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## **Street Gangs and Interventions: Innovative Problem Solving with Network Analysis**

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## **About This Report**

This paper briefly reviews the range of prevention, intervention, suppression, and comprehensive strategies, providing examples of each type. It then offers a case study of problem analysis in Newark, New Jersey. The Greater Newark Safer Cities Initiative (GNSCI) began in 1996 as a collaborative effort among law enforcement, community groups, social service agencies, clergy, and Rutgers University to address and temper the local violence problem. By 2003, the partners in GNSCI expressed concern over a perceived growth in street gangs and related crime. Accordingly, the North Jersey Gang Task Force emerged under the framework and from the existing partnerships of GNSCI. This paper discusses the unique utility of network analysis in the resultant problem analysis and underscores the important role of an academic research partner. Finally, the paper considers the importance of sustainability with regard to problem analysis.

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## Introduction

In light of the growing numbers, geographical spread, and demographic changes of street gangs in the 1990s, many consider them to be worthy of law enforcement attention, regardless of locale. Indeed, though most gangs exist in urban environments and are populated by minority males, they are not limited to such locations or such members.<sup>1</sup> The age range of gang members extends past youth, and many gangs demonstrate gender and ethnic diversity greater than earlier research suggested.<sup>2</sup> In addition, as the number of gangs and gang members within urban environments has increased they have also spread across the country into rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the line between prison and street gangs is becoming muddied as gang members flow in and out of the correctional system.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, law enforcement has a difficult task in attempting to address this evolving and longstanding problem. This task is not necessarily more difficult than the somewhat more recent problems confronting local law enforcement, such as internet crime and terrorism. Still, the enduring nature of street gangs, as well as their diverse and dynamic nature, poses a unique challenge.

Turning to the existing research only serves to underscore their complicated nature by highlighting variation in gang type, membership, and crime. Indeed, there are many gang varieties. Often, points of difference include size, longevity, level of organization, demographic characteristics, and favored criminal behavior (if any is discernable).<sup>5</sup> Other research has shed light on variation in the levels of gang membership.<sup>6</sup> Consistent with the finding that full-fledged gang membership often is a gradual, social process,<sup>7</sup> there are distinctions in the level to which individuals are affiliated with, or involved in, street gangs. These increasing levels of affiliation are positively related to increasing levels of criminal behavior, stressing the fact that even youths who are not members, but only associates of a gang, evidence more criminal behavior than those who are not involved. In short, the range of problems that may face law enforcement with street gangs is vast when considering the various gang types, levels of membership, and crimes that can emerge.

Academics, law enforcement, and citizens agree that street gangs can have a significantly damaging impact on a community and its residents. Gangs play a role in firearm transactions and violence, drug sales and use, home invasions, car theft, homicide, and/or a general decline in the quality of life, along with a number of other crime problems. These issues are not necessarily new to law enforcement—indeed, the relatively small number of the most problematic gang members who often underlie such issues are typically well-known among criminal justice agencies—but the nature of gang involvement often requires a particular (i.e., “value-added”) understanding. Just as law enforcement engages in problem-oriented policing for particular crime problems, they should likewise attempt a problem analysis of the involved street gangs. This is particularly important because gangs are unique phenomena, particular to time and place.<sup>8</sup> Failing to undertake an appropriate problem analysis, not only of the specific crime problem at hand—whether car theft, firearm violence, or other crimes—but also of the gang landscape may result in a futile, even harmful, response strategy. For example, one strategy in Nevada relied on the incorrect notion that local gangs were similar to those in Los Angeles. It is no surprise, therefore, that it was ineffective.<sup>9</sup>



## **Prevention, Intervention, Suppression, and Comprehensive Strategies**

There are many options before law enforcement as they attempt to address a street gang problem(s), with regard to both goals and tactics. This is logical, given the previously mentioned variety of potential problems. As others have noted,<sup>10</sup> programs may range from prevention, intervention, suppression, and/or comprehensive strategies. These different categories have the aim of reducing problems associated with street gangs, but the manner by which they do that, and the exact nature of the problems of interest, deserve brief elaboration. Figure 1 on page 8 illustrates this spectrum. In particular, this figure shows that prevention and intervention/suppression programs typically respond to different levels of risk and problems. It also details the different focus of these techniques and how comprehensive strategies rely on a combination of tactics. The forthcoming paragraphs explain this spectrum in more detail. Street Gangs and Interventions: Innovative Problem Solving with Network Analysis

