



## Office of Research and Strategic Planning

# RESEARCH BRIEF

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# Charleston's West Side Drug Market Intervention: Selected Results from Crime Data Analysis and Resident Surveys

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### Highlights:

- **Spatial analysis of crime data reveals that there was minimal change in crime rates in the targeted area following the intervention, but shows that several nearby areas experienced substantial changes in rates of drug crime and violent crime.**
- **Survey results indicate that West Side residents were more likely than residents of other Charleston neighborhoods to perceive crime to be a serious local problem. West Side residents were more likely to have heard about a crime reduction initiative in their neighborhood and to believe that it made a positive impact.**

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 2012 and 2016, a focused deterrence police strategy targeting high-risk offenders was implemented in the West Side neighborhood of Charleston, West Virginia. The West Side accounted for more than 38% of all arrests in the city in 2011. In addition, geographic analyses identified a specific area within this neighborhood that had a disproportionately high number of violent and property crimes. City officials focused the intervention on this area which comprised thirty-five city blocks ranging from Park Avenue in the east to Florida Street in the west and from 1st Avenue in the south to Washington Street West in the north.

Drug market intervention strategies have goals that involve both the reduction of crime and disorder as well as bringing together local citizens and raising awareness to strengthen police-community relations. Therefore, two separate data sources were used to examine the effects of the DMI initiative: 1) official crime data based on crime incidents reported to the police and 2) survey data based on mailed self-administered questionnaires.

Geospatial analyses were performed to examine changes in reported crime before and after implementation of the DMI. This pre-post design is used because the DMI occurred over a period of time rather than at a specific time point. The analysis involved the use of graduated color mapping to identify the level of crime prior to implementation and the change in crime after implementation by census tract.

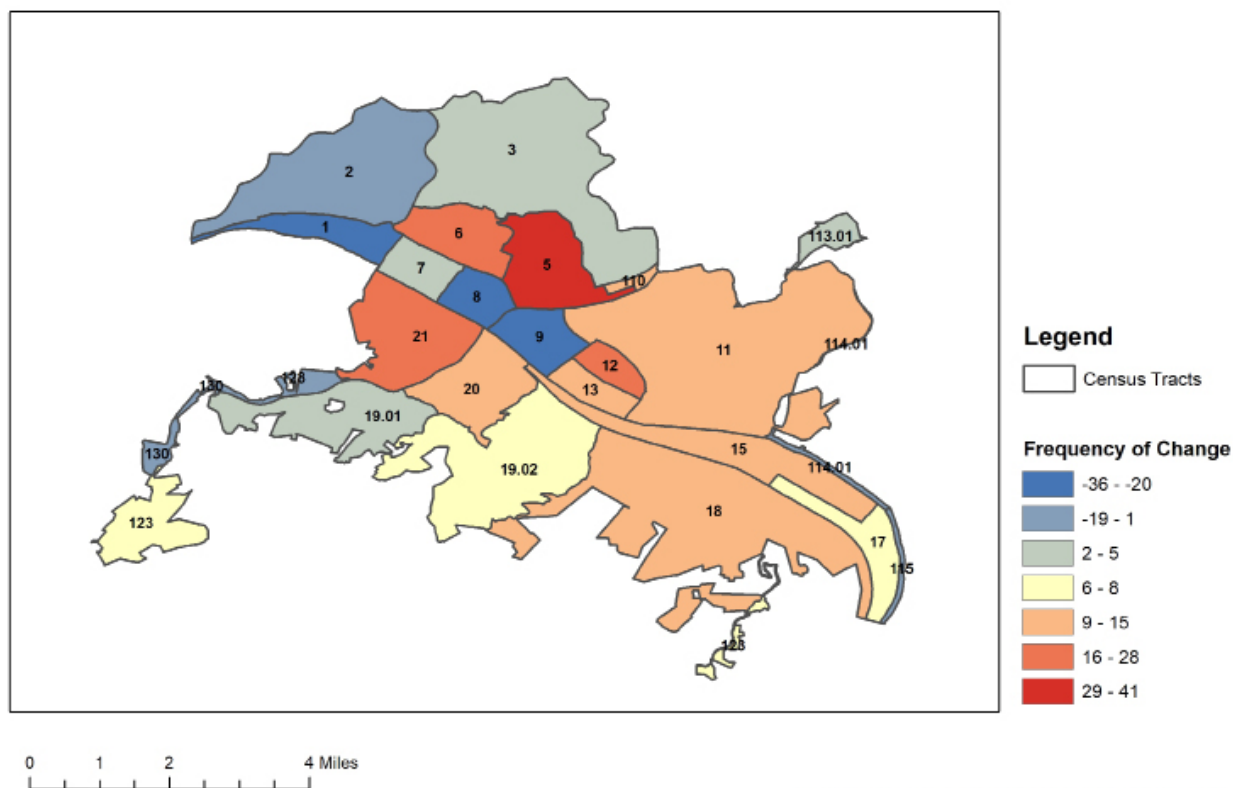
Researchers also conducted a mail-based survey of a random sample of 2,000 households in Charleston in order to examine residents' perceptions of changes in levels of crime and disorder, and to assess their views on the impact of crime-reduction interventions. In addition, survey respondents were also asked questions that measured perceptions of police-effectiveness, the quality of police-community relations and community efficacy. Responses were gathered from every neighborhood in the city in order to compare the responses of West Side residents to those of their counterparts living in other areas.

