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The Handbook of Homicide

Edited by

Fiona Brookman, Edward R. Maguire,
and Mike Maguire

Preventing Homicide

Edward R. Maguire

Introduction

Conventional wisdom suggests that homicide cannot be prevented. Government officials and other influential policymakers routinely lament that it will take at least a generation to reduce the number of homicides. Many critics continue to believe it is not possible to reduce homicide without solving poverty, inequality and other “root causes” of crime. Yet, researchers have now amassed a considerable body of evidence which suggests that homicides can be prevented (Brookman and Maguire 2005). Moreover, the evidence suggests that it does not have to take a generation; short term reductions in homicide are possible with the right mix of policies. This chapter summarizes a multidisciplinary body of research evidence on what works and what doesn't work in preventing homicides.

The chapter focuses primarily on what I refer to as “street” homicides (Kuhns and Maguire 2012; Maguire *et al.* 2008). These include homicides that are associated with gangs, retail drug markets, and petty disputes that are typically carried out by and against young men using guns. The use of the word “street” does not refer to the locations where homicide incidents take place; it refers to cultural systems in which violence is commonly used to preserve one's reputation, enforce boundaries, and resolve disputes (Anderson 1999; Berg *et al.* 2012; Stewart and Simons 2010). These homicides are often difficult to classify using conventional motive categories because they may involve a mix of motives. For instance, imagine that a gang leader has an altercation with a drug dealer who he perceives as behaving disrespectfully by selling drugs in his gang's territory without permission. If the gang leader kills the drug dealer, should the motive be classified as gang-related, drug-related, revenge, or an

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altercation? In cities and countries with high homicide rates, street homicides often constitute the majority of homicide incidents. Other specific types of homicides that are beyond the scope of this chapter include those associated with genocide, terrorism and political violence, domestic violence, sexual homicide, and serial and spree homicides.

The Knowledge-base on Preventing Homicide

The knowledge-base about how to prevent, deter, control or reduce homicides is a minefield of anecdotes and opinions, unsupported claims, unbridled advocacy, and research evidence of varying levels of quality. Anecdotes and opinions about effective solutions for reducing homicide are ubiquitous, but in the absence of rigorous evidence of their validity they provide a weak foundation for designing or implementing policy. Unsupported claims are also common, with public officials routinely claiming credit for reductions in homicide on the basis of weak evidence (Bowling 1999). These same officials are typically less eager to claim credit for subsequent increases in homicide, often attributing these increases to external factors beyond their control. Zealous advocacy for certain programs and policies intended to reduce homicide is also very common, particularly for certain deeply felt policy issues like gun control. However, the research cited by advocates to support their preferred policy positions is often based on a biased reading of the evidence. There is a considerable body of research evidence on how to prevent homicide, but the quality of the research varies widely.

In short, making sense of the literature on preventing homicide is difficult because it requires the reader to be a careful consumer of the evidence. This means setting aside the anecdotes and opinions, unsupported claims, unbridled advocacy, and poorly done research in an attempt to extract only the highest-quality scientific evidence on what works to prevent homicide. That is the purpose of this chapter. Two concepts from research methodology—internal and external validity—play an important role in assessing the quality of the evidence. *Internal validity* is the extent to which a research method is capable of discerning cause and effect. Some methods (such as bivariate correlations) are only suitable for inferring that two variables (such as poverty and crime) are statistically associated, but not for concluding that one “causes” the other. This is why research methods instructors teach students that “correlation does not imply causation.” Many research designs have weak internal validity and therefore do not allow for confident inferences about causation. Randomized experiments, if designed and executed well, allow for confident assertions about cause and effect because the random assignment ensures that the only difference between the treatment and control groups is the treatment. When randomized experiments are not possible, rigorous quasi-experiments can also provide strong evidence about cause and effect. Quasi-experiments resemble randomized experiments in certain ways, but do not involve random assignment to treatment and control groups. The best scientific evidence on preventing homicides is often derived from experiments and quasi-experiments.