First, prevention programs have the broadest audience of interest. Such strategies are typically aimed at groups that pose some risk, or more broadly, at general populations. For example, a prevention program may focus on preschool children who reside in gang neighborhoods, trying to intervene on their behalf to offset risk factors that would otherwise lead them into gang involvement. Such strategies rarely make divisions among the types of street gangs; the typical goal is to reduce gang membership regardless of category. Perhaps the best-known gang prevention program is Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.), which has the aim of reducing the probability of youth joining a street gang. Evaluation results suggest that while G.R.E.A.T. has positive short term effects on gang-related behavior and attitudes, a four-year follow-up revealed no impact on gang membership or delinquent behavior.<sup>11</sup> Still, “G.R.E.A.T. was able to successfully change several risk factors (e.g., peer group associations and attitudes about gangs, law enforcement, and risk-seeking behaviors) associated with delinquency and gang membership.”<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 1. A Schematic of Prevention, Intervention, Suppression, and Comprehensive Programs.**

Some risk (sometimes minimal) exists (e.g., local youth are at risk for joining street gangs; there is a risk for street gangs to emerge and/or grow in a particular geographic location)



Risk has manifested into an actual problem (e.g., the emergence and continuation of local street gangs; increased gang membership and violence among local youth)

**Prevention Programs**



Attempt to prevent gang membership, gang crime, and/or gang emergence/growth

**Intervention and Suppression Programs**



Tend to have a social service orientation; focus re-integrating gang members into the community



Tend to be law enforcement-based; focus on suppressing gangs and gang activities



**Comprehensive Programs**

These programs combine intervention and suppression techniques, as well as (at times) prevention tactics; necessitate collaboration among numerous agencies and groups

Second, intervention strategies typically address individuals or places that have manifested some problem; that is, the situation has progressed past risk. In most cases, such programs attempt to persuade gang members or gang-affiliated youth to abandon their current lifestyle or to reduce gang-related crime. At this stage, defining the type of gang of interest, the level of individual involvement in the gang(s), as well as the specific problem of focus becomes extremely important and integral to any success. Intervention programs may include such tactics as a gang truce or the use of detached workers to persuade gang members to leave gang life and reintegrate into the community. One interesting intervention program moved the spotlight of the strategy away from the streets with the assumption that hospitals provided unique leverage to address gang problems.

The G.R.E.A.T. Program, administered by the Office of Justice Program's (OJP) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), is a school-based, law enforcement officer-instructed classroom curriculum. The program's primary objective is prevention and is intended as an immunization against delinquency, youth violence, and gang membership. G.R.E.A.T. lessons focus on providing life skills to students to help them avoid delinquent behavior and violence to solve problems. To learn more, go to [www.great-online.org/](http://www.great-online.org/).

In Oakland, California, a non-profit group helped to develop an emergency room-based intervention, entitled Caught in the Crossfire, aimed at reducing gang-related youth violence and death. The staff, which includes previous victims of violence, provides support and mentorship to victims of youth violence who are admitted to a local hospital. Beginning with bedside visits and extending into release, the staff works to identify the needs of the victim (e.g., employment, social services, mental health), prevent retaliation, and aid in his or her reintegration into the community. The staff also provides these services to local youth on probation for violent offenses. According to an evaluation, hospitalized youth who took part in the project were 70% less likely to be arrested and 60% less likely to evidence criminal involvement than hospitalized youth who did not partake in the program.<sup>13</sup>

Caught in the Crossfire is a program of Youth ALIVE!, a non-profit public health organization dedicated to reducing violent injuries and deaths among youth in California through education, prevention, and research. Youth ALIVE! works with communities most at risk for violence and seeks to empower residents to advocate for violence prevention, to address the social and emotional impact of violence in their communities, and make their communities safer places to live. To learn more, go to [www.youthalive.org/caught.html](http://www.youthalive.org/caught.html).

Third, suppression programs also have the aim of reducing gang activities, but they typically rely on the law as a guide and on criminal justice agencies as the primary, and often only, partners. These techniques characteristically depend on deterrence principles and often include law enforcement task forces or units, vertical prosecution, and sentencing enhancements. As with intervention programs, any success hinges on developing a plan based on a problem analysis to understand the gang problem in that jurisdiction. For example, in 1990, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) launched Operation Cul-de-Sac (OCDS) in a community permeated by gangs and violent criminal activities. The strategy operated on the premise that gangs thrived on criminal opportunities and that if such opportunities could be “designed out,” crime would decline. OCDS, therefore, erected traffic barriers to limit access to major roadways and the gang members’ movement to hot spots of crime. By limiting direct access to such hot spots, the LAPD essentially created temporary cul-de-sacs, resulting in significantly fewer gang-related homicides and assaults.

Operation Cul-De-Sac used traffic barriers to block gang mobility, assuming that gang violence was partly the result of criminal opportunity. Law enforcement closed all major roads leading to and from the identified hotspots by placing freeway-dividers at the end of the streets that led directly to the hotspots. This reconfiguration essentially created cul-de-sacs, which could hamper “hit-and-run” crimes such as drive-by shootings. For a detailed assessment of this and other youth gang prevention and suppression programs, go to the Office of Justice Program’s (OJP) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s (OJJDP) Youth Gang Programs and Strategies (2000) at [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/171154.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/171154.pdf).

