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On Good Authority is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice program evaluation. This report was written by staff Senior Research Analyst Dan Higgins. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the Municipal Drug and Gang House Enforcement Pilot Program operated by the City of Chicago's Department of Buildings and Department of Law. The evaluation was conducted by Dan Higgins and James R. "Chip" Coldren Jr., Ph.D., of the Center for Research in Law and Justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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Controlling gang and drug house nuisances in Chicago

Law enforcement agencies throughout the U.S. have implemented many strategies to tackle gang and drug-related crime. The use of civil statutes and sanctions to reduce gang activity, drug dealing, disorderly behavior, and loitering is becoming more prevalent in large communities. Many of these strategies complement traditional policing techniques used to reduce crime in problem areas of big cities.

In November 1996, the City of Chicago implemented the Municipal Drug and Gang House Enforcement Pilot Program, a multi-agency effort that utilizes a nuisance abatement ordinance to address criminal gang and narcotics activity in specific areas. Under the ordinance the city is able to hold property owners accountable for some of their tenants' criminal activities.

Implemented in several police districts throughout the city, the program is proven to be effective at lowering gang- and drug-related activities in targeted buildings and their immediate areas.

This *On Good Authority* presents a summary of the findings from process and impact evaluations of the Municipal Drug and Gang House Enforcement Pilot Program. The study was conducted by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority on behalf of the Chicago Police Department.

Abatement strategy and structure

The Municipal Drug and Gang House Enforcement Pilot Program's mission is to tackle gang and drug problem buildings, known as non-owner occupied multi-unit dwellings. Multi-unit dwellings were targeted because they are believed to

foster gang and drug crime by acting as magnets for illegal activity. In addition, a lack of cooperation from building owners and managers seems to compound the problem. The lack of attention to structural deterioration, inadequate screening of potential tenants, failure to monitor who has access to the building, and failure to take action against tenants who are known to engage in criminal activities serve to feed the cycle of crime and disorder. The abatement program strategy attempts to engage building owners as proactive partners in corrective measures, and presents powerful deterrents against owners that are unresponsive.

The program utilizes an inspections task force to identify city buildings on major thoroughfares and residential streets with documented drug and gang problems. The task force also conducts inspections for code violations and provides recommendations for improving properties. Some cases are referred to city attorneys for prosecution under the modified city nuisance abatement ordinance. Administrative proceedings are conducted in these cases to bring landlords into compliance.

City attorneys are placed in police districts to assist with case identification and preparation. Placing attorneys closer to field operations resulted in quicker access to better case information and a better understanding of neighborhood problems. It was hoped that this would lead to more efficient prosecution of nuisance abatement cases and, ultimately, safer neighborhoods.

About the evaluation

The process evaluation involved a description of the operations and implementation experiences of the Municipal Drug and Gang House Enforcement Pilot Program that existed in the selected police districts, and a comparison of those operations to the original plans and goals set for the program. Evaluators interviewed 29 staff members associated with nuisance abatement operations, and observed the program. Evaluation staff supplemented interviews and observations with analyses of archival and administrative records.

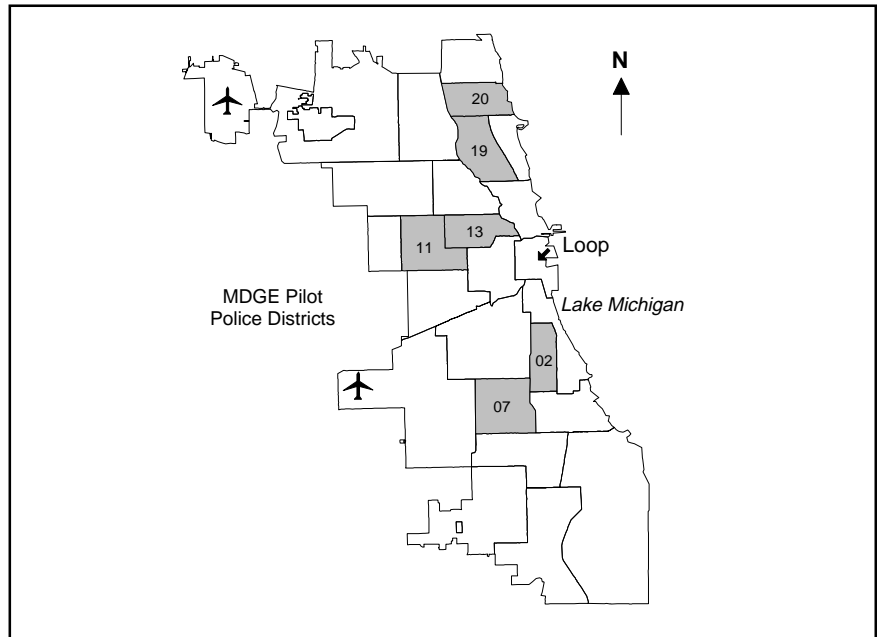
To measure the impact of the nuisance abatement program, evaluators used reported incidents of gang, narcotics, violent and property index¹, and criminal damage to property offenses over a 28-month period. The study consisted of 12-month periods prior to and following program implementation, and a 4-month intervention period, when inspections commenced at targeted buildings. Fifty-four sites targeted by the program were examined in Police District 2 (Figure 1). Criminal activity was mapped for one year prior to program implementation and one year following program implementation. Data collected regarding the activities around the buildings and catchment areas (a one-half block circular area around each building) were then analyzed to determine whether the program reduced criminal activity in targeted areas.

