



# Evaluating criminal justice programs designed to reduce crime by targeting repeat gang offenders<sup>☆</sup>

Douglas R. Kent<sup>a,\*</sup>, Stewart I. Donaldson<sup>b</sup>, Phelan A. Wyrick<sup>b</sup>, Peggy J. Smith<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Westminster Police Department, 8200 Westminster Boulevard, Westminster, CA 92683, USA*

<sup>b</sup>*School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences, Claremont Graduate University, 123 E. Eighth Street, Claremont, CA 91711, USA*

<sup>c</sup>*Sociology Department, California State University at Long Beach, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840, USA*

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## Abstract

This paper suggests that a theory-driven approach be taken in the evaluation of gang crime reduction programs. The rationale for selecting this approach and an example of this type of evaluation are presented. The gang program evaluated involved close collaboration among law enforcement, probation, and prosecution toward incarcerating repeat gang offenders. Data were collected concerning incarceration and subsequent crime over a seven-year period. Trend analysis indicated a strong relationship between incarceration and gang crime trends, and an overall reduction of 47% in gang crime. It is suggested that policy makers and researchers consider replicating this model to further test its effects. Practical and methodological aspects of evaluating gang crime reduction programs are discussed. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Communities throughout the United States are searching for ways to reduce violence and destruction of property caused by members of street gangs. Criminal justice agencies have implemented a variety of policies and programs intended to reduce gang crime, but little more than anecdotal information exists as to the actual effectiveness of these efforts. The lack of data about effective approaches has prompted leading scholars to declare program evaluation as a top priority in gang research (Howell, 1994; Klein, 1993). This paper describes various types of gang programs, suggests an approach that could be used in the evaluation of gang programs, reports an evaluation of a criminal justice program intended to reduce gang crime, and concludes

with a discussion of evaluation issues and recommendations.

## 1. Central definitions

At present, there is no consensus in either academia or government as to the definition of the terms ‘street gang’, ‘gang crime’ or ‘gang member’. For purposes of this discussion, we adopt Klein’s (1971) influential definition of a gang: an identifiable group of youngsters who (a) are generally perceived as a distinct aggregation by others in their neighborhood; (b) recognize themselves as a group (almost invariably with a group name); and (c) have been involved in a sufficient number of delinquent incidents to call forth a consistent negative response from neighborhood residents and/or law enforcement agencies. This definition comes closest to describing the kind of street gang discussed in this paper (see Bursik & Grasmick, 1993 for debate on the definition of this term), with the exclusion of tagger crews, skinheads, and hate groups. Although these

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-714-898-3315; fax: +1-714-379-9604.

*E-mail address:* dougk@cl.westminster.ca.us (D.R. Kent).

groups fit within Klein's definition, they were excluded by the gang crime reduction program evaluated because their offenses often differ from those of street gangs.

Competing definitions of gang crime diverge on whether the offender is affiliated with a gang, or whether the motive of the offense benefits the gang. For this paper, we adopt the affiliation definition because it is consistent with the California Penal Code, it does not preclude the motivation definition, and it is most suitable for measurement because motives for crimes are often indeterminable or unrecorded. We define a gang member as any individual who believes he is a member of a street gang, and whose membership is acknowledged by his own gang and/or members of other gangs. Thus, the discussion to follow is consistent with the layperson's understanding of what a street gang is, gang crime is defined as any criminal offense that is committed by a member of a gang, and a gang member is an individual who recognizes himself as a member and whose membership is acknowledged by others.

## 2. Classification of gang programs

The variety and complexity of gang programs operating across the nation are illustrated by Howell (1998) who provides a brief description of several gang programs and efforts to evaluate them. Gang programs can be categorized by their targeted behavior (reduction of gang membership or gang crime) and by their activities (prevention or intervention). Of course, many programs incorporate more than one of these approaches (see Conly, Kelly, Mahanna & Warner 1993 as examples), and it is possible that multiple approaches have the greatest potential to ultimately reduce gang crime.

In general, gang *membership* programs seek to reduce individual involvement in gangs. Thus, gang *membership prevention* programs intend to keep individuals at risk of gang membership from future involvement in gangs, and gang *membership intervention* programs are designed to extricate individuals from present involvement in a gang. Membership prevention is often overlooked in policy and program planning, and is almost never evaluated. Convincing longitudinal data indicate that preventing gang membership would ultimately be effective in reducing crime (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte & Chard-Wierschem, 1993). Anecdotal information concerning removal of individuals from gang membership suggests that this effort is time consuming and often unsuccessful. For this reason, reducing gang membership may be a more promising approach to reducing gang crime, and membership prevention programs should be given greater attention by policy makers and program planners.