In the summer of 2003, the city of Chicago began installing surveillance cameras as part of Operation Disruption, an aggressive use of surveillance to curb violent, often gang-related, crime. The cameras, which can swivel 360° and have the capacity to zoom in on objects of interest, can film in both day and night and serve to alert law enforcement to criminal activities. Similar to a strategy in Los Angeles, crime has declined since installation of the cameras, although it is unclear whether this is just because of the program. To be sure, when operating alone, suppression techniques are rarely successful in the long term.<sup>14</sup> Even if a program appears successful in the short term, gangs tend to endure because law enforcement can rarely eradicate them completely, nor does law enforcement have the resources to sustain such an intensive focus over time and across all gangs and gang members. In addition, crime may simply be displaced and there is the added risk of giving the gang a collective point of conflict, which may increase their cohesion and criminal activities. Suppression techniques certainly are important, but appear to provide the most benefit when part of a larger, comprehensive program that couples them with social intervention tactics.<sup>15</sup>

Operation Disruption involves the use of portable units mounted on light poles and other fixtures in strategic locations. Each unit will be equipped with a variety of technologies, including cameras that have the ability to capture criminal activity blocks away. The goal of Operation Disruption is to create a visible crime deterrent in communities that have experienced a high incidence of violent crime. For more information, go to [www.cityofchicago.org/police](http://www.cityofchicago.org/police).

Finally, collaborative, comprehensive programs typically include prevention, intervention, and suppression techniques and hinge on the collective work of a variety of agencies, including criminal justice, social service, mental health, and faith-based groups. Though they often require intensive resources and time, such programs appear to be the most promising in areas that have an array of problems surrounding a gang problem and fit well within an existing community policing framework and philosophy. In addition, should a particular gang pose numerous problems, such as intense gang recruitment in schools, drug

sales, and gang-related homicides, it may require a variety of techniques and partners to best address the issues at hand. Each agency has certain leverage and resources that can serve the problem and complement those of its partners. Perhaps the best-known comprehensive program is the Boston Gun Project, both for its innovation and success.<sup>16</sup>

The Boston Gun Project was a problem-oriented policing initiative expressly aimed at taking on a serious, large-scale crime problem—homicide victimization among young people in Boston. Sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and directed by David M. Kennedy, Anthony A. Braga, and Anne M. Piehl of Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, the Project began in early 1995 and implemented what is now known as the “Operation Ceasefire” intervention, which began in the late spring of 1996. Operation Ceasefire was an innovative partnership between researchers and practitioners brought together to assess the city’s youth homicide problem and implement an intervention designed to have a substantial near-term impact on the problem. For more information, go to [www.ksg.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/research/bpg.htm](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/criminaljustice/research/bpg.htm).

The Boston Gun Project—and the consequent Operation Ceasefire—began as an attempt to develop, initiate, and evaluate an intervention aimed at addressing the dramatic increase in local youth violence. The partnerships that formed the base of this strategy (in both the analysis and implementation phases) included local, state, and federal criminal justice agencies (e.g., law enforcement, probation, prosecution, parole), social service agencies, academic researchers, as well as community and faith-based groups. After an in-depth analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, the project selected a strategy of focused deterrence that combined suppressive and social intervention techniques. In addition to a focus on shutting down the city’s illegal firearms trafficking, Operation Ceasefire relied on the tactic of “pulling levers.” When a gang came into focus because of violent behavior, the relevant partners would pull every potential criminal justice sanction “lever” for that particular gang and/or individual gang member. At the same time, opportunities for, and access to, social services were made available to gang members to provide support for an alternative to life in the gang. An evaluation found that Operation Ceasefire was associated with a decline in youth homicide, firearm assaults, and “shots-fired” calls for service.<sup>17</sup>

This comprehensive framework, which is mirrored in Project Safe Neighborhoods and the Office of Justice Program's (OJP) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Comprehensive Gang Model, has been replicated across many sites, including Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles.<sup>18</sup> Also known as the Spergel Model of Gang Intervention and Suppression, the OJJDP model was named after Dr. Irving Spergel of the University of Chicago, who directed the initial phase of the project. The model calls for a team of community agencies and organizations to deliver five core strategies through an integrated approach: community mobilization; social intervention, including street outreach; provision of opportunities; suppression; and organizational change.