Much of the "evidence" that people draw on when thinking about how to reduce homicide has weak internal validity. People's opinions are often based on casual observations. For example, a police agency will launch a violence reduction program and shootings will decrease. Officials will then conclude from this evidence that the program is effective. These types of unsystematic inferences have weak internal validity because they do not account for alternative explanations for changes in violence. Journalists and advocates often write compelling stories about "effective" violence reduction initiatives for which the actual evidence of effectiveness is weak or non-existent. Policymakers routinely rely on this type of impressionistic or anecdotal evidence in deciding how to expend public funds. The central idea of evidence-based crime policy is to ensure that policies intended to reduce crime are based on the strongest evidence about what works (Mears 2007; Welsh and Farrington 2011). The strength of the evidence depends in large part on the internal validity of the studies comprising the evidence base (e.g., Farrington 2003; MacKenzie 2000; Sherman 2003; for an alternative perspective, see Pawson and Tilley 1997). Studies with weaker internal validity are more likely to report that a treatment is effective and less likely to report that a treatment has harmful effects (Weisburd, Lum, and Petrosino 2001).

Another key issue in weighing the quality of the evidence is *external validity*, which is concerned with the generalizability of a research finding "across different persons, settings, and times" (Cook and Campbell 1979: 37). Suppose we found that a certain crime prevention program was successful in reducing violence in Boston. Would this same program be effective in Baltimore or Philadelphia? How about London or Sydney? How about Port-au-Prince or the favelas of Rio de Janeiro? External validity is concerned with the applicability of a study finding outside of the specific sample from which it was generated. If a cognitive behavioral intervention works on incarcerated adults, will it also work on non-incarcerated adults? How about non-incarcerated juveniles? External validity is important because we often don't know whether a program that is effective for one population will be equally effective for others (Pawson and Tilley 1997). For instance, crime reduction initiatives established in developed nations often backfire in unexpected ways when implemented in developing nations (Maguire and King 2013). A study's external validity has implications for its policy relevance. As Eck (2010: 865) notes: "Policy relevance is not simply about 'what works.' Policy relevance is also about 'what works where, when, and with whom.'"

External validity is especially important here because most empirical research on how to reduce homicide comes from the United States, which is a unique nation by world standards. There are good reasons to question whether research carried out in this unique setting is applicable to the rest of the world, particularly low- and middle-income countries where basic governmental and social structures differ considerably from the United States. The world often turns to the United States for ideas about how to address homicide. This is an example of a broader phenomenon known as "policy transfer" (Jones and Newburn 2007; Robertson 2005). While every nation engages in policy transfer, it is especially evident in developing countries,

which often borrow policy ideas from developed nations. These imported solutions may be problematic if they are not adapted to the contexts into which they are being embedded (Maguire and King 2013).

In this chapter, I examine the evidence associated with four types of initiatives that have received significant attention in recent years: focused deterrence strategies that target high-risk violent offenders; place-based policing strategies that target "hot spots" of violence; street outreach strategies that seek to prevent violent incidents, especially retaliation shootings; and gun-related strategies.

Focused Deterrence Strategies

Deterrence is a classic theory of criminology dating back to the work of eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers. It asserts that potential offenders weigh the costs and benefits when deciding whether to commit a crime. Deterrence theory suggests that offenders can be dissuaded from committing crime, and therefore crime can be prevented, by laws and policies which ensure that the costs of committing a crime outweigh the benefits (Cook 1980; Gibbs 1975). The literature on deterrence suggests that offenders weigh three factors when deciding whether to commit an offense: the certainty, severity, and swiftness of the sanction (Paternoster 2010). Certainty refers to the likelihood of being punished; severity refers to the harshness of the punishment; and swiftness refers to the speed with which the punishment is administered. Justice systems that optimize these three factors are thought to deter crime more effectively.

According to Kennedy (2009), deterrence often fails because policymakers and practitioners focus too heavily on the *objective* characteristics of criminal sanctions (especially their severity) and not sufficiently on how these sanctions are perceived by offenders and would-be offenders. As noted by Paternoster (2010: 785): "legislators establish and modify the objective properties of punishment with the expectation that perceptual properties of punishment will be affected." Influencing these perceptions is vital. At the core of deterrence theory is a psychological process in which offenders and potential offenders weigh the costs and benefits of offending. However, these calculations are often based on imperfect, unclear, and incorrect information. Just as the rational man in classic economic theory tries to "maximize his utility" by making optimal choices that yield the greatest benefit at the lowest cost, offenders make decisions based on whatever imperfect information is available at the time. Kennedy argues that people often misunderstand the: "radical subjectivity that is at the heart of the deterrence process ... what matters in deterrence is what matters to offenders and potential offenders. It is benefits and costs as they understand them and define them, and their thinking in weighing those benefits and costs, that are dispositive" (Kennedy 2009: 23). Designing criminal justice sanctions that deter crime more effectively means developing a deeper understanding of how offenders and potential offenders perceive the costs and benefits of crime. A key aspect of deterrence is that offenders know what consequence they are likely to face as a result