Gang *crime* programs seek to reduce the amount of crime committed by gang members. Thus, gang *crime prevention* programs intend to keep gang members from committing future crime, and gang *crime intervention* programs are designed to penalize individuals for crimes they have committed. An example of a crime prevention program is employment training that is intended to direct youth activities away from those that are illegal, thereby preventing future crime. Crime intervention programs are usually carried out by criminal justice agencies, and focus on the investigation, apprehension, and incarceration of gang members. However, in addition to the penalty for crimes committed, a prevention effect is achieved by preventing gang members from committing 'new' offenses in the community for the period of time while in custody. Crime reduction programs, especially those that emphasize intervention, are the most common type of gang program. Yet, very few of these programs have been evaluated with regard to their effectiveness.

## 3. Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team

The Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET) is a gang crime intervention program intended to provide a strong criminal justice response to offenses committed by gang members. The singular goal of this program is to place repeat gang offenders in custody for any and all possible offenses in order to disable offenders from committing crime in the community while incarcerated. The program was established in Westminster, a Los Angeles metropolitan city of 187,000 residents having a large Latino and Asian gang presence. Criminal justice agencies with jurisdiction over this area, the city police department, the county probation department, and the district attorney's office, entered into a formal agreement to work together to selectively incarcerate repeat gang offenders.

### 3.1. Multi-agency cooperation

Three police detectives, one probation officer, one district attorney, and one attorney's investigator were assigned to work together in the same office at the police department. This arrangement was intended to increase the amount of information shared, and to enhance coordination and strategic planning beyond what would occur through usual bureaucratic channels. Using this configuration, case preparation and witness protection could be organized even before a suspect was arrested. Cooperative efforts were expected to increase the ability to apprehend, investigate, and prosecute gang offenders.

### 3.2. *Selective intervention*

Individuals were identified as repeat gang offenders on the basis of their criminal record and were monitored for commission of new offenses. This was done on the assumption that individuals who have committed past crime will be most likely to commit future crime. This assumption is supported by studies finding a small percent of repeat criminal offenders to be responsible for a disproportionate share of crime (Greenwood & Abrahamse, 1982; Wolfgang, 1983; Wolfgang, Figlio & Sellin, 1972), and has been used in other law enforcement programs (e.g., Martin & Sherman, 1986; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1988).

Selective incarceration has also been proposed as a general crime reduction strategy. This strategy suggests that penalties for some types of crime (such as robbery or burglary) should be set on the basis of how much future crime the offender is predicted to commit if the criminal was not incarcerated (see Greenwood & Abrahamse, 1982). This approach has drawn criticism based largely upon practical concerns such as error in selection and uncertainty of outcomes (see Bernard & Ritti, 1991; Gottfredson, 1984; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1985; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1986; Hirsch, 1984; Messinger & Berk, 1987; Struckhoff, 1987), but also upon concern that ethnic minorities might be more likely to be designated as high rate offenders than majority group members (Decker & Salert, 1987). On the other hand, selective incarceration has received philosophical support (see Hanks, 1991; Wilson, 1983), and practical arguments in its favor have been made, including the possibility that limited criminal justice resources might most efficiently be used in ways in which public resources could have the greatest impact on crime reduction.

## 4. Selection of evaluation approach

Two evaluation approaches, experimentation and logic model examination, were considered in planning the TARGET evaluation. A test of the logic model was chosen over experimentation because of several notable limitations of the experiment in evaluating gang programs, and some distinct advantages of logic model testing.

### 4.1. *Experimental evaluation*

The classic experiment is often regarded as the strongest and most desirable research design because of its ability to guard against threats to internal validity. However, difficulty with its use in gang research centers on the feasibility of utilizing comparison

groups. One approach to obtaining a control group would match subjects on all relevant factors such as age, ethnicity and criminal record. Although methodologically possible, this approach is not likely to be feasible because many factors combine to determine the outcome of dependent variables such as gang membership, gang crime, case conviction, or offense penalties. For example, length of time in custody as a dependent variable may be influenced by the specific facts in a case, criminal record of the defendant, prosecution strategy, or opinions of a judge, and must therefore be controlled through matching. Although occasionally circumstances may arise in which matching is feasible (see Reed, Graham & Uchida, 1993 as an example of this), it would likely be very difficult to find control subjects matched on all relevant factors to conduct a gang program experiment.