## **The Need for Problem Analysis**

Many gang programs are interesting and hold promise, but this should not be taken as a signal for the immediate adoption of particular tactics or of their long-term effectiveness. Articles or reports rarely define the problem that a strategy is meant to address, seldom describe the program in full detail, and rarely contain an evaluation. As with any issue before law enforcement, an effective strategy must be rooted in a preceding problem analysis that takes the time and the care to define the various components of the situation.<sup>19</sup> Gang problems in many locations are urgent and waiting to complete an analysis is difficult. Even so, the consequences of failing to engage in this step may be great. A misinformed strategy may possess ineffective tactics, making it impotent, or worse, leading to a further decline of the situation.

The remainder of this publication focuses on a case study to describe an example of problem solving in Newark, New Jersey, which led to an innovative way to investigate a local gang landscape. The case study also highlights how one problem-solving effort may serve as the context and foundation for another. While the gang project is still in development, the process and the preliminary findings are nonetheless informative.

In many instances, the problem analysis phase of a strategy may last longer than the intervention stage. At the same time, it must be on-going. For example, Newark research partner Dr. George Kelling notes that it took a full year to understand the problems plaguing New York City's subways, yet only a few months to manage it

effectively. This is often the most difficult portion of an intervention and requires careful attention because people tend to get distracted by other crises or problems. It is careful analysis, however, that will lead to long-term success. By detailing the Newark case study, this paper hopes to provide some examples of potential pathways for understanding local gang problems.

This example also highlights the importance of an academic partner in such problem solving endeavors. It is unlikely that the analyses referenced here would have been generated by many law enforcement agencies. Indeed, some have noted that “most police officers are probably more prone to action than to research.”<sup>20</sup> While mapping techniques have permeated into many law enforcement departments, network analysis (the technique later described) has yet to emerge as a recognizably useful analytic tool in most law enforcement circles. Academic partners provide access to analytic expertise, as well as resources, which can provide unique insight to the problem solving process. Simply put, an academic–law enforcement partnership has the potential to be a particularly beneficial collaboration.<sup>21</sup>

### **An Example of a Local Problem Analysis**

In 1996, the director of the Newark Police Department, Joseph Santiago, approached the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University—Professor George Kelling in particular—and asked whether it could provide help addressing violence in Newark. While Newark had recently illustrated a fairly sharp decline in violence (murder, robbery, aggravated assault, and rape), its violent crime index still greatly surpassed those of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Despite the benefits of the newly instituted CompStat, Director Santiago was concerned that violence in Newark appeared immune to law enforcement tactics. Because the School of Criminal Justice has the goal of training researchers within this urban environment and Professor Kelling has a professional history with the Newark Police Department,<sup>22</sup> a relationship began based on a common goal: reduce violence in the city of Newark. This project came to be known as the Greater Newark Safer Cities Initiative (GNSCI).

One of the benefits of the School of Criminal Justice serving as the organizer of a problem analysis is that it could serve as a “neutral convener.” The neutral convener is critical because it has the capacity



to raise questions, highlight problems, and corral attention around a particular issue since it is not perceived as having an allegiance to any one stakeholder at the table.<sup>23</sup> We certainly found that this was the case with GNSCI. Simply, Rutgers existed outside the inter-organizational relationships, and, therefore, the provost of Rutgers-Newark, was able to gather various stakeholders for an initial meeting. This first meeting, hosted at Rutgers, included the Newark Police Department, the United States Attorney's Office for New Jersey, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office, and the School of Criminal Justice.

During the next three years, the School of Criminal Justice attempted to build relationships with and across agencies. This was not always easy, often because of past problems and perceived conflicting interests. Forging successful partnerships is a difficult task and it is not uncommon for different orientations, perceptions of responsibilities, training, pressures, and priorities to act as significant hurdles.<sup>24</sup> Still, if agencies and partners are able to agree on a common goal and are willing to communicate and work through such difficulties, forging such a collaborative relationship often is a linchpin of problem analysis and intervention success. By 1999, staff began collecting data on the nature of the violence problem in Newark—it took three years to convince people that it may be time to change the way of doing business to improve the quality of life and reduce violence in this city.

The importance of collaboration in this project, and in problem-solving exercises in general, cannot be overstated. Forging these partnerships can be difficult, but often they are integral to understanding the problem at hand by combining information and perspectives. For example, in the Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiative in St. Louis, the U.S. Attorney had the political power to push past roadblocks and ensure open access to data.<sup>25</sup> In a similar manner, the Attorney General's Office of New Jersey served to convince certain partners, namely the local prosecutors, to participate in GNSCI during the early stages. At the same time, these partnerships also expand the utility and capabilities of the intervention itself. To be sure, various partners provide different resources and capabilities that complement and structure a comprehensive strategy. As an example, the Ten Point Coalition, as well as the Boston Streetworkers, provided a base of legitimacy for law enforcement action in the Boston Gun Project.<sup>26</sup> In a similar

fashion, the clergy of Newark opened the churches as locations for the notification sessions for the offenders of interest, which provided moral legitimacy to GNSCI in the community.

