On Good Authority

Outcomes of the Gang Violence Reduction Project

After seven years of comprehensive research, the Little Village Gang Violence Reduction Project (GVRP) evaluators submitted their conclusions on changes in gang member criminal behavior. The findings included:

• Gang members aged 17-24 targeted by the program generally reduced and/or lowered their level of arrests in relation to gang members in the comparison sample during the five-year program period.

• The project appeared to be particularly successful with the more serious offenders, using a combined approach of comprehensive social intervention, suppression, and opportunities provision in the community.

Researchers from the University of Chicago conducted an implementation and impact evaluation of the GVRP from 1992 through 1999. The evaluation was funded using federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds distributed through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. This *On Good Authority* presents some of the highlights of findings surrounding criminal histories and outcomes between targeted gang members and comparison groups in the 10th police district.

The GVRP began operating in mid-1992 and continued through mid-1997. University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration Professor Irving Spergel designed the project and became its coordinator over time.

Two major hard-core violent gang constellations were targeted. The assumption underlying the project's structure was that gang problems, especially serious violence, occur in response to community social disorganization and lack of avenues of social opportunities. The key policy and program focus of the project model was to have social organizations and representatives of the local community work together to de-isolate, socially assist, and control young gang members so that they could participate in legitimate mainstream activities in society. The project strategy and structure included outreach services provided by youth workers with ties to the target community, including some former gang members, referrals for service and supervision from police and probation officers, and gang violence suppression efforts conducted by the Chicago Police Department.

The evaluation sought to determine whether gang crime, mainly violence, was reduced at the individual, gang, and area levels, and, if so, whether the GVRP and its particular strategies accounted for these changes. Evaluators collected data over time using a variety of collection methods: gang member interviews, field observations, project staff contact and service records, community surveys, aggregate level police data, census data, team meeting records, and focus groups.

Program and comparison groups

Comparative data analysis was completed across three groups: 195 program youths, 90 quasi-program youths, and 208 comparison youths. The quasi-program and comparison groups consisted of selected members of the same two gangs, the Latin Kings and the Two Six, who were co-arrestees of program youths at the time the latter entered the program. The distinguishing feature between the

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quasi-program and comparison group was service contacts. Evaluators discovered that some gang members selected as part of the comparison group did receive some sort of service contact from program staff, but were not interviewed or targeted by the program staff. These gang members became the quasi-program group.

Demographic data for the three groups were similar. The racial makeup was predominantly Latino, all sample youths were male, and the mean age of each group was just under 18 years.

Preprogram criminal histories were identified for the program and comparison groups. The quasi-program group was significantly more delinquent at the time the program started.

Evaluators established seven models for analysis, with each model using one or more of the following independent or control variables:

1. Offense level in the pre-program period, Time I (4 ½ years prior to program start).
2. Age categories (19 years and older, 17 and 18 years, and 16 years and younger).
3. Sample groups (program, quasi-program, and comparison).
4. Detention/incarceration levels in the pre-program (Time I) and program (Time II) periods.

Two key interaction variables were utilized:

1. Age category in interaction with the particular sample.
2. Offense level in interaction with the particular sample.

The outcomes measured within the seven models highlighted included:

1. Total arrest change.
2. Total serious violence change (homicide, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, and armed robbery).
3. Total violence arrest change (including serious and less serious violence arrests).
4. Property arrest change.
5. Drug arrest change.
6. Other arrest category changes.
7. Changes in offenses of special interest to law enforcement, such as mob action, gang loitering, and disorderly conduct.

Differences in total arrests

The age categories of 19 and older, and 17 and 18 years old had a reduction in total arrests while participating in the project. Gang members 16 and under participating in the project, however, showed a significant increase in total arrests during the program period compared to prior to the program. Similar arrest patterns were found for the other sample groups as well.

Evaluators concluded for the first model that there was an overall increase in the number of total arrests comparing Time I with Time II for each sample. Older youths generally had fewer arrests across the samples, while the younger gang members had more. The program group and quasi-program group of 17 and 18 year olds did better than the comparison sample. The difference was statistically significant between the quasi-program and the comparison groups. The

youngest group of program youths, 16 and under, appeared to do worse than the comparison group.