of their decision to commit an offense. If offenders don't know about a sanction—or if they underestimate the certainty, severity, or swiftness of a sanction—then it is likely to be an ineffective deterrent. Put in the language of criminologists, we know very little about “the formation of sanction risk perception” (Nagin 1998: 11).

Focused deterrence strategies seek to optimize the deterrent value of sanctions (or threat of sanctions) in multiple ways. First, rather than dispersing deterrent efforts broadly across a wide range of offenses and offenders, they focus on the most serious concentrations of violent offending: those people, groups, and places most responsible for violence. Second, by assembling a working group of agencies with different mechanisms for generating compliance by offenders, they widen the range of potential sanctions to include things like relentless stops and searches, enforcing probation and parole violations, taking advantage of federal law (in the US) in cases where state law is less severe, and arresting violent offenders for minor offenses. Third, by communicating directly with the offender population about the penalties that will result from continuing to engage in violence, the working groups aim to alter risk perceptions and generate a deterrent effect, in some cases without imposing an actual sanction. Fourth, when dealing with gangs, officials make it known that the entire gang will be held accountable for violence committed by any member of the gang (an approach known as “collective accountability”). Fifth, officials coordinate with service providers who can help offenders pursue alternatives to violence by offering counseling, mentoring, job training, and employment opportunities. Taken together, this collection of strategies is intended to “pull every lever” and optimize the deterrent effects of the working group's efforts (Kennedy 2009).

A growing body of high-quality research evidence suggests that well-designed focused deterrence interventions can produce dramatic reductions in gang and group-involved violence (e.g., Braga and Weisburd 2012; Kennedy 2009; Skogan and Frydl 2004). They were initially developed and tested in Boston, where they generated a 63 percent reduction in youth homicides (Braga *et al.* 2001; Piehl, Kennedy, and Braga 2000; Piehl *et al.* 2003). Since then they have been tested and found effective in several US cities, including: Chicago, IL (Papachristos, Mearns, and Fagan 2007); Cincinnati, OH (Engel, Tillyer, and Corsaro 2013); Indianapolis, IN (McGarrell, Chermak, and Wilson 2006); Lowell, MA (Braga *et al.* 2008); and Stockton, CA (Braga 2008). A recent meta-analysis found “strong empirical evidence for the crime prevention effectiveness of focused deterrence strategies” (Braga and Weisburd 2012: 349). Little is known about their effectiveness outside of the US cities where they have been tested so far (for an exception, see Williams *et al.* 2014).

Place-based Policing Strategies

A significant body of research has established that crime and violence are not distributed evenly over space. Instead, they are concentrated in micro-places that are referred to as “hot spots” (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger 1989; Weisburd, Maher, and Sherman 1992) or “pockets of crime” (St. Jean 2007). These micro-places are

typically smaller locations within larger geographical units such as communities, neighborhoods, or police beats (Eck and Weisburd 1995). They usually vary in size from something as large as a block, street segment, or block face (Sherman and Weisburd 1995; Weisburd *et al.* 2004) to something as small as a single building, address, or street corner (Sherman, Gartin, and Buerger 1989). Even within very high-crime communities, crime exhibits “non-random patterns of highly localized concentration” in certain micro-places (Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005: 27; also see Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2010; Maguire *et al.* 2008). Furthermore, street gangs, which are responsible for a significant share of gun violence in certain communities, also tend to cluster “in relatively small, geographically defined areas within a neighborhood” (Tita, Cohen, and Engberg 2005: 27). Understanding the spatial concentrations of violence is very useful for designing targeted solutions.

Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau (2010) examined spatial patterning in gun assault incidents in Boston over a 29-year period from 1980 to 2008. They found that gun violence was not “spread evenly across the urban landscape” (2010: 33). Instead, it was spatially concentrated in a handful of street segments and intersections. In some hot spots, violence was stable over time, whereas others were more volatile. Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau suggest that rapid or sudden changes in gun violence may emerge as a result of “highly volatile micro-level trends at a relatively small number of places in urban environments” (2010: 33). They note that volatile hot spots “represent less than 3% of street segments and intersections, generate more than half of all gun violence incidents, and seem to be the primary drivers of overall gun violence trends in Boston” (2010: 33). These findings are consistent with those from an earlier study which found that most street segments in Seattle had stable crime patterns over a 14-year period (Weisburd *et al.* 2004). Only a small proportion of street segments exhibited increasing or decreasing crime trajectories, and these places tended to be responsible for driving citywide trends in crime (also see Weisburd, Groff, and Yang 2012).

Understanding spatial concentrations in violence enables police agencies to deploy their resources in a more targeted manner that can increase the likelihood of preventing or deterring crime. Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau (2010: 50) recommend that a city's violence prevention strategies should include place-based interventions that are “focused in very specific locations rather than diffused across larger neighborhoods.” One possible approach is for police to identify hot spots of violence, especially gun violence, and then assign officers to acquire detailed knowledge about those areas. These experts can get to know residents and other local stakeholders, collect intelligence, conduct enforcement activity, and test a variety of crime prevention measures. They can also work closely with detectives to provide local knowledge that may be useful for investigations in those areas. They can anticipate impending incidents of violence, such as retaliation shootings, and take action to prevent violence. They can also anticipate other influential events in the community like changes in gang leadership or offenders returning home from prison. In short, they can serve as a valuable resource not only for the community itself, but also for other police units to ensure that they are well-informed about the

area and the offenders who may be operating there (Maguire *et al.* 2008). Koper, Egge, and Lum (2015) recommend that police agencies broaden the role of criminal investigators to focus attention on criminogenic *places* instead of just individual criminal cases. This involves tracking hot spots and developing “problem-solving interventions tailored to specific places” (2015: 242). Their suggestion reinforces the idea that hot spots policing need not focus only on patrol; criminal investigators and patrol officers can work together in focusing on micro-places where crime and violence are most prevalent.

The idea of focusing on places instead of people represents “a radical departure from traditional criminological theories that focused prevention efforts on the individual and ignored the importance of place” (Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2012: 9). Yet there is considerable scientific evidence to support this approach. For instance, a committee of experts assembled by the US National Research Council reviewed the research and concluded: “studies that focused police resources on crime hot spots provided the strongest collective evidence of police effectiveness that is now available” (Skogan and Frydl 2004: 250). The most systematic evidence to date comes from a meta-analysis conducted by Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau (2012), whose review included 19 studies that used quasi-experimental (9 studies) or randomized experimental (10 studies) designs to test the effects of hot spots policing interventions. These studies contained 25 separate tests of hot spots policing, 20 of which reported significant reductions in crime and disorder. Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau concluded that the evaluation evidence “provides fairly robust evidence that hot spots policing is an effective crime prevention strategy. The research also suggests that focusing police efforts on high-activity crime places does not inevitably lead to crime displacement and crime control benefits may diffuse into the areas immediately surrounding the targeted locations” (2012: 6).

Street Outreach Strategies

Another well-known violence reduction strategy is the use of street outreach workers to provide counseling, mentoring, mediation, and other services within high-risk populations. These types of initiatives were especially popular in the 1950s and 1960s for dealing with youth gangs (Klein and Maxson 2006). However, the findings from research conducted during that era raised serious questions about the wisdom of these approaches (Carney, Mattick, and Callaway 1969; Gold and Mattick 1974; Klein 1969; Klein 1971; Yablonski 1962). One of the key issues was whether outreach workers may actually make things worse by validating gangs as legitimate entities and increasing gang cohesion. In reviewing this research, Klein and Maxson (2006: 260) conclude that street outreach workers *can* be successful if they are “carefully guided and monitored” to ensure that they do not generate iatrogenic (crime amplifying) effects.