Recent law enforcement programs have explicitly recognized the importance of forging and sustaining such partnerships. Indeed, the Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative has “partnership” as one of its five core elements. At a minimum, this framework recognizes that a truly comprehensive gun-violence intervention must include federal, state, and local law enforcement, as well as prosecutors, as inherent stakeholders. In addition, collaboration was one of the primary pillars for two of the best-known gun violence programs, as well as their respective replications across the nation: Operation Ceasefire in Boston, Massachusetts and Project Exile in Richmond, Virginia. Partnerships and collaboration are moving past being considered advisable to being considered essential when addressing community problems.<sup>27</sup>

By 2000, GNSCI had established what has become its cornerstone: biweekly meetings hosted by Rutgers University that included various law enforcement and prosecution agencies (local, state, and federal), parole and probation, social service providers, clergy, community groups, the public defender, and various mental health, substance abuse, and employment agencies. These partners had a stake in the violence problem in Newark, all had insight into the problem and all had unique resources that potentially could help address this problem. This working group had the task of addressing the primary finding of earlier data analysis. Like many cities, a small portion of people is responsible for the majority of the violence and the people who are killing and those being killed are remarkably similar. Whether individuals are killed or are the killers seemingly depends on chance. Similar to Boston, a large proportion of these problematic people in Newark are under probation or parole supervision; therefore, agencies have leverage over them.

The working group became responsible for managing the most at-risk people with the goal of reducing their violent behavior and, in turn, the overall violence in Newark. The overarching goal was to deter them and others by example through the pulling-levers-strategy.<sup>28</sup> Individuals on this caseload were notified that if they engage in violent behavior or are caught with a gun during their

time on probation or parole, every potential resource will be brought to bear, including more stringent bail, vertical prosecution (and potential federal prosecution), and enhanced penalties. At the same time, if they needed services (e.g., employment, substance abuse counseling, mental health services, faith services), they could receive them. Clients (as those on the caseload came to be known) also had to attend accountability sessions to establish whether they, as well as partners in GNSCI, were meeting their obligations. It was important for the GNSCI group to follow through both sanctions and social services to gain and sustain credibility.

Since the inception of GNSCI, of the 353 individuals in the at-risk group, only 7.9% have been arrested for violence and only 7.4% have been victims of violence. In addition, from 2001 to 2002, the homicide rate dropped by 28% (the adjoining towns of East Orange and Irvington had a 20% and 14% increase, respectively). By 2003, however, homicide in Newark jumped by 28%. The working group began to speculate about why this may be the case and one consistent answer emerged: gangs.

## **Gangs in Newark**

During the GNSCI working group meetings of 2003, a new concern started to bubble to the surface. Community members and law enforcement were becoming increasingly concerned about what they perceived as a growing gang problem. They believed that the increased rate and changing nature of homicide in Newark was caused, in part, by the local gangs. Recent analyses in GNSCI had revealed an interesting trend: while homicides were increasing in Newark, shootings were decreasing. In the previous years of data analysis, homicides and shootings had a positive relationship with one another. The impression in the working group was that homicides were becoming more directed: victims were intended and sought out. While partners were unsure whether this reflected the actions of rival gangs or whether it was simply the fact that gang members were involved, they nonetheless perceived a connection. In short, the community believed that gangs posed a problem and the stakeholders saw GNSCI as a legitimate forum within which to voice their concerns and have them addressed. One problem analysis forum, therefore, served as the context within which to consider another issue. This is an important point to stress, if not for the

partnerships and collaboration already in existence as a result of GNSCI, there would have been no forum for these various groups and agencies to discuss their concerns collectively.

When pressed about their concerns, the stakeholders relayed the belief that local street gangs were involved in a plethora of criminal activities, from auto theft to drug sales to homicide to general community harassment. Given the broad nature of the problem, the nature of the gang landscape had to be defined, rather than defining only their role in a particular crime. In addition, the community and GNSCI stakeholders believed that this was part of a larger regional problem: that gangs in Newark had connections beyond the city's borders and to ignore adjacent municipalities would be ill-advised. This project, therefore, actually would expand geographically beyond its parent project, GNSCI. Accordingly, the North Jersey Gang Task Force was born in 2003 and began a methodical process of defining the gang problem in various cities and towns in northern New Jersey.

In a fashion similar to the Boston Gun Project, this project relied on the experiential knowledge of personnel from various criminal justice agencies (law enforcement, prosecution, probation, parole, juvenile justice commission, department of corrections, and so forth) when constructing a general, evolving picture of the gang landscape. The interview groups included different agencies as an attempt to get as complete a picture of the gang problem as possible from the law enforcement viewpoint. While many agencies have their own gang data, relying on intelligence files is problematic on several levels. First, university researchers do not have easy legal access to such files. Second, many agencies use different definitions and rules for their respective databases, which makes comparison and consolidation very difficult. Finally, such databases are not always updated or purged with regularity. Since the goal of the analysis is to construct a picture of the current gang landscape, the Boston Gun Project was used as a model and various criminal justice personnel who have an expertise about the gang problem were data sources.

