

National anti-gun violence program largely successful, study finds

November 9 2009

Project Safe Neighborhoods - a community-based policing effort launched in 2001 - has been largely successful in its goal of reducing violent crime, according to an analysis by Michigan State University, the national research and training partner of the federal initiative.

And, as an offshoot of the program, the U.S. Department of Justice recently awarded MSU \$1 million in stimulus funding to expand a research and training program designed to eliminate illegal drug markets.

"One of the dynamics driving [violent crime](#) in the United States is open-air drug markets," said Ed McGarrell, lead researcher on the project and professor and director of MSU's School of Criminal Justice. "There's also a harmful community effect where this drug activity tends to create a lot of fear among local residents."

The Justice Department started Project Safe Neighborhoods eight years ago to reduce the level of [gun violence](#) across the country. Federal officials chose MSU's renowned criminal justice faculty to train local, state and federal law enforcement personnel on cutting-edge enforcement and prevention practices and to research and continually refine the community policing program.

The initiative stresses involvement from community groups and intervention into the lives of potential gun-crime victims and perpetrators, with possible assistance for vocational training, drug treatment and other needs, McGarrell said. The program is coordinated

by the 94 U.S. Attorney offices nationwide.

In the 26 cities where the program was implemented rigorously, violent crime dropped by an average of 13 percent from 2000 to 2006, according to MSU's analysis. The 38 cities that did not implement the program thoroughly saw violent crime increase by an average of 8 percent.

MSU submitted its evaluation to the Justice Department earlier this year. Attorney General Eric Holder subsequently cited the results at the National Institute of Justice annual conference as reflective of the Justice Department's commitment to evidence-based practice.

"Project Safe Neighborhoods was a qualified success," McGarrell said, "in the sense that what it really demonstrated was that the program had a powerful impact when it was implemented effectively."

As the program progressed, officials in High Point, N.C., took a similar, community-based approach to permanently shutting down illegal drug markets. Building on that experience, and with MSU's guidance, 16 additional cities - from Atlanta to Middletown, Ohio, to Seattle - have similarly attacked the drug problem.

The \$1 million grant from the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance will allow MSU to provide anti-drug market training to law enforcement personnel and community groups in 12 more cities, while continuing to research and refine the program. McGarrell said the cities have not yet been selected.

Lansing, Mich., received a \$350,000 grant from the Department of Justice to implement its own anti-drug program, with MSU evaluating.

To date, MSU has landed about \$5 million in Justice Department

funding for the anti-gun violence and anti-drug initiatives. McGarrell said the programs embrace MSU's land-grant tradition of combining education, research and outreach - a full-circle approach designed to solve real-world problems.

He added that the School of Criminal Justice, which turns 75 next year, is the nation's oldest degree-granting criminal justice program.

"The community policing movement was largely begun through research by MSU faculty," McGarrell said. "We've always tried to be on the cutting-edge of new developments in the field of [criminal justice](#)."

Source: Michigan State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: National anti-gun violence program largely successful, study finds (2009, November 9) retrieved 2 May 2024 from

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