In spite of the early research findings, street outreach workers have become a central component of violence reduction initiatives in many jurisdictions.¹

For instance, street outreach is the nucleus of the Cure Violence model and related efforts that seek to interrupt and prevent violence through mediation and other forms of intervention by street outreach workers (see Chapter 34). Rather than relying on a criminal justice approach centered on arrest and prosecution, Cure Violence is based on a public health approach that focuses on prevention. The underlying premise is that violence is socially contagious and can spread like an epidemic. Cure Violence seeks to alter existing norms that view violence as an appropriate means of resolving conflict. As outlined in Chapter 35, a growing body of research evidence finds that violence is highly concentrated in certain networks of people (e.g., Papachristos, Braga, and Hureau 2012; Papachristos and Wildeman 2014; Tracy, Braga, and Papachristos 2016). Interventions that focus on stopping the spread of violence within these networks could have robust effects.

Cure Violence relies on street intelligence to identify people at greatest risk for shooting someone or being shot so the program’s outreach workers and “violence interrupters” can intervene.² Cure Violence staff use their deep knowledge of the community to mediate disputes and interrupt the cycles of retaliation that tend to characterize gang- and group-involved violence. Many were once drug dealers or gang members and therefore they have “street” credibility. They monitor the pulse of the community, intervening in situations where violence is imminent, and seeking to alter the way people think about how to resolve conflict. Cure Violence and related interventions have now been evaluated in six US cities.³ Although a thorough review of these evaluations is beyond the scope of this chapter, I discuss the initial evaluation that took place in Chicago and then only briefly summarize the findings from the other studies.

Cure Violence was first tested in Chicago (where it was originally known as *Chicago Ceasefire*). An evaluation examined the effects of Ceasefire on violent crime in seven of the 27 areas in which it was implemented (Skogan *et al.* 2009). The evaluators selected matched comparison areas that were similar in demographic and socioeconomic characteristics to these seven “treatment” areas. Because violent crime had already been decreasing throughout Chicago, the primary research question was whether the decrease in the Ceasefire zones was greater than the decrease in the comparison zones. The evaluation focused on three outcomes: shots fired (whether or not someone was hit), shootings (in which someone was hit), and killings. Thus there were 21 pairs of outcomes (seven pairs of treatment/comparison areas and three outcomes per area). The most basic analysis compared the percent change in each outcome before and after the implementation of Ceasefire for both the treatment and comparison areas. Of the 21 comparisons, 12 favored the comparison areas (the decrease in crime was greater in the comparison areas), eight favored the treatment areas (the decrease in crime was greater in the treatment areas), and one favored neither (the decrease in both areas was equivalent). This simplistic analysis suggests that Ceasefire did not consistently reduce violent crime because the comparison areas fared better than the treatment areas. The evaluators also carried out more sophisticated time series analyses meant to isolate the effects of Ceasefire. These analyses showed that Ceasefire was effective at reducing violence

for eight of the 21 outcomes; it was not effective for another eight; and for five of them, the effects of Ceasefire were inconclusive.

Additional evidence on the effects of Ceasefire comes from an evaluation of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), a focused deterrence intervention that was implemented in Chicago in some of the areas where Ceasefire was operating. The evaluators used a sophisticated quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effects of PSN on violent crime and to separate the effects of PSN from Ceasefire in those areas where both programs were operating (Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan 2007). The authors concluded that Ceasefire was not associated with the decrease in homicide rates in the PSN treatment area.

Evaluations of Cure Violence and related initiatives in other cities have found mixed results. In Baltimore, five of the ten treatment effects reported in the evaluation favored the treatment areas, one favored the comparison area, and four revealed no significant differences between treatment and comparison areas (Webster *et al.* 2012). An evaluation of a Cure Violence replication in the Crown Heights neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York found that shooting rates decreased by 6 percent in the treatment area and increased by 18 percent to 28 percent in the three comparison areas.

In Pittsburgh, an evaluation of a program partially modeled on Chicago's Ceasefire found that homicides either increased or remained stable in the treatment areas relative to the comparison areas, whereas aggravated assaults and gun assaults increased in all three treatment areas (Wilson, Chermak, and McGarrell 2010). In Newark, evaluators examined the effects of a hybrid model that represented a blend of "the law enforcement model used in Boston's Ceasefire and the public health approach adopted by Ceasefire Chicago" (Boyle *et al.* 2010: 107).⁴ The evaluators found no significant differences in the number of patients admitted to a Level 1 trauma center with gunshot wounds after the program's launch. In Phoenix, an evaluation of another program modeled on Chicago's Ceasefire found that it resulted in a significant decrease in assaults and a significant increase in shootings in contrast with the comparison areas (Fox *et al.* 2015).