Again, the centrality of collaboration in GNSCI emerged as integral to the progress of the North Jersey Gang Task Force. Street gangs are a particularly political issue and law enforcement agencies can show strong reticence about sharing information. By 2003, the Newark Police Department had been sharing information and collaborating with other

agencies through GNSCI for 4 years. The police department, therefore, had cultivated a trust of the other stakeholders and of Rutgers University as an analytic and research partner. At the start of the gang analysis, the department was willing and enthusiastic about sharing information because gangs were a problem worth solving. At the same time, the department vouched to other law enforcement agencies that this partnership was worthwhile given past experience. While some agencies declined to be part of this project either because of denial of a local gang problem or because of a lack of faith in the utility of this project, the majority agreed to participate. They simply realized they could not ignore the gang problem in their jurisdiction and were willing to be part of a problem solving initiative that may help.

The interview groups began to provide data on such issues as gang territory, the role, nature, and extent of violence and crime, recruitment and initiation rituals, the extent of female membership, size, history, the role of families, and other topics of interest. In addition, researchers began to gather information on the criminal histories of all identified gang members. These data confirm the notion that such individuals do not specialize in particular forms of crime, but rather engage in an array of offending behavior.<sup>29</sup> Given the fact that gangs are dynamic and that the project desires current data, the focus groups continued to meet over the course of one year. This not only allowed for the collection of recent data, but also for the formation of trusted relationships across agencies and with the researchers.

The first analysis phase included GIS-mapping. Although the belief at the beginning stages of the project was that gangs were pervasive, identifying hot spots of gang territories was an appealing notion that could translate easily into intervention tactics. The sense was accurate: there were no clear hot spots of gang territory. Gangs seemed to be everywhere; the only area in Newark, for example, that did not have gang territory was the airport. This analysis also confirmed that a regional approach was appropriate because many gang territories overlap between cities. At this point, the partners asked whether there were residential hot spots and, if these emerged, perhaps that could inform an intervention in some manner. The analysis revealed that many gang members did not reside in their respective territories, which was consistent with some previous research.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a good number did not even reside in the city that contained their territory.

## **Introduction to Network Analysis**

At this point in the problem analysis, it was clear that mapping could not be the sole analytic tool. Trying to be innovative and view the gang landscape from a unique perspective, this project recognized the usefulness that network analysis played in the Boston Gun Project. Network analysis is a technique that focuses on analyzing the pattern of social relationships among groups or individuals. By detailing the pattern of relationships (namely rivalries) among the street gangs in Boston, certain gangs nominated themselves for focus, and researchers were able to anticipate the potential consequences of an intervention strategy, such as particular gangs taking advantage of others' perceived weakness. The North Jersey Gang Task Force also detailed the relationships among the gangs and sets in the various neighborhoods under focus. Such an analysis provided insight into why particular geographic areas may experience violence caused by a contentious relationship among gangs or sets and the allegiances and rivalries that could influence the focus of an intervention or suppression program. To better define the street gang landscape in Newark, the project went one step further by defining the relationships among known gang members and their associates. To our knowledge, no other problem analysis preceding a gang intervention has done this. Doing so provided insight into law enforcement perceptions of the internal organizations of the street gangs under study.<sup>31</sup>

Though social network analysis is not widely used by criminal justice practitioners or researchers, it has demonstrated effectiveness in shedding insight on the organization of criminal networks, such as the connectedness of members in a heroin-dealing organization in New York<sup>32</sup> and the ways in which legitimate businessmen were positioned and integrated in international drug networks anchored in Montreal.<sup>33</sup> Network analysis even clarified the reasons for, and patterns of, gang homicides in Chicago.<sup>34</sup>

Keeping track of the associations among gang members is relatively easy for law enforcement when dealing with small groups. For example, tracking the relationships and associations among a criminal group of 10 individuals is reasonable. Many street gangs are quite large, however. Recognizing the web of relationships among

hundreds of gang members and seeing the overall structure of this pattern is quite difficult under such circumstances. This is especially true when the knowledge that one person has about certain people and their associations overlaps with another's knowledge. Combining such information through data collection and analysis offers a more complete picture of how gang members are connected to each other. Not only does this information give a sense of how organized a particular street gang is, but it also provides insight into differential levels of individual entrenchment within a street gang.