Serious violent crime arrests

All age categories across each of the three samples reduced their levels of arrest for serious violent crimes, including homicide, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, and armed robbery. Those 19 years and over experienced the greatest reduction, followed by those 16 years and under, and finally the 17 and 18 year olds.

Looking across sample groups and age categories, the program group exhibited a larger reduction of arrests for serious violence than the quasi-program and comparison groups. The reduction in arrests for serious violence was nearly 70 percent greater for the program group, controlling for other variables. The findings suggest the GVRP had a distinctive and considerable effect in reducing the level of arrests for serious violence in relation to the comparison group, and also in relation to the less-served, quasi-program group.

Total violent crime arrests

The total violent crime arrests variable included not only the more serious violent crimes just discussed, but also simple battery, simple assault, weapons violations, and intimidation. The program group had a greater reduction of total arrests for violence at all age levels compared to the other samples. Program sample subgroups with a prior history of more extensive arrests for violence did better than the comparable quasi-program and comparison sample subgroups. Based on police arrest data, the evaluators felt that the GVRP was effective in reducing total as well as serious violence.

Property crime arrests

Evaluators also examined the change in all property arrests. By age categories, the youngest age group demonstrated the least reduction of property crime arrests during the project period. The 19 years and over group had the greatest reduction in property offenses, followed by the 17 and 18 year olds. Although not significant, the patterns for reduction across sample groups were greatest for the

quasi-program group, and almost identical for the program and comparison groups.

Evaluators concluded that the GVRP appeared to have no distinguishable effect on the level of property crime arrests of the program sample that was different from that of the quasi-program and comparison samples. In addition, while there was generally a reduction of property arrests across all of the sample groups, there was no evidence the reduction was associated with the reduction in violent crime.

Drug crime arrests

The GVRP did not target drug crime behavior by gang members, although workers were concerned about it and provided some service with regard to the problem. Overall, gang members with more drug crime arrests prior to the project decreased their arrests during the project. Gang members with fewer drug crime arrests prior to the project increased their drug crime arrests during the project period. However, the subgroup of youth with highest number of drug arrests in the past showed an increase rather than a decrease in arrests during the project period. Overall, the program sample showed a decrease in total drug arrests, while the quasi-program group and, in particular, the comparison sample showed increases. Across age categories, the under age 16 program group and, in particular, the age 17-18 program group showed the most significant decreases.

Evaluators were unable to fully explain from a program perspective why the GVRP seemed to have an effect on the reduction of gang-related drug crime during the evaluation period. It was likely that the combination of project police and youth outreach attention was effective with those drug-dealing program youths who were only partially committed to drug dealing and were in the process of transitioning out of the gang and criminal behavior generally. In other words, if violence was reduced, drug crime was also reduced. However, those who were heavily into selling drugs increased their involvement.

Other arrests

Other crime arrests included all other crimes listed as committed by the sample youths, including status offenses and violations of probation, but especially crimes such as mob action, disorderly conduct, gang loitering, and obstruction of justice. Gang members who had high arrests for other crimes prior to the project time period experienced sharp reductions in arrests for such crimes during the project time period. There was also an increase in arrests for other crimes, particularly minor crimes, by those 16 and under during the project period, while gang members in the older age categories experienced a reduction in such offenses. There was little difference in arrest levels across sample groups or when analyzed across age and sample group.

## Special police activity crimes

Certain of these crime categories, such as disorderly conduct, mob action, and obstruction of a police officer, are closely related to police suppression activities, particularly with respect to young gang members. This model of analysis examined whether law enforcement was becoming more suppressive at Time II and arresting more gang members for minor crimes, especially younger program participants. Evaluators found that participants with the least number of

arrests for typical police suppression types of activity at Time I had the most increase in such arrests at Time II. Conversely, participants who had the most arrests for crimes of this type at Time I had the most decrease in crimes of this type at Time II.