Taken together, these studies suggest that street outreach strategies have variable effects: they can reduce violence, have no effect on violence, or increase violence. There is some indication in the literature that communities with more conflict mediation activity may experience greater reductions in violence (Whitehill, Webster, and Vernick 2013). Unfortunately, the scientific research on the effects of street outreach has not yet matured to the point where it is possible to reach more definitive conclusions. This is one body of research in which investments in stronger research designs, especially randomized trials, are sorely needed to improve our understanding of whether (and under what conditions) the intervention is effective. Unlike some of the other initiatives reviewed in this chapter, street outreach strategies are currently being tested in cities around the world. If these efforts are rigorously evaluated using research designs with strong internal validity, the resulting body of research should provide useful insights about external validity as well.

Gun-related Strategies

Much of the public policy debate over guns focuses on regulating civilian ownership of firearms. There is a substantial body of research on the relationship between gun ownership and violent crime. This is a heavily contested and complex body of research that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Much of the debate is unfortunately influenced by emotion and ideology rather than scientific evidence (Makarios and Pratt 2012). Because some of the research is motivated by advocacy, it is crucial to question the quality and veracity of each study carefully. For many scholars, the debate over the civilian ownership of firearms misses a crucial point: that not all guns have an equal probability of being used in violence. For instance, the evidence suggests that illegal guns (those that are unlawfully obtained or possessed) are used more often in crime than legal guns.⁵ Moreover, regulations controlling civilian ownership of firearms are less focused and incur more collateral costs than those that focus on illegal guns or those who use them. Research has also shown that certain types of weapons are used more often in violent crime than others (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996; Wintemute *et al.* 2004). Although much of the United States debate on solutions to gun violence focuses on banning "assault weapons," research shows that these weapons are involved in less than 2 percent of gun homicides (Kleck 2001). Finally, results from ballistic imaging research reveal that certain individual guns are used repeatedly in crime (Braga and Pierce 2004; King and Wells 2015; Maguire *et al.* 2016). Getting these so-called "hot guns" off the streets is likely to produce disproportionate impacts on violence.

Unfortunately, since much of the debate over how to address gun violence fails to focus on the highest-risk guns, the policy solutions that emerge from this debate are often similarly unfocused. For instance, research shows that voluntary⁶ gun buyback programs are ineffective at reducing violence because they typically attract weapons that are not used in crime (Kuhn *et al.* 2002; Romero, Wintemute, and Vernick 1998). Systematic evaluations of gun buyback programs in Argentina (Lenis, Ronconi, and Scharogrodsky 2010) and three US cities (Callahan, Rivara, and Koepsell 1995; Phillips, Kim, and Sobel 2013; Rosenfeld 1995) have all found that they had no effect on violent crime. According to Sherman (2001: 19), gun buyback programs fail because the intervention doesn't focus sufficiently on the risk: "Guns are bought from anyone, regardless of where they live or whether the gun was readily accessible to people at high risk for crime ... not all guns are equal risk of being used in crime." Gun buyback programs could actually have perverse effects. For instance, since most such programs operate with a "no questions asked" policy, they could encourage offenders to steal guns and convert them to cash, or they could provide offenders with cash for trading in their old or unused weapons. Though the research evidence clearly demonstrates that gun buyback programs are ineffective, they continue to be used by well-intentioned policymakers and community activists concerned with "doing something" about gun violence. However, the resources invested in these programs could be put to better use supporting violence reduction initiatives that actually work.

If certain guns (both individual guns and *types* of guns) are used more often by offenders to commit acts of violence, then we would expect interventions that focus on these guns to be successful in reducing violence. Koper and Mayo-Wilson (2012) report findings from a systematic review of research evidence on the effectiveness of police interventions to reduce gun violence through efforts to stem the illegal possession and carrying of firearms. The underlying basis of these interventions is their primary focus on illegal guns, which are thought to be used more often in violent crime than legally owned guns. Koper and Mayo-Wilson's review includes seven rigorous studies that examine the impact of directed patrols in which police officers are assigned "to high-crime areas at high-risk times" (Koper and Mayo-Wilson 2012: 14) and they are encouraged to engage in proactive enforcement focused on seizing guns. Five of the seven studies took place in the United States with two others taking place in Colombia. The authors conclude that the intervention reduced gun violence in six of the seven studies. Moreover, they note that "crackdowns on gun carrying are more effective and efficient when they are more intensive and focused on high-risk places, times, and people" (2012: 32). This is a robust finding that derives from high-quality research.

