

Jackson County District Attorney's Office Smart Prosecution Initiative

Statement of the Problem

Kansas City's violent crime rate continues to rank the highest among comparably-sized U.S. cities. The jurisdiction's violent crime is especially concentrated in the "East Zone," with a homicide rate of 56.9 homicides per 100,000 residents; a rate almost twice the city's average and more than 10 times the national average. The East Zone also reported 969 aggravated assaults and 526 robberies. Given these high rates of violent crime, the Jackson County Prosecuting Attorney's Office ("JCPAO") will collaborate with the Kansas City Police Department ("KCPD") through a Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Smart Policing grant¹ to innovatively reduce crime, prevent victimization, save lives, and build trust in the community, especially in the East Zone.

Moreover, victims of violent crimes are less likely to report. Local studies conducted in 2012 showed that 60% of shooting victims did not cooperate with law enforcement; thereby leading to unsuccessful prosecutions and non-deterrent sentences of probation instead of incarceration.

Strategies and Tactics

JCPAO believes this violent crime strategies can be improved by shifting to intelligence-driven prosecution including: social network analysis and data analytics. The site will target five particularly violent hotspots in the East Zone, each approximately ½ square miles, chosen from data generated by KCPD from 2015 and 2016.

Social network analysis helps law enforcement understand the connectedness between individuals and groups of individuals, and can help illuminate why cooperation rates may be so low among victims. To test the process of social network analysis using data available through JCPAO, the site's researchers at California State University-Fresno conducted an initial analysis. Data were pulled from all 2015 and 2016 referrals to the office. A two-mode network was created to identify all the cases connected through the people involved as defendants in one of

¹The Smart Policing Initiative (SPI) is a collaborative consortium composed of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), and 31 local law enforcement agencies that are testing solutions to serious crime problems in their jurisdictions. More information is available at https://www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program_ID=80.

five identified hotspots of violent crime in East Zone. Next, all the clusters of people and incidents that were connected to the hotspots were identified. These data, in part, will inform prosecutors on prioritizing offenders. Further in the process, an additional network analysis will be conducted to identify the central victims.

JCPAO will use geographic prosecution to focus on distinct communities or neighborhoods, broadening the mission and awareness of its office to include prevention, reduction and management of crime. Examples include: focusing on abandoned, blighted properties and initiating civil suits to clear title; using restorative justice for certain property crimes cases to facilitate communication between victims, offenders, and the community; and, hiring a victim advocate who will work exclusively with victims in the five hotspot areas, regardless if the case is investigated or charged.

Prosecutors will keep office hours at KCPD's East Patrol Campus to further strengthen relationships with police officers. Following the vertical prosecution model, prosecution teams will manage cases from arraignment through disposition.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The site will work closely with KCPD, a SMART Policing Grant recipient, whose data determined which five violent hotspots should be targeted. KCPD and JCPAO are also sharing a community engagement coordinator, who will meet with neighborhood associations to hear concerns and share progress on the initiative. The site will also work with Legal Aid and private attorneys to clear title and initiate nuisance suits on abandoned, blighted properties. The Center for Conflict Resolution will supervise the sites restorative justice-based diversion programs.

Research Methodology

The site's researchers at California State University-Fresno will: establish protocols for victim assistance; develop ongoing strategies to identify ongoing and recognized problems; conduct a process evaluation to assess implementation and plan for continued sustainability; and, conduct an outcome evaluation through assessing of overall program impacts of targeted objectives. At the end of the initiative, the evaluations will determine whether violent crimes in the East Zone were handled more efficiently with vertical prosecution; whether geographic-based prosecution increased the likelihood that victims participated in the criminal justice process; and, whether geographic, vertical-based prosecution contributed to violence reduction within the five, targeted hotspot areas in the East Zone.

To evaluate the implementation of geographic-based prosecution, the researchers will compare case characteristics between the five target areas and five randomly selected control areas within the city. All crimes in the treatment and control areas will be compared to identify the time for cases to be referred to the office, the time until charging, and the time until disposition. Additionally, case dispositions will be examined, including the percent of cases dismissed for lack of victim or witness participation. Second, the evaluation of the victim services program is meant to provide program administrators insight to the perception of their client, stakeholder and staff opinions on the performance of the program. Researchers will use both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the timing of contact and referrals/interagency issues, measurement of caseloads, assessment of record keeping procedures, assessment of victims, staff and community feedback, and evaluation of service proficiency and/or service redundancy. The researchers will issue a final evaluation report.