Inspection and enforcement process

Select addresses for inspection. The inspection process begins with the identification and targeting of dwelling units for inspection. Targeting activities are initiated a few weeks before case activity takes place. Inspectors tour potential targets with police personnel looking for evidence of code or criminal violations at specific addresses, and crime or nuisance problems, such as damage to property, gang graffiti, poor lighting, and litter.

Targets can be identified from other sources as well. Chicago Police Department community policing teams may suggest dwelling units for inspection

Figure 1
Pilot police districts for Chicago's gang and drug house nuisance abatement program

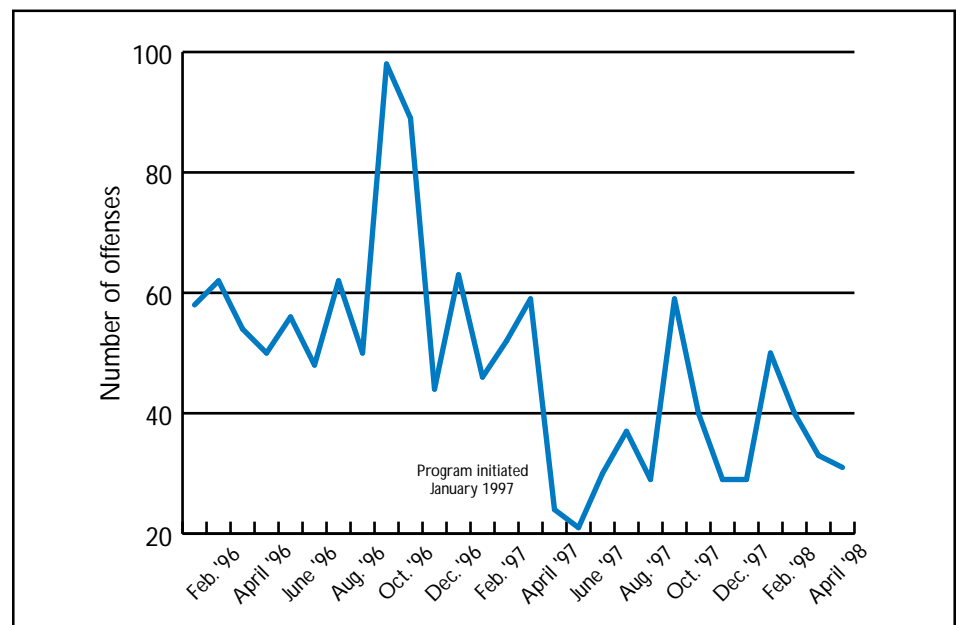


based on information gathered at community meetings, from residents, or during the normal course of daily police work in the neighborhoods. Field prosecutors and inspectors also may suggest dwelling units for inspection.

Targeted dwelling units must meet certain criteria relating to gangs and

narcotics violations prior to being inspected. The ordinance can be applied when a minimum of two misdemeanor arrests or one felony arrest associated with gang activity or drug trafficking are made within six months in or around each dwelling unit.

Figure 2
Pilot District 2 narcotics crime trend around buildings and catchment areas



Conduct inspections. Once district and program officials develop a list of dwellings to be inspected, teams attempt to conduct inspections at each address. The teams typically include general building, electrical, and plumbing inspectors. Other officials may join the inspection team, including police officers, beat team representatives, fire inspectors, and health inspectors.