Information on gang organization often is integral to the proper selection of intervention tactics and programs; therefore, network analysis struck us as a useful, cutting-edge technique. In this setting, the fact that Rutgers University served as both neutral convener and research partner was invaluable. It is difficult for any law enforcement or criminal justice agency to invest the time and money necessary for this analysis. Partnering with a university, however, provides free access to the skills and labor of graduate students and researchers. Collaboration, therefore, is important not only for getting complete and consistent data about the gang problem, but also for having partners who are willing and able to analyze these data. Partnerships between local universities and communities are mutually beneficial because each side possesses unique but underutilized expertise and resources.<sup>35</sup>

The interview groups provided information about the gang members' known associates in a variety of categories, including who hangs out and commits crime together ("runs together"), who has been incarcerated together, who is related to each other, who is a co-arrestee or co-defendant with whom, and other relationship dimensions. After these interviews, the data were coded and entered into statistical programs (the data were also updated after every interview). This information built up the street gang networks, providing insight into the structure of the gangs as well as into the various social positions that members occupy within the gangs. Such analysis was important because it provided knowledge about the structure of the gang in a manner different from most inquiries, which tend to investigate gang rules, meetings, and loyalty, and it is important to the decision of how to have an impact on the gangs. Are the gangs organized enough to hold all members accountable for one member's actions (an Operation

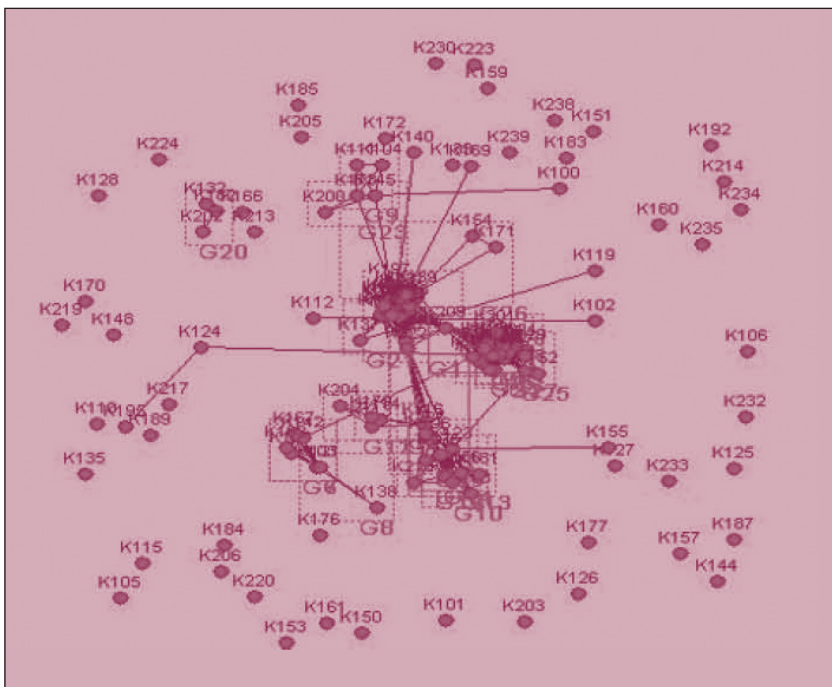
Ceasefire tactic called “collective accountability”)? Do certain subgroups require focus? Do certain people nominate themselves for focus based on their social position in the gang?

The first thing that the network analyses suggested is that the gangs in Newark are loosely organized. This finding was generally consistent with the research literature and with the perceptions of the partners in GNSCI. Even so, this analysis allowed the North Jersey Task Force partners to make this firm statement about the local gangs because it was grounded in a problem analysis. As such, collective accountability as a general tactic for gangs in Newark was unlikely to be a successful in this jurisdiction (see a more in-depth discussion in McGloin, 2005). Instead, smaller, well-connected groups may be better suited to an intervention focus. For example, Figure 2 on page 23 illustrates cliques in the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation in Newark. Cliques are intensely connected groupings within the overall network and may be vulnerable to a collective accountability strategy. This distinction between Newark and Boston gangs may be somewhat semantic. Gang definitions vary across location and Boston gangs may essentially be similar to the cliques in Newark, since they were small, relatively well-connected groups. Without network analysis, however, these groups of well-connected people in Newark may have gone unnoticed since the “overall” nature of the gang may have clouded such groupings.

Figure 2 also shows that there is variation of the embeddedness within the street gangs. In short, some people exist on the periphery of the gang, whereas others act as core members. At a minimum, this suggests that any strategy must recognize that there should be different tactics for such people. Central members are unlikely to be persuaded to leave gang life in the same manner as tangential members, for example. Rather than randomly addressing particular gang members or treating all in a similar fashion, this analysis provides the leverage to tailor program elements individually in an effective and educated manner that is tied to the local gang landscape. Network analysis also allows one to identify people who hold structurally important positions within the gang networks. Cut points, people who are the only connection among people or groups of people, may be ideal selections for spreading a deterrence message or for affecting the structure and organization of the street gangs.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 2.** The Identified Cliques for the Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation in Newark, New Jersey.