Another approach to obtaining a comparison group might be to randomly assign half of the subject pool to 'treatment-as-usual'. In the case of gang crime intervention programs, this would require half of the subject pool to undergo usual criminal justice procedures. Typically, intervention programs are designed to be much stronger than usual treatment. Allowing control group subjects to remain free of the most intensive intervention possible through random assignment not only places the community at risk for crime, but undermines the ethical and legal obligations of criminal justice agencies to provide the highest possible level of public safety in the community. Thus, treatment-as-usual control group comparisons may not always be possible or desirable in evaluating gang programs.

An additional limitation of the traditional experimental design concerns the use of simple pretest and posttest measures on a given dependent variable. This approach provides no information about intervening mechanisms or explanations about how a program works. Such an approach has been labeled a 'black box' evaluation and has received strong criticism focused on the lack of specification and testing of implicit or explicit program linkages (mediating variables) between program efforts and intended outcomes (Bickman, 1987; Chen & Rossi, 1983, 1987; Costner, 1989). In sum, limitations in the feasibility and practicality of obtaining controls in gang programs, together with lack of information about intervening mechanisms, render the experimental evaluation design largely unsuitable in evaluation of gang programs.

### 4.2. *Logic model evaluation*

The logic model approach requires specification as to how a program is intended to work, and measurement of the treatment, the outcome, and key mediating variables. Specification and measurement of the logic

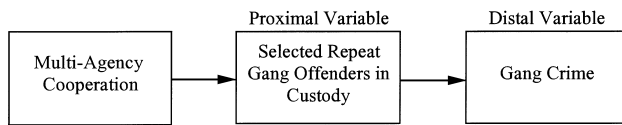


Fig. 1. Mediation model of the TARGET program.

model is called ‘theory-driven’ evaluation (Bickman, 1987; Chen, 1990; Chen & Rossi, 1983, 1987; Costner, 1989; Lipsey & Pollard, 1989), and its increasing use is considered an important trend in evaluation research (Lipsey, 1997; Weiss, 1997).

One variation of the theory-driven approach, called the ‘basic two-step’, identifies only one major intervening variable between the independent and dependent variable (Lipsey & Pollard, 1989). The intervening variable is the proximal variable that is expected to change directly as a result of program activities (e.g., incarceration of repeat gang offenders) and is a precondition for successful outcome. This step represents the hypothesis that program efforts actually affect the intervening variable. The outcome variable is the distal variable that represents that which the program is attempting to achieve (e.g., reduction of gang crime in a community). This step represents the hypothesis that a change in the identified intervening variable will result in a change in the desired outcome variable. The theory-driven approach avoids problems associated with obtaining control groups, and provides information as to the intervening mechanisms of the program.

## 5. Evaluation plan

In the TARGET program, cooperative agency efforts were expected to result in the incarceration of repeat gang offenders. It was hypothesized that incarceration of repeat gang offenders would result in the reduction of gang crime (see Fig. 1 for the model). The program theory being tested represents how the program was designed to reduce gang crime, without being a test of social science theory about gangs or gang crime (see Huff, 1996; Klein, 1995; Spergel, 1995 for work toward theory about gangs). A positive relationship between treatment delivery and custody status of target subjects would indicate successful program implementation. A positive relationship between custody status of target subjects and gang crime in the community would be indicative of a successful program theory.

### 5.1. Subjects

Repeat gang offenders were selected on the basis of a judgement of an individual’s gang membership status and criminal record made by a police detective. Selection criteria were general in nature and were not tested for validity or reliability, as program staff insisted on latitude in their application. Repeat gang offenders were identified and monitored for new criminal activity. Once an offense was committed, offenders were prosecuted to obtain the lengthiest period of incarceration possible, including increased sentence lengths applicable because of gang membership (see Standard Penal Code, 1994). The program processed 237 cases involving repeat offenders, all cases had favorable prosecution outcomes (e.g., guilty pleas or convictions), and nearly all defendants were kept in continuous custody from arrest through sentencing<sup>2</sup>.