## Drug Market Intervention (DMI)

The Drug Market Intervention is a focused deterrence initiative that seeks to 1) eliminate open-air drug markets, 2) return a neighborhood to the residents, 3) reduce crime and disorder, and 4) improve the safety of the public and their quality of life.

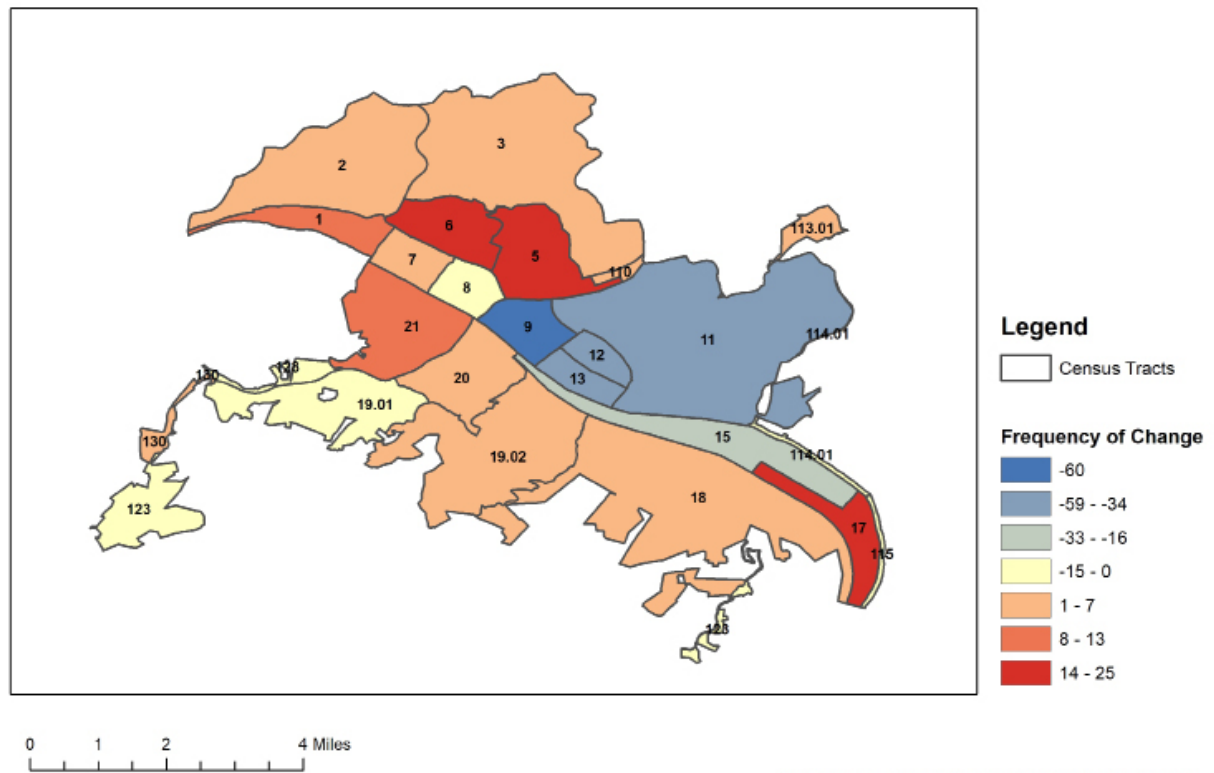
A focused deterrence initiative involves the identification of prolific offenders to receive targeted law enforcement actions, persuasive communication of sanction threats through offender notification meetings, coordinated and strategic prosecution of uncooperative individuals, provision of social services to individuals willing to accept them and change their behavior, and careful monitoring of the individuals' actions (Braga & Weisburd, 2012; Scott, 2017).

### Change in Violent Crime Incidents by Census Tract, 2012-2016 Charleston



Note: The unit of analysis is the individual crime incident.

## Change in Drug Crime Incidents by Census Tract, 2012-2016 Charleston



## KEY FINDINGS FROM CRIME ANALYSIS

