, & D. Mears, *The Oxford Handbook of Evidence-Based Crime and Justice Policy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Lum, C., Koper, C.S., Goodier, M., Johnson, W., & Krause, J. (2024). A multi-method case study of a police agency's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management.* https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-09-2023-0109.

Lum, C., Wellford, C., Scott., T., Vovak, H., Scherer, J.A., & Goodier, M. (2023). Differences between high and low performing police agencies in clearing robberies, aggravated assaults, and burglaries: Findings from an eight-agency case study. *Police Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111231182728.

Lum, C., Maupin, C., & Stoltz, M. (2023). The supply and demand shifts in policing at the start of the pandemic: A national multi-wave survey of the impacts of COVID-19 on American law enforcement. *Police Quarterly, 26*(4), 495-519.

Olaghere, A., Wilson, D. B., & Kimbrell, C. (2023). Inclusive critical appraisal of qualitative and quantitative findings in evidence synthesis. Research Synthesis Methods, 14(6), 847-852.

Park, S., & Lum, C. (2023). Does Weisburd's Law of Crime Concentration apply to traffic crashes? Implications for policing and traffic law enforcement. *Policing: An International Journal (of Police Strategies and Management), 46*(5/6), 922-940.

Petersen, K., & Lu, Y.-F. (2023). The downstream effects of body-worn cameras: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Justice Quarterly*, 40(6), 765-790.

Petersen, K., Papy, D., Mouro, A., & Ariel, B. (2023). The usage and utility of body-worn camera footage in courts: A survey analysis of state prosecutors. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 20(3), 534-569.

Petersen, K., Weisburd, D., Fay, S., Eggins, E., & Mazerolle, L. (2023). Police stops to reduce crime: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 19(1), e1302.

Smith, L., Swartz, P., & Irvin-Erickson, Y. (2023). "Information is power:" Promoting a safer environment for college students to report sexual violence. *Journal of School Violence*, 23(1), 30-42.

Yang, S.-M., Gill, C. E., Lu, Y.-F., Azam, M., & Kanewske, L. C. (2024). A police-clinician co-response team to people with mental illness in a suburban-rural community: A randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-023-09603-8

Weisburd, D., Jonathan-Zamir, T., White, C., Wilson, D. B., & Kuen, K. (2024). Are the police primarily responsible for influencing place-level perceptions of procedural justice and effectiveness? A longitudinal study of street segments. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 61(1), 76-123.

Weisburd, D., Jonathan-Zamir, T., Perry, G., & Hasisi, B. (Eds.) (2023). *The Future of Evidence Based Policing*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Weisburd, D., Petersen, K., & Fay, S. (2023). Does scientific evidence support the widespread use of SQFs as a proactive policing strategy? *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 17*, paac098.

Weisburd, D., Wilson, D., Petersen, K., Telep, C. (2023). Does police patrol in large areas prevent crime? Revisiting the Kansas City Preventive Patrol Experiment. *Criminology and Public Policy, 22*(3), 543–560.

Weisburd, D., Uding, C. V., Hinkle, J.C., & Kuen, K. (2023). Broken windows and community social control: Evidence from a study of street segments. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278231168614

Wilson, D. B., & Lipsey, M. W. (2024). Scaling up effective juvenile delinquency programs by focusing on change levers: Evidence from a large meta-analysis. *Criminology and Public Policy, 23*(2).

Evan Cantwell

Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy
George Mason University
4400 University Drive, MS 6D12
Fairfax, Virginia 22030
cebcp.org
X@cebcp