### 5.2. Program effort

Although a measure of program treatment is desirable in the two-step procedure, in this case the program effort (investigation, apprehension, and arrest) can be assumed to have placed the repeat offenders in custody. However, a measure of *intensity* of program efforts (i.e., the amount of cooperative effort toward incarceration) would have been desirable. This would be valuable information because covariant trends in treatment intensity and outcomes could provide convincing evidence of the causal effects of the treatment. The measurement of intensity of program efforts will be addressed further in the limitations portion of this paper.

### 5.3. Proximal variable: custody status

Once repeat gang offenders had been selected, program efforts were directed toward placing them in custody. The amount of time spent in custody by all defendants and co-defendants (other individuals prosecuted in the same case) was recorded. The result was a custody score representing the total number of repeat offenders in custody each month. Because the unit of analysis was months, individuals in custody 15 or more days were counted as incarcerated that month, those in custody less than 15 days were not counted as incarcerated. The higher the value on the custody score, the more repeat offenders and co-defendants in custody each month.

### 5.4. Distal variable: gang crime

All reported gang crime in 11 categories was

<sup>2</sup> See Westminster Police Department, 1998, for detailed selection criteria and program process information.

counted each month, regardless of whether or not the suspect in a given report was a targeted repeat gang offender<sup>3</sup>. Any of these offenses labeled by the field officer as gang-related or indicating gang activity in the narrative were classified as gang crime. The reliability of this categorization was checked by sampling two months of reports for the first three years. Qualified raters read each report and made independent judgements as to whether the offense was or was not a gang crime. A test of reliability between independent raters (Cohen, 1960) was performed to determine consistency in the application of classification criteria. The result was satisfactory, showing nearly 100% agreement in the joint judgements after chance agreement was excluded. This result is not surprising given the general criterion applied by the judges. Had the criterion been more specific, such as requiring classification based upon motive for the crime, inter-rater reliability would have been much more difficult to achieve.

Prior to program implementation, gang crime was not counted separately from non-gang crime. Therefore, it was necessary to collect data retrospectively for the baseline period. Only 12 months of baseline data could be retrieved because reports from earlier months had been summarized for microfiche storage. The summary information did not contain enough narrative to reliably classify gang offenses. In all, 84 months of data were available, 12 months prior to program implementation, and 72 months after implementation. In order to improve the clarity of the trend to facilitate interpretation, a three-month moving average was computed. Thus, the gang crime measure represents a three-month average number of gang crimes in the 11 categories for each month.

### 5.5. Custody status of subjects and gang crime over time

Several threats to internal validity can be ruled out through observation of the proximal and distal variables over time. Had additional observations of gang crime been available prior to the implementation of the program, a regression discontinuity design could

<sup>3</sup> Crime categories included homicide, attempted homicide, robbery, assault, exhibiting a firearm, burglary, grand theft auto, petty theft, drug violations, disturbances, and shots fired (e.g., drive-by shooting). Forcible rape and arson categories were excluded as no gang offenses in these categories occurred during the period examined. In crime reports involving multiple offenses, only the most serious charge was counted. This procedure underrepresents crime, but was used to remain consistent with both California and United States crime reporting methods.

<sup>4</sup> Such an approach would provide nearly the same protection against threats to internal validity and even greater protection against threats to external validity than does the classic experimental design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

have been tested using interrupted time-series analysis<sup>4</sup>. However, the relationship between custody status and gang crime trends can be evaluated by observing the co-variation of trends as in single case study design methods (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1990). In such designs, the first stage consists of a baseline stage, the second stage is the introduction of the intervention, and the third stage is the subsequent pattern of observations. Changes in the frequency of custody status and gang crime in stages two and three are then contrasted with the baseline observations to assess the treatment effect. The present evaluation problem does not permit repeated application and removal of treatment to provide conclusive evidence of the program. Therefore, efforts were made to rule out alternative explanations of the observed effect.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Custody status and gang crime

It was hypothesized that a change in the custody status score would result in a change in the gang crime score. Each trend is shown in Fig. 2. The point in time at which the program began is indicated by the broken line. Although the program was implemented at this time point, various components were being brought into place and procedures refined during the first six months or so of the program. The relatively large fluctuations in the gang crime score in 1994 and 1996 are possibly due to changes in the intensity of program effort. A measure of program effort intensity would have provided information to check this, and this is addressed later in the limitations section.