One of the most well-known studies of police crackdowns on guns was the Kansas City Gun Experiment, which found that intensive police efforts to detect and seize concealed guns reduced violence (Sherman and Rogan 1995). Police engaged in proactive patrols in an 80 by 10 block area with a heavy concentration of gun violence. They conducted pedestrian and traffic stops in this area as a means of carrying out legally justified searches for firearms. Most (but not all) of the weapons seized were carried illegally and were later destroyed by police. The analysis found that the intervention was responsible for significant reductions in gun violence relative to an otherwise similar comparison area that did not receive the extra gun patrols. The authors concluded that enforcing existing laws prohibiting carrying concealed weapons can be an effective strategy for reducing gun crime. Similarly, Wells, Zhang, and Zhao (2012) examined the effects of gun possession arrests by a proactive patrol unit in the Houston Police Department. They found that increasing the number of illegal gun possession arrests reduced gun violence. Their findings are consistent with the conclusion that gun violence reduction strategies which focus intently on risk—including high-risk places, offenders, and guns—can be highly effective. Although the debate over civilian ownership of firearms is often highly polarized, all sides of the debate would likely find some common ground in supporting these effective initiatives.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the research evidence on four well-known approaches to reducing violence. The research evidence on these strategies is uneven, with some notable gaps in knowledge that need to be filled. Even when there is a body of research on certain types of strategies, internal and external validity issues sometimes make it difficult to draw confident conclusions about what works and under what conditions. In spite of these issues, the research evidence reviewed in

this chapter makes it clear that homicide *can* be prevented using the right mix of policies. The challenge is to continue testing and experimenting with these and other approaches to continue filling gaps in our knowledge, with the goal of building a high-quality body of research evidence on how to prevent homicide.

Notes

- 1 Street outreach is an important component of the Spèrgel model, a comprehensive approach to dealing with gangs and gang violence in the United States (Spèrgel 1995, 2007). Street outreach is just one part of this larger and more complex strategy for dealing with gangs. However, evaluations of the Spèrgel model have not isolated the effects of street outreach from the effects of other program elements.
- 2 Cure Violence outreach workers serve as case managers, working closely with clients on an ongoing basis, mentoring them, helping them address their problems without using violence, and working with them to find jobs. They adopt a social work-like approach (Skogan *et al.* 2009). Violence interrupters do not manage an ongoing caseload like the outreach workers. They focus more directly on anticipating and preventing violent incidents.
- 3 Some of these initiatives are not viewed by Cure Violence as official partners and may be missing certain elements of the Cure Violence approach.
- 4 Although the evaluators describe Newark's Ceasefire as a hybrid of projects in Boston and Chicago, its similarities to Boston's approach were somewhat superficial. Newark's Ceasefire appears to have adopted many of the elements of Chicago's Ceasefire. However, its outreach workers were a mix of ex-offenders and church congregants, did not maintain formal client caseloads, and appear to have been more reactive and less preventive than their peers in Chicago.
- 5 I use the word "suggests" because the evidence is somewhat incomplete. Due to the difficulties inherent in obtaining a representative sample of guns used in crime (because many crime guns are never seized), the best data come from asking offenders. In the United States, for instance, surveys or interviews of prisoners have clarified the sources from which offenders obtain guns (Cook *et al.* 2015; Cook, Parker, and Pollack 2015; Planty and Truman 2013; Wright and Rossi 1994). The research shows that since many offenders are prohibited from purchasing guns legally, they get them "in off-the-books transactions, often from social connections such as family and acquaintances, or from 'street' sources such as illicit brokers or drug dealers" (Cook, Parker, and Pollack 2015: 29).
- 6 Compulsory gun buybacks like the one implemented in Australia are beyond the scope of this chapter. For further reading, see Lee and Suardi (2010), Leigh and Neill (2010), and Reuter and Mouzos (2003).

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