The team first attempts to notify the targeted building's landlord of the inspection and requests admission to the property. When a landlord, building manager, or owner cannot be located, the team attempts to contact individual tenants for admission. Sometimes a few visits to an address are required before entry is obtained. In some instances a discussion with an owner, landlord, or tenant is not possible. In those cases, the team makes every effort to inspect the dwelling unit from outside and along the perimeter of the property.

Inspection teams document building code violations with reports and photographs. Goals of the inspections include:

- The compilation of an organized, legible case file for review by program management, with enough information to prosecute.
- Contact with property owners and landlords to provide advice and inform them of resources available to help better manage and screen tenants, fix properties, and avoid future problems.

Prepare case information. After an inspection is conducted, inspectors prepare reports including a list of citation violations, evidence, photos, and recommendations for further action. The information is then reviewed by building supervisors, amended and supplemented if necessary, and delivered to program attorneys for consideration of further action.

Enforcement action and subsequent case processing. Program attorneys review information collected to determine the quality of a case. In cases that are accepted by program attorneys, four courses of action may be pursued. These include:

- Sending a notification of violation letter to the landlord or property owner

and pursue a course of voluntary compliance.

- Requiring the landlord or owner to attend the Landlord Training Program, a special seminar on property improvement, tenant screening, and management.
- Pursuing the code violations through a special administrative hearing that includes possible imposition of fines and other sanctions.
- Bringing the case to a civil court, the most formal sanction possible. This course of action typically is used in cases

Table 1

Reported offenses before and after intervention in District 2 buildings and catchment areas

Target buildings (54)			
	Before	After	Percent change
Gang narcotics offenses	32	4	-88%
Non-gang narcotics offenses	91	31	-66%
Total	123	35	-72%
Criminal damage to property offenses	55	44	-20%
Violent index offenses	150	133	-11%
Property index offenses	197	172	-13%
Catchment areas (54)			
	Before	After	Percent change
Gang narcotics offenses	116	79	-32%
Non-gang narcotics offenses	294	205	-30%
Total	410	284	-31%
Criminal damage to property offenses	212	207	-2%
Violent index offenses	616	620	1%
Property index offenses	826	864	5%

of repeated criminal gang and drug violations, and when landlords or owners refuse to pursue any other means to resolve the case.

Re-inspection and case closing. Re-inspection of dwelling units in the process of compliance or nearing case completion is a key component of the abatement process. Building inspectors and program attorneys determine whether a case has been completed successfully or unsuccessfully. Most inspection cases are resolved through voluntary compliance after a violation notification.

Evaluation findings

The Authority's evaluation revealed that:

- The abatement program was implemented as planned. Sensible adjustments to program operations were made during implementation based on field experience and what was being learned from the evaluation.
- Most of the dissatisfaction expressed by program staff was related to resources, and not to personnel, political, or systemic problems.
- Most staff and leaders felt their work was productive and beneficial.
- Research observations and administrative data support the notion that field prosecutors improved task force operations, but their roles varied from week to week and neighborhood to neighborhood, and based on individual skills, professional aspirations, and experience.
- The program had the intended impact across all crime categories for the 54 targeted buildings studied in this research, but the reduction was most

pronounced for reported narcotics offenses. The reduction in reported narcotics offenses was about one-third in the 54 catchment areas but changes in violent and property index, and criminal damage to property offenses were negligible (Table 1).

- A correlation between crime reduction in building and catchment areas for the study sites was found, suggesting that cleaning up an individual drug house might have the positive residual effect of cleaning up a nearby area of one-half block around the building.
- Some geographic crime displacement may occur as a result of this program, but the research design did not address that issue specifically.
- There is evidence that program effects are lasting. Downturns in targeted crimes continued well after the inspection teams left the targeted areas (Figure 2).

Conclusion

The full evaluation report notes important limitations, such as resources available

for evaluation research, available data, program operations that conflicted with evaluation plans, and the limited number of pilot district cases. These limitations preclude any broad or sweeping statements about the program's impact and success. It is not possible to generalize from the experience of one district or sample of targeted properties.

Since the process evaluation concluded that program implementation was successful, and since the impact evaluation found evidence of program success, it is reasonable to make a connection between project implementation and positive outcomes. It would not be reasonable, however, to assume that replication of the program citywide over many years would result in successful outcomes equal to those observed in the district studied for this project. Ongoing and more rigorous evaluation would be required to make that determination. ♦

¹Violent index offenses include homicide, aggravated assault, criminal sexual assault, and robbery. Property index offenses include theft, burglary, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