After program implementation, the custody and gang crime trends are relatively consistent and covariant in the hypothesized directions. Thus, the placement of repeat offenders in custody appears to have had an effect upon reducing gang crime. Gang crime decreased by 11% during 1992, the first year of the program. The cumulative reduction in gang crime was 64% through 1993, 59% through 1994, and 47% through 1997. Unfortunately, because baseline observations are limited to 12 months, and because the baseline trend is not stable, interpretation of the gang crime pattern is subject to plausible alternative explanations.

### 6.2. Ruling out plausible alternative explanations

It is possible that the reduction in gang crime was attributable to a general decrease in crime in the community, rather than to program efforts. To check this, the trend in gang crime and the trend in non-gang crime in the community were compared. A smoothing procedure similar to that of the gang crime measure

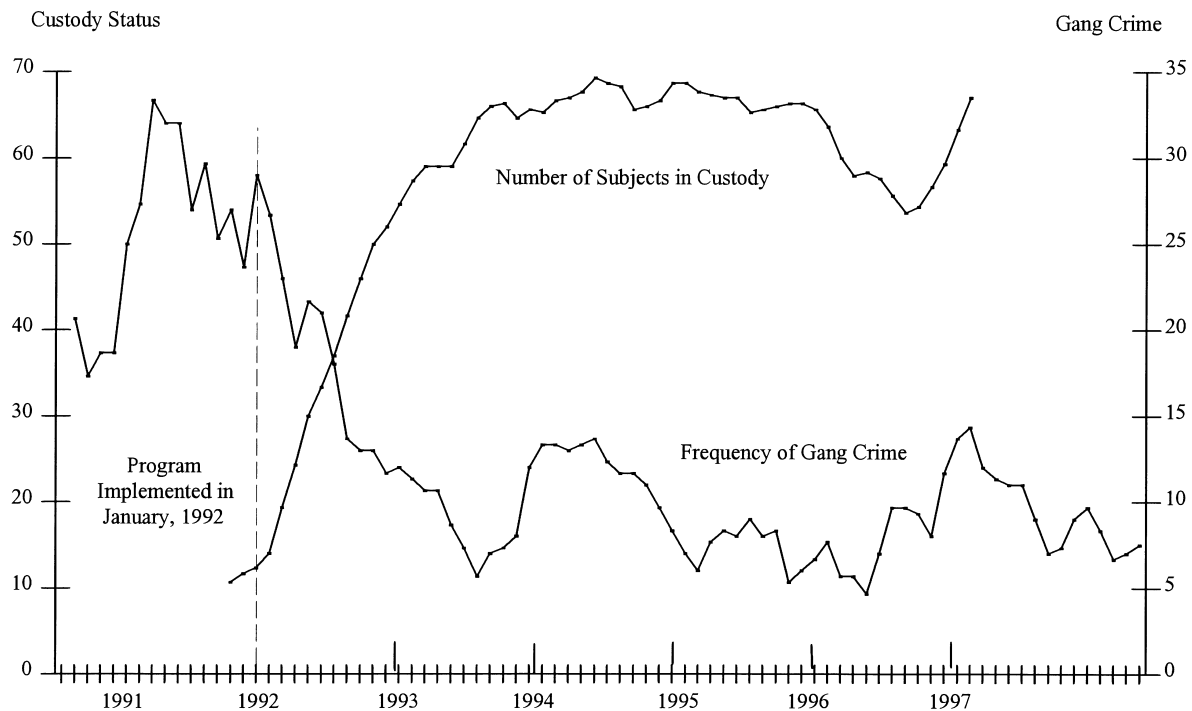


Fig. 2. Trends in custody status and gang crime. The broken line notes the implementation of the program in January, 1992.

was used by computing the three-month moving average in the non-gang trend. Because the program focused specifically on gang crime, it was expected that gang crime would decrease at a greater rate than non-gang crime over the test period. Both crime trends are compared in Fig. 3. This figure shows a greater decrease in gang crime<sup>5</sup> (slope =  $-0.70$ ) than in non-gang crime (slope =  $-0.42$ ) during 1992. Thus, the initial decline in gang crime cannot be attributed to the overall reduction of crime in the community. However, both trends' slope change again dramatically over subsequent program years. For cumulative program months through 1993 the gang crime slope and non-gang crime slopes were  $-0.67$  and  $-0.61$ , through 1994 the slopes were  $-0.43$  and  $-0.76$ , and through 1997 the slopes were  $-0.18$  and  $-0.78$ , respectively. Thus, there appears to be support for attributing the gang crime decrease to the program for a year or so, while, after this point, the possibility that further crime reduction is attributable to general crime decreases cannot be ruled out.