Simply having information on gang members and their associates, even if one chooses not to analyze it in any complex way, is helpful. For example, Dr. Wayne Fisher, a researcher in this project, had the idea of putting together a book of the most problematic gang members. This book detailed the associates of those individuals in whom law enforcement is most interested. Any time police questioned a gang member, this book could be consulted to determine if he or she was an associate and, therefore, may have important information. As another example, when a homicide suspect who was a gang member was at large, Newark police consulted the association data of this project. By reviewing the information provided by law enforcement officers, the Newark Police Department was able to direct its search and find the suspect quickly.

Continuing to rely on network analysis throughout the course of an intervention strategy helps to ensure that tactics continue to be appropriate and useful with a dynamic problem. For example, continuing to analyze the network of relationships will provide insight on whether an intervention strategy is further disorganizing the gang(s), or having the unintended consequence of increasing cohesion, and thereby raising the risk of more crime. At the same time, should positions in the gang shift, or new people move into structurally important positions within the gang, interventions may have to address new individuals or alter current strategies.

This raises the important issue of sustainability, not only for problem analysis but also for collaboration and partnerships. Often, a crisis brings stakeholders to the table, perhaps because of a dramatic spike in youth homicide or a handful of particularly attention-grabbing gang crimes, for example. As the crisis subsides, however, it can be difficult to maintain the sense of urgency about the problem at hand. Accordingly, partners can become distracted and the collaboration and data analysis subside. This can be an unintended consequence of program success or simply a product of shifting attention and priorities. Whatever the cause, it can cease any benefit as the program loses treading and/or fails to match the problem at hand. For example, Operation Ceasefire ended in 2000 and the street gang problem of today is not the same as it was at the genesis of the project.<sup>37</sup> Representatives from Boston at the *National Gang Executive Session II*, hosted by Chief William J. Bratton, Los Angeles Police Department and supported by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, reflected on this issue and agreed that applying the same COPS Innovations intervention framework within this city would be an ill-advised pathway. In short, an in-depth problem analysis must again inform any intervention strategy, despite early success.

Most would agree that problem analysis must precede a gang intervention. A major theme, however, at the *National Executive Session on Gangs II* was the difficulty of sustaining such analysis as well as the resulting intervention. Two factors may improve the odds of sustainability. First, it is important for stakeholders to maintain a sense of urgency about the problem at hand. This is perhaps easier said than done, and relies on strong, committed leadership. This

leadership is related to the second factor. Often, dynamic individuals form the core of these collaborative relationships. While this is beneficial with regard to leadership, it can be detrimental if and when such individuals inherit other professional responsibilities and leave the partnership. Under such circumstances, a problem-solving initiative and intervention can easily fall apart. If a project is to be sustained, the relationships must be among groups and agencies (i.e., organizational in nature) rather than based on individuals. In such a context, the relationships may become institutionalized and, therefore, remain despite individual-level turnover. GNSCI, for example, has continued despite witnessing four governors, three directors of the Newark Police Department, four State Attorneys General, and three U.S. Attorneys since its inception. This is possible only because of a focus on inter-organizational, rather than interpersonal, collaboration and partnership.

## **Conclusion**

While the exact nature of street gangs and the criminal problems in which they are involved often are unique to location and time, the commitment to engaging in a problem analysis should be pervasive. Some debates remain within the literature about many seminal street gang issues, suggesting that there can be no assumptions. Accordingly, generalizing themes and findings often is inappropriate. At the same time, law enforcement has a plethora of program types and tactics from which to choose, but that decision must be informed by the nature of the problem. Even if a program is a success in a particular domain, this is not a guarantee for repeat success elsewhere, particularly if the underlying problem is different. It is wise to attend to the principles of problem-oriented policing, taking the time and care to define a problem adequately before adopting a response strategy with an emphasis on collaboration, especially in the sphere of street gangs.<sup>38</sup>

## **About the Author**

Jean M. McGloin is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland. She received her Ph.D. from the School of Criminal Justice at Rutgers University-Newark in 2004. Her research interests include street gangs, policing and criminological theory. Her recent publications have appeared in *Criminology and Public Policy*, *Justice Quarterly*, and *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the National Youth Gang Surveys [www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#Surveys](http://www.iir.com/nygc/PublicationLinks.htm#Surveys)

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- <sup>12</sup> Esbensen, F.A. (2004). *Evaluating G.R.E.A.T.: A school-based gang prevention program*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice. (Pages 1-3)
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- <sup>16</sup> For more information, see: Braga, A.A., Kennedy, D.M., Waring, E.J. and Piehl, A.M. (2001). Problem-oriented policing, deterrence, and youth violence: An evaluation of Boston's Operation Ceasefire. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 38: 195-225.
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