



Concept Intro: Crime Hot Spots

Did you know that most crime happens on just a handful of blocks, even in neighborhoods people describe as generally unsafe?

Research consistently shows that crime concentrates in certain geographic areas. In fact, even in the communities with big crime challenges, most streets have little or no crime and only a small percentage of blocks are home to a vast majority of crime. These concentrations, often referred to as “hot spots,” can be identified using Geographic Information System (GIS) software. Although hot spots can be a chronic problem for a community, innovative policing practices and solutions from community partnerships have been found to reduce crime in these places in communities across the country.

Once law enforcement officers have a visual picture of where crime is regularly occurring in their jurisdiction, they can begin a thorough analysis of the physical and social characteristics of those places and the factors that drive crime. In the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program (BCJI), other cross sector partners engage in this analysis together with law enforcement and researchers. The information they glean forms the basis of targeted measures of action. For example, police can deploy walking beats in a particular hot spot at the specific times when robbery is prevalent, and housing developers can work on acquiring and rehabilitating problem properties. In addition, many BCJI sites are adopting community policing principles and practices as part of problem-solving around hot spots.

Key Terms

Hot spots—small geographic areas that have high concentrations of crime. For example, an intersection with a liquor store that is associated with illegal drug activity, prostitution, and loitering.

Crime mapping—a technique used by researchers, analysts, and law enforcement officers to visualize the spatial distribution of crime.

Community policing—a proactive approach to law enforcement that emphasizes 1) community partnerships, 2) organizational transformation, and 3) problem solving to develop strategic responses to public safety concerns.

Problem-oriented policing (POP)—an approach that emphasizes understanding the comprehensive nature of a specific crime issue to improve local responses, balancing the fact that crimes follow predictable patterns with the need to adapt prevention measures for variances across places. What works to reduce crime for one community may not be the right answer for another.

The BCJI Approach

These powerful themes run through all BCJI projects.

DATA-DRIVEN

BCJI targets crime hot spots – often streets, properties or public spaces in communities that have struggled with crime for years. Researchers are engaged in the day-to-day work, helping partners examine problems, assess evidence-based solutions, and monitor progress.



COMMUNITY-ORIENTED:

BCJI champions active roles for residents in identifying problems, selecting strategies and creating safe and healthy environments.



SPURS REVITALIZATION:

BCJI tackles problem properties, unsafe streets and parks, unemployment, transit barriers and service gaps related to crime.



BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS:

BCJI taps the resources of public, nonprofit and community leaders to bring more resources and different approaches to bear on longstanding crime challenges for lasting change.



Concept Intro: Crime Hot Spots, *continued*

Where A Focus on Hot Spots Has Worked

Austin, TX

The Austin Police Department increased police presence in hot spots through walking beats. This contributed to an **82 percent decrease in violent crime** in one hot spot in the Rundberg community.

Detroit, MI

In 2014, **Part 1 crimes dropped 20 percent** along the Morang Avenue corridor, where community leaders increased crime fighting and engagement efforts.

Milwaukee, WI

From 2013 to 2015, five hot spots that had been targeted in the Washington Park neighborhood experienced a **23 percent decrease in violent crime**, compared to a 1 percent increase in the city as a whole.

Philadelphia, PA

A Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) intervention at the 34th and Haverford Avenue intersection in the Mantua neighborhood—including installing surveillance cameras and signage, replacing graffiti with a mural, and increasing lighting—led to a **decrease in crime incidents by 75 percent** over one year.

Resources

For more information on community policing, visit the Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) website: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/>.

For more information on problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing website: <http://www.popcenter.org/>.

Read “The Effects of Hot Spots Policing on Crime: An Updated Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.”: <https://tinyurl.com/mfqlwo3>

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