Targeted Gang Prevention: Prospects and Problems

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Targeted Gang Prevention

- Violence is not random.
- “The Power Few” (Sherman, 2007)
  - Community (Hot Spots)
  - Group (Gangs)
  - Individual (Hot People)

- “targeting a small, high-risk population can have significant, broader benefits”

  *U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder (2009: 1)*
Chicago Gang Homicide Network
(Papachristos, 2009)
The Power Few  
(Esbensen et al., 2013)

- Gang members are disproportionately involved in violence, as victims and offenders.
  - Albuquerque, NM (n = 591)
    - 5% of sample reported gang membership in 2008
      - Accounted for 56% of robbery offenders in the sample
      - 1 of every 3 gang members committed a robbery
      - 1.2 of every 100 non-gang youth involved in a robbery
  - Nashville, TN
    - 2% of sample reported gang membership in 2008
      - Accounted for 36% of aggravated assault offenders.
  - Philadelphia, PA
    - 6% of sample reported gang membership in 2008
      - Accounted for 43% of robbery victims
      - Accounted for 35% of aggravated assault victims
How do we identify gang members *BEFORE* they join?

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<thead>
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<th>Lower</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Empathy</td>
<td>- Impulsivity</td>
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<td>- Likelihood of Reporting Victimization</td>
<td>- Risk Seeking</td>
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<td>- Guilt</td>
<td>- Self-Centerededness</td>
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<td>- Parental Monitoring</td>
<td>- Approve of Aggressive Conflict Resolution</td>
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<td>- School Commitment</td>
<td>- Delinquent Peers</td>
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<td>- Fewer Pro-social Peers</td>
<td>- Delinquency</td>
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<td>- Commitment to Pro-social Peers</td>
<td>- Anger Identity</td>
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<td>- Neutralizations; etc…</td>
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<td>- Suicidal Ideation (Add Health)</td>
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Delinquency Trajectory of Gang Involved Youth
(Esbensen et al., 2013)

Gang Onset at age 13 and Exit at 15
The Consequences of Gang Membership, Beyond Delinquency and Violence

- **Cumulative Continuity**
  - Short-term problems can have a lasting impact
    - E.g., failing freshman algebra, expulsion
- **Interactional Continuity**
  - How do others treat you?
- **Levitt and Venkatesh (1999)**
  - Gang members less likely to graduate, arrested more frequently in early adulthood, lower legitimate income
- **Krohn and colleagues (2011)**
  - Gang members had less education, early parenthood, less income, and more arrests in early adulthood.
Continuum of Promising Practices for Targeted Gang Intervention

**SUPPRESSION**
- Boston Ceasefire
- “Pulling Levers”

**Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative**
- “Spergel Model”

**SOCIAL SERVICE**
- CureViolence
- “Violence Interrupters”
Why do great ideas fail so often?

Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative (CAGI)

- What is the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative?
  - Project Safe Neighborhoods (94 US Attorney’s Offices)
  - Spergel/OJJDP Comprehensive Model

- A lesson in paradigm shifts and paradigm clashes.
  - Successes and failures of CAGI
Stopping the Cycle of Gang Violence

Youth Exposed to Violence

Getting into Gangs

Involvement with Guns, Violence, Drugs

Incarceration/Re-entry
Components of the “Spergel” Model

- The Comprehensive Community-Wide Gang Program Model
  - 1) Community Mobilization
    - Development of a community-wide working group *(i.e., PSN)*
  - 2) Social Intervention
    - Street workers that mentor youth. Bridge to institutions.
  - 3) Opportunity Provision
    - Employment, education, social services
  - 4) Organizational Change *(Policy Analysis)*
    - Policies and practices routinely fail “at-risk” youth
  - 5) Suppression
    - Specialized gang units, intensive probation, prosecution
CAGI Details: Funding Areas

- **1) Enforcement and Prosecution ($1 million)**
  - Collaboration of local and federal law enforcement
    - Intelligence sharing and case coordination
  - Collaboration of local and federal prosecution

- **2) Prevention and Intervention ($1 million)**
  - The prevention and intervention strategy provides gang focused programming to youth at high risk for gang involvement

- **3) Prisoner Reentry ($500,000)**
  - The prisoner reentry strategy provides mentoring, social services, and treatment to gang-involved offenders returning to “the” community from prison.
Participating CAGI Sites

- **Original Six (2006)**
  - Cleveland (OH-ND)
  - Dallas/Fort Worth (TX-ND)
  - Los Angeles (CA-CD)
  - Milwaukee (WI-ED)
  - Pennsylvania Corridor (PA-ED)
  - Tampa (FL-MD)

- **Subsequent Four (2007)**
  - Indianapolis (IN-SD)
  - Oklahoma City (OK-ED)
  - Rochester (NY-WD)
  - Raleigh/Durham (NC-ED and NC-MD)

- **Final Two (2008)**
  - Chicago (IL-ND)
  - Detroit (MI-ED)
Average Violent Crime Trends between 2002-2009
(Violent Crime Rate per 100,000)
Law Enforcement Results

- Process Evaluation Results suggest that law enforcement was quick to implement, and included 5 sites that engaged in policing strategies highly consistent with the model.
  - Data Driven
  - Targeted
  - Solid Cases
- No usable gang data in 10 of 12 sites.
- No overall program effect on violent crime.
  - Coefficient in the right direction, not significant
Law Enforcement Implementation Ranking and Changes in Violent Crime (High Imp. = 15% reduction in violent crime)
Reentry?

