

Focused Deterrence in Philadelphia: Fighting Crime with Redemption and Hope

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ABSTRACT: Philadelphia is the most violent of the nation's ten largest cities. In order to reduce gun violence and provide for a safer city, an innovative solution is necessary. Professor David Kennedy's model of focused deterrence, notifying violent offenders of the consequences of their actions and providing priority social services for those who want a change, is being implemented with success in South Philadelphia.

The Vicious Cycle

Conventional approaches to reducing gun violence in Philadelphia have failed. While numbers over the past decade have fluctuated, resulting in an overall decrease in violent crime, the reduction has been insufficient. Philadelphia's epidemic of gun violence is similar to that of other cities around the country. It is driven by the common ailments of urban society: poverty, joblessness, broken homes, broken schools, drugs, generational cycles and the like. Despite the general causes, the perpetrators of much of the violence are specific individuals and gangs or groups who are readily

identifiable. The trend in law enforcement today is to organize policing and prosecution around this small percentage of prolific offenders. The current approach of arresting, prosecuting and putting them in jail is not working.

Offenders are being paroled back into the community with no realistic hope for success. As a result, it is clear that we cannot arrest our way out of the problem. We need the community and law enforcement to work together to prevent violence rather than just punish those who commit violent acts.

Violence in the City of Brotherly Love

In 2012, over 6,200 Philadelphians were the victims of some form of gun violence. That means one out of every 258 city residents was individually and directly victimized by a gun. There were 282 people killed by gunfire, 2,512 aggravated assaults with firearms (with 1,282 people shot) and 3,398 gunpoint robberies. These victims' families, friends and communities were further victimized by the lasting effects of gun crime on their lives (Admin., 2012).

Of the nation's ten largest cities, Philadelphia is the most deadly. Based on an approximate population of 1.6 million people, Philadelphia's 331 homicides in 2012 represent a value of 20.7 homicides per 100,000 people.

Comparatively, Chicago, well-known in the media for

having a banner year in terms of gun violence, had 19 homicides per 100,000 people. New York City, having their least deadly year since 1960, compares at 5.1 homicides per 100,000 people. Since the war on terror in Afghanistan began in 2001, almost double the number of Philadelphians have been killed by gunfire as members of the Armed Forces have been killed in that conflict.

Breaking the Cycle

To address the problems of concentrated geographic gun violence and the small population of prolific, violent gun offenders, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, the police department and the district attorney's office created GunStat in January 2012. GunStat is a criminal-intelligence-driven collaborative between the district attorney, the police and multiple other agencies designed to focus the city's limited resources on those concentrated areas of violence and prolific offenders. The GunStat intelligence development process was expanded in mid-2012 to include "group-mapping" and "group motivated incident reviews," information that was required to implement a proven gun violence reduction strategy known as focused deterrence.

Focused deterrence was developed by David Kennedy, a professor at John Jay College in New York, and detailed at length in his 2011 book, *Don't Shoot: One Man, A Street Fellowship, and The End of Violence in Inner-City America*. In the early 1990s, while working as a researcher at

Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Professor Kennedy discovered that the police had had success communicating directly with gang members before incidents of gun violence and letting them know specifically what would happen if they or a member of their gang or group committed a shooting. As part of what became known as the "Boston Ceasefire," the police and community members led by the local clergy organized formal meetings with gang members, known as "call-ins," where the gang members heard a series of messages discouraging continued violence. First, they heard from law enforcement: We know who you are, we know how you are associated and we know what you are doing. If you or a member of your gang is involved in a shooting, all of you will suffer whatever legal consequences we can bring to bear on you.

They heard from the community and from the families of murder victims that the violence was wrong and that it was destroying the community. Finally, they heard a message of hope and assistance. The members of law enforcement and the community understood that for some of them, it was difficult to get out of the cycle they were in, so help was made available; gang members were presented with an "off ramp" out of the cycle in the form of opting to receive help in whatever area they needed, such as finding a job, getting a GED or getting off of drugs. After the call-ins, every partner delivered on their promises. When there was a shooting, the police took

action against the entire gang or group responsible. When someone called for help, they got help.

A Philadelphia Story

For South Division, the smallest of Philadelphia's six divisions, we began the process by identifying the violent offenders and groups and bringing together multiple agencies to deliver sanctions and social services. The first call-in for South was held in April 2013. The initial group of approximately 40 offenders was ordered by the Court of Common Pleas to attend the call-in based on their probation or parole status. Like in Boston, the group members in Philadelphia heard messages from law enforcement, the community and social services. The community was represented by ex-offenders and the mother of a murder victim. That mother told the group members about the horrific impact of her son's death and asked them to take the offer of services to avoid prison or the same fate as her son. Many of the hardened group members who were scowling and bored during the law enforcement description of sanctions began to cry during the mother's talk. Within an hour of the meeting, two of the 40 offenders had called the social service hotline and within weeks, a dozen were enrolled in services. Four found jobs, two reenrolled in school and all of those engaged with the social services coordinator are making some effort at changing the direction of their lives.

There have also been shootings since the call-ins. As

promised, law enforcement has utilized all of the legal vulnerabilities of the group/gang members. The law enforcement actions include the revocation of probation, rearrest of group members on older cases, enforcement of child support warrants, coordination with utility companies to interdict and arrest for utility theft, referrals to the department of public welfare for fraud investigations and federal indictment. With each of these actions, group members are reminded that they are suffering these consequences because their group committed an act of gun violence.

A Sign of Hope

A research team from Temple University is working to analyze outcome and impact data to quantify the results. The approach has been implemented in cities all across America with great results. The cities of Boston, Cincinnati, Stockton, Indianapolis, Nashville and Lowell, Massachusetts have all implemented intelligence-led crime prevention programs based on Professor Kennedy's model (The Campbell Collaboration, 2011). All of these cities have experienced dramatic reductions in gun violence since implementing Professor Kennedy's model.

Boston saw a 63% decrease in youth homicide, a 32% decrease in citywide shots fired calls, a 25% decrease in all-age gun assault incidents and a 44% decrease in youth gun assault incidents in a targeted district (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001). These statistics show that

the decrease in gun-based crime was directly related to the implementation of the program.

Gun violence is one of the most difficult and devastating problems facing our city. With the implementation of strategies like GunStat and focused deterrence, we are beginning a process that has the potential to save lives and heal our city.

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