A second possibility is that the reduction was attributable to a general decrease in gang crime in the region. Unfortunately, because law enforcement

agencies in comparable communities did not distinguish between gang and non-gang crime in their counts, the amount of gang crime outside of Westminster was unknown. As a substitute for this information, the amount of total violent crime (both gang crime and non-gang crime together) in each community was compared with the program community. Violent crimes (i.e., wilful homicide, robbery, and aggravated assault) were selected because they are frequently committed by gang members.

It was expected that total violent crime might decrease at a slightly greater rate in the program community than in communities without the program. Only a slight decrease was expected because violent gang crime is a relatively small proportion of total violent crime. This is evident by comparing the two y-axis scales in Fig. 3. It was also possible that violent crime in comparison communities might even be on the increase, and this would also suggest that the gang crime reduction in the program community was not attributable to a regional decrease in violent crime.

Two comparison communities were selected on the basis of reports from knowledgeable gang crime investigators that these communities had similar types and amounts of gang crime in 1991. The rate of total violent crime for each community was computed from crime data obtained from the California Department of Justice (1997). A comparison of the rate of violent crime for each community is presented in Fig. 4. This figure shows the program community experienced a greater decline in total violent crime than that found

<sup>5</sup> Due to differential recording procedures, crime categories counted by the agency did not exactly match the 11 categories of gang crimes used in this study. Comparable categories of homicide, attempted homicide, assault, robbery, grand theft auto, and burglary were used. Thus, the gang crime trend in Fig. 3 somewhat differs from the gang crime trend in Fig. 2.

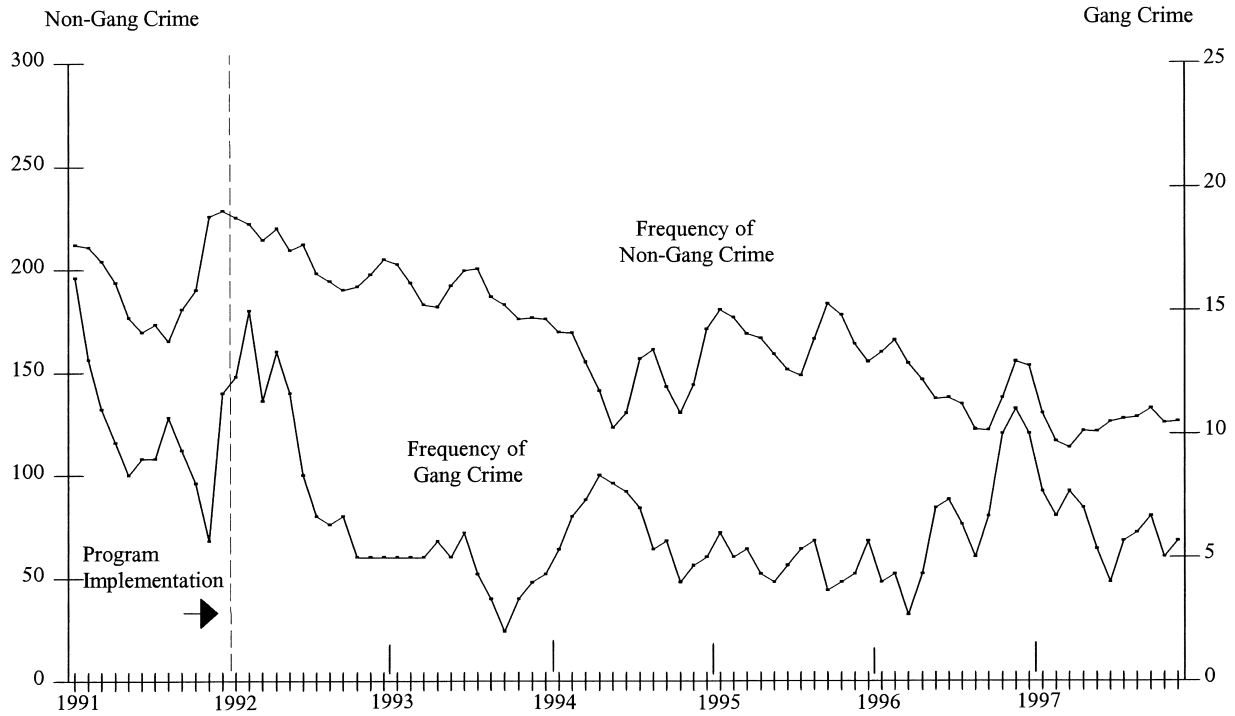


Fig. 3. Trends in gang crime and non-gang crime.