- The reentry component of the intervention was not suitable for an outcome analysis.
  - **Poor planning** led to the inability to identify and serve the intended population.
    - Six sites did not become “operational” until 2009 or after.
    - Only 5 sites met targeted number of clients.

- Program **assumed** inmates would return to original neighborhood, which was not realized.

- A common complaint was that the program did not always deliver on promises.
  - Economic collapse and job market in 2008.
Prevention and Intervention

- Identifying those most at-risk for gang membership and violence.
  - Gang members, while a small fraction of the population, account for roughly 50 to 75 percent of violent crime in some U.S. locations.

- Just target the bad apples (simple right?)
  - How do we identify them?
  - Who do we ask?
  - Where do we get our information?

- How successful are we in doing this?
  - Evidence, mostly anecdotal, suggested we regularly provide services to youth at low risk for violence.
A Unique Opportunity: Cleveland, OH

- African American Male School Dropout Rate = 75%
  - Overall graduation rate = 43%
  - School District wanted to know the needs of students.
- Cleveland awarded grant to implement CAGI
  - Wanted a standardized instrument to help identify youth most at-risk for gang membership.
- The Global Risk Assessment Device (GRAD) (Gavazzi et al., 2003)
  1) Those targeted as part of the CAGI (n = 146)
  2) A general sample of African American males attending public high school (n = 1,438)
Risk Domains

- Four Risk Domains were evaluated across the two samples:
  - **Disrupted Family Processes** (17 items)
    - Sub-Domains: Conflict; Parental Tiptoeing; Hardship
  - **Mental Health** (26 items)
    - Sub-Domains: Internalizing; Externalizing; ADHD
  - **Educational Risks** (12 items)
    - Sub-Domains: Disruptive Classroom Behavior; Threats to Educational Progress; Learning Difficulties
  - **Delinquent Peers** (sub-scale) (3 items)
    - Associate with Gangs, Involved with Gangs, Delinquent Friends
Hypothesis

- Those targeted as part of the CAGI will report more risk than the non-targeted general school-based sample in each domain.
  - The targeted sample was supposed to represent the youth most at-risk of gang membership from high gang areas.
  - The non-targeted sample represents African American males attending public high schools across the city.
Results

Level of Risk by Domain and Target Group

- **Education**: 5.61 (Red), 5.25 (Blue)
- **Family**: 5.12 (Red), 6.66* (Blue)
- **Mental Health**: 10.83 (Blue), 13.56* (Red)
- **Peer Group**: 2.03 (Red), 2.33* (Blue)

Red = CAGI, Blue = School
Paradigm Shifts and Paradigm Clashes

**RISK**
- Law enforcement and corrections have an easier time implementing risk focused interventions.
  - It is how they view the world
- Implementation of data driven programs is now commonplace.

**NEED**
- Social service providers view the world differently.
  - Identify subjects in need, and do their best to remedy those needs.
  - Many youth are in need, but few youth are at risk.
Common Hurdles to Program Fidelity

1) The idea that “something is better than nothing.”
   - “If we can help just one kid it is worth it.”

Opportunity Costs
   - “Nothing” is not the alternative to prevention and intervention programs.
   - Is there a better alternative?

Reality: Half-hearted implementation of programs designed for high-risk youth fair no better than no implementation at all (Kovaleski et. al., 1999).
Common Hurdles to Program Fidelity

2) Insufficient “buy in” to the targeted approach.
   - Identifying and working with the highest risk youth is difficult.

“Motivation clearly makes a client, ex-offender, or kid much easier to handle, since street-level workers typically define motivation in terms of cooperation. The motivated citizen-client is nonetheless deemed morally superior to the unmotivated. Conversely, the unmotivated, regardless of their need or circumstance, are deemed worthy.”

(Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2009: 104)
Common Hurdles to Program Fidelity

3) “Buy in” is simply not enough.
   - Many people bought in to CAGI
   - Ignaz Semmelweis, M.D. (1818 – 1865)
   - A simple solution

What is the mission of your organization?

(1) How do high risk youth fit into this mission?

(2) Are you willing to deny services to “good kids” in order to devote your limited resources to high risk youth?

(3) If youth continue to demonstrate conduct problems, how will this impact their involvement in your program?
Common Hurdles to Program Fidelity

4) What about you and members of your organization?

- It is okay to ask: “What about us?”
  - Working with high risk youth, day in and day out, is difficult.
  - Are there incentives for working with high risk youth?
    - Working with the “unworthy”
    - What are your small wins?
  - What proportion of your available resources can you devote to those at-risk versus those in-need?
    - Both are necessary, but only one can prevent a substantial level of violence.
Thank You!

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