

SMART PROSECUTION

Chatham County District Attorney's Office Smart Prosecution East End Gun Violence Initiative The Chatham County Smart Prosecution Program

Statement of the Problem

Violent crime has risen dramatically in Savannah (the county seat of Chatham County, Georgia) over the last several years. For example, between 2014 and 2015, the homicide rate rose from 32 individuals to 54 individuals per year. In 2015, an additional 525 aggravated assaults were identified; of those, 298 involved guns. By contrast, in 2014, there were a total of 366 aggravated assaults; of those, 195 involved guns. Through collaboration between law enforcement at the research partner, Georgia Southern University (GSU), the site has identified five regions in the city where .5% of the overall population (young adult males) commit most of the reported violent crime. The site will also include one intervention area (encompassing a police beat) and two comparison areas (two police beats which are qualitatively similar to the experimental area).

In addition, as with many other areas nationally, Chatham County's law enforcement community struggles with reluctant and recanting witnesses for a list of reasons including: lack of trust, social pressures against snitching, and fear of retaliation.

Strategies and Tactics

Since August 2015, the Chatham County District Attorney's Office (DAO) partnered with the National Network of Safe Communities. As part of this initiative, the DAO focuses on reducing gun violence by focusing on group and gang violence. For its Smart Prosecution initiative, the site will identify local regions for gun violence in the Savannah area, identify the most violent offenders within, and track and prioritize prosecution within the hotspots. This process will use a modified vertical prosecution method; two prosecutors will handle cases from indictment until disposition. One prosecutor will handle non-fatal shootings, another will handle homicides. If additional charges occur that are found to be violations of current probation for the offender, those same prosecutors will handle the probation case. Cases that do not fit the

screening for Smart Prosecution will be diverted to alternative programs – particularly juveniles identified as minor offenders or at-risk of violent offending or victimization.

To ensure community support, the site's research team at GSU, led by Dr. Chad Posick, will engage with community groups by attending regular community meetings to receive input and direction on the project. A major goal of the project is to consider and address the needs and concerns of the community and to evaluate attitudes and perceptions regarding the neighborhood and the SMART community prevention strategy. To accomplish this, GSU will develop community surveys to gauge community attitudes and perception of violence in their neighborhoods.

The site envisions an overall reduction in violent crime, swift prosecution of violent offenders, and greater trust among victims, victims' families, and community members.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The DAO, GSU, and the SCMPD's Savannah Area Regional Intelligence Center (SARIC) collaborated by taking SCMPD's crime statistics to map the regions where the most violent crime occurred over the past year.

The team plans to continue work with the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) and Youth Intercept program for case diversions and with End Gun Violence for intervention with serious violent offenders. The team plans to work with local judges and community organizations to create ownership and build sustainability. GSU is working with SARIC to compile data on crimes committed with a weapon and possession of firearm cases.

Research Methodology

GSU will conduct a formal impact evaluation via a mixed methods approach. This will consist of a quantitative analysis of before-and-after crime rates as well as an analysis of the intervention hotspot in comparison to the comparison hotspots. GSU will also analyze time to prosecution, from arrest to prosecution, using time sensitive statistical analyses including survival/hazard models. Tests of proportions will examine whether there was a significant increase in the proportion of cases that lead to conviction before-and-after the program. To gauge any changes in citizen perceptions and attitudes, repeated measures will be collected every six months on community leaders, youth, and local law enforcement, self-reports of trust in the police, feelings of safety, and perceptions of neighborhood disorder (as well as other features typical in self-report surveys). Longitudinal statistical methods will be used to investigate changes over time in among these three factors. Short-term changes will be monitored and

discussed to consider alternative strategies where possible during the project period. The research team will provide a final evaluation report.