When comparing across age categories, the 16 years and under group showed an increase in arrest levels for these types of crimes while the 17 and 18 year olds, and the 19 years and older groups showed a decrease. Across sample groups, the program sample showed a greater decrease in these arrests at Time II compared to Time I, followed by a lesser decrease by the quasi-program and comparison samples. There were no statistically significant differences for the 16 and under group across the three samples, although there was an increase in arrests for this age group in the three samples.

Surprisingly, there appeared to be no evidence of an increase in suppression-type activities by police at Time II compared to Time I for all of the samples. Evidence indicated that there was a decrease, and the decrease was significantly greater for the program sample in relation to the comparison samples. Thus the police were not targeting program gang youth for arrest more often at Time I than they were at Time II, at least for minor crimes.

Age distribution for program and comparison samples

31%

40%

29%

16 and under (n=164)

17-18 (n=123)

19 and over (n-131)
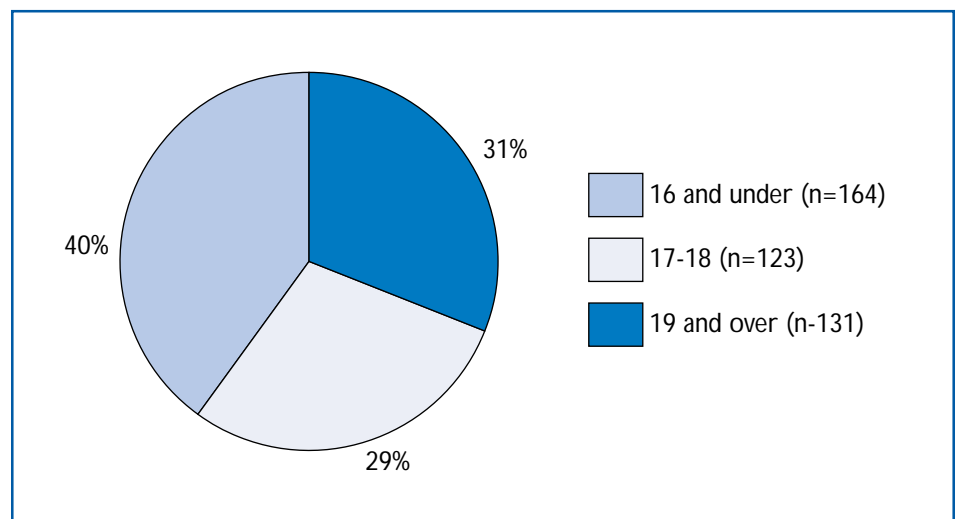
Success and failure

Regarding the overall success and failure of the GVRP, the evaluators also focused on whether the program succeeded or failed in its effort to reduce the number of serious gang crime offenders, especially gang violent offenders in Little Village, not just the level of offending. The evaluation expectation was that a larger number of program youths targeted would reduce their gang crime, especially serious gang violence compared to gang members with similar backgrounds not targeted by the project.

If a youth shifted from a medium or high level of crime in the pre-program period to a lower level of crime, regardless if the amount of the shift was statistically significant, he was classified as a success. If the youth remained at low, medium or high levels of crime, or shifted from the low to medium or high, or from the medium to the high category, he was classified as a failure. Additionally,

evaluators examined these shifts of crime across three categories: total arrests, serious violence, and total violence.

In a series of logistic regression analyses, with all three offending groups (low, medium, and high), the program sample did better than the comparison sample in terms of the ratio of youths with reduced total arrests.

When we focused our analysis on the more serious type of offender, especially the serious violent offender, we found more program youth reducing their level of serious violence.

In conclusion, evaluators found that youth in the program sample generally reduced and/or lowered their level of arrests for violence and drug crime in relation to youth in the comparison sample in the program period. Program youth also showed greater reduction in arrests that typically characterize police tactics for dealing with young gang members, i.e., mob action, disorderly

conduct, gang loitering and obstruction of justice. Serious offenders in the program sample experienced a greater reduction in crime levels than serious offenders in the comparison (non-served or project-contact) groups.◆

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A detailed statistical analysis of the findings contained in this report is available from the Authority.