in communities with a comparable gang crime problem. Violent crime in Community A slightly increased during the first two years of the programs, then leveled off and gradually declined. Violent crime in Community B increased during the first two years of the program period, then declined drastically. Thus, the decline in gang crime in the program community cannot be attributed to a general reduction in violent

gang crime in the region, especially during the first two years of the program.

In all, trend analysis showed a sharp increase in custody and a covariant decrease in gang crime. A comparison of community crime trends showed that the decrease in gang crime was not attributable to a general decrease in crime, at least for the first year or so of the program. Similarly, a comparison of trends in

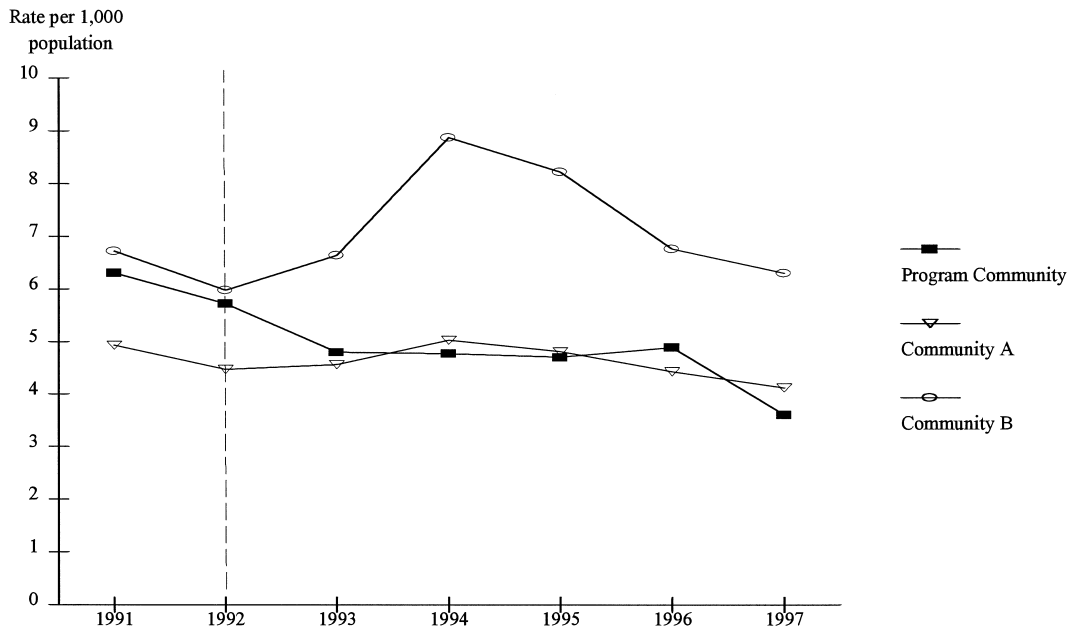


Fig. 4. Community comparison of total violent crime.

total violent crime in the region (as gang crime measures were not available from comparable communities) showed that the decrease in total violent crime was not attributable to a regional decrease in violent crime. Overall, the analysis indicated that gang crime was reduced by the program. Given this finding, the program should be considered for replication in other settings. Additional evaluations of the program concept may provide further evidence of program impact on gang crime.

## 7. Strengths and limitations

The program goal was to place repeat gang offenders in custody in order to disable offenders from committing crime in the community while incarcerated, and a subsequent decrease in overall gang crime was expected. This evaluation provided information concerning program effects through explication and measurement of the program's logic model. The approach taken averted practical, ethical, and methodological problems associated with the use of control groups and pretest/posttest evaluation designs. This evaluation method would also have revealed whether there was no change in custody status, but a decrease in gang crime; a change in program treatment, but no decrease in crime; or no change in either program treatment or gang crime outcomes. Each of these possible results would have had different implications for the conclusions about the program's effectiveness. The advantage of this approach is that it provides a clear specification of the treatment process, it can be applied in a variety of gang crime reduction programs, and it provides useful practical and conceptual information.

There are also several notable limitations in this evaluation related to the specific circumstances of the program being evaluated. One limitation centers on the fact that a single measure of gang crime reported to police was used. A measure of reported crime could be influenced by merely implementing a gang crime reduction program. It is possible that the creation of the program increased the ability of police officers to identify reported crimes as gang-related. Thus, an artificial increase in the reporting of gang crimes is possible. However, this would result in a masking of program effects, rather than overstating the effectiveness of the intervention.

Additional measures of gang crime were sought for the present project. A community survey of perception of gang crime was not feasible because it was not planned in advance. Retrospective questioning would have been invalid because of problems of recall of events over a lengthy period of time prior to the survey. Information obtained from police informants was also considered as a possible additional measure of

criminal activity of gangs. However, in the current program setting, obtaining information from police informants was a sensitive issue that was met with resistance. These measures might be possible for use in evaluation of other gang programs.

Additional evidence of the program effect may have been found had an accurate measure of program effort been available. If program effort could have been quantified, it would have been possible to examine the 'dose-response' relationship (Scott & Sechrest, 1989). That is, if a measure of program effort was found to be positively correlated with the proximal and distal variables, then there would be much stronger evidence of the program's effectiveness. This would be particularly valuable in cases in which program efforts vary. The activities of a wide variety of programs vary in the amount of effort due to political, resource, programmatic, or personnel issues. The present program was subject to variation in program effort, but an acceptable measure of treatment strength was not available.

The findings in the evaluation are also limited because they do not explain what aspects of the program worked best, only whether the program as implemented, worked or not. That is to say, there is no evidence as to whether multi-agency cooperation or selective intervention alone would have been adequate to achieve the observed result, or whether the interaction of the two was needed.

Similarly, this evaluation does not provide information regarding other possible mediating variables, such as level of police contact with gang members, that may have had an effect on reducing criminal activity. However, such law enforcement efforts would be very difficult to evaluate and quantify. Moreover, this evaluation does not distinguish between the effects of incarcerating repeat gang offenders and the incarceration of their co-defendants. Co-defendants also receive program treatment (prosecution and incarceration), and the effect of the custody of these individuals cannot be distinguished from the effects of placing targeted subjects in custody.

Finally, when considering gang crime as a dependent variable, one measurement issue to consider is the possible confounded nature of the proximal and distal variables. The proximal variable of arrests is partially confounded with the distal variable of gang crime. This is because an arrest does not usually take place without the occurrence of a crime. However, not all arrests occur for categories of crimes counted in the gang crime score. For example, a gang member may be arrested for violation of probation terms. This violation of law was not counted in the gang crime score but the individual would be counted as being in custody. Similarly, if a gang member was arrested for a homicide occurring within the city limits, the custody

score would increase by one, and the gang crime score would increase by one. If the arrest was made by another agency, the crime would be reported in another jurisdiction, and the gang crime score would not be affected, but the targeted individual would be counted as in custody. These possibilities existed, but seemed to be an exception to what normally occurred. If all relevant data were available from other jurisdictions, it is possible that a series of conditional variables could be constructed to take these circumstances into account.

## 8. Recommendation

Toward the goal of increasing evaluation of gang programs, it is recommended that evaluators look for opportunities to become involved in the early stages of program planning. Evaluators may be able to influence the program design to include a reasonable spectrum of targeted behaviors and treatments, and facilitate their evaluation. Evaluators are in the best position to promote gang program evaluation by illustrating its value to policy makers and program managers. The present project could serve as an example of a feasible, non-intrusive evaluation, and may possibly be used to encourage future evaluations of gang programs.

## 9. Conclusion

Programs to reduce gang crime across in the United States could benefit from greater documentation of their efforts and outcomes. However, traditional approaches to evaluation are problematic when applied to these programs. These problems center on the impracticality of control groups and limitations of simple pre-test/post-test measures of dependent variables. These difficulties can be overcome through the use of the theory-driven approach to evaluation. This approach is one in which the components of the implicit or explicit program theory are examined. When data are collected over time, with adequate baseline data, a regression discontinuity design can control for nearly all of the same threats to internal validity as the classical experimental design, and improve control over threats to external validity. The application of this approach to the present program yields results which suggest that this program be considered for replication in other jurisdictions. Replication may provide further evidence of the effectiveness of the program and may provide opportunities for its improvement. Future evaluations can provide valuable information about what strategies work in the search for ways to reduce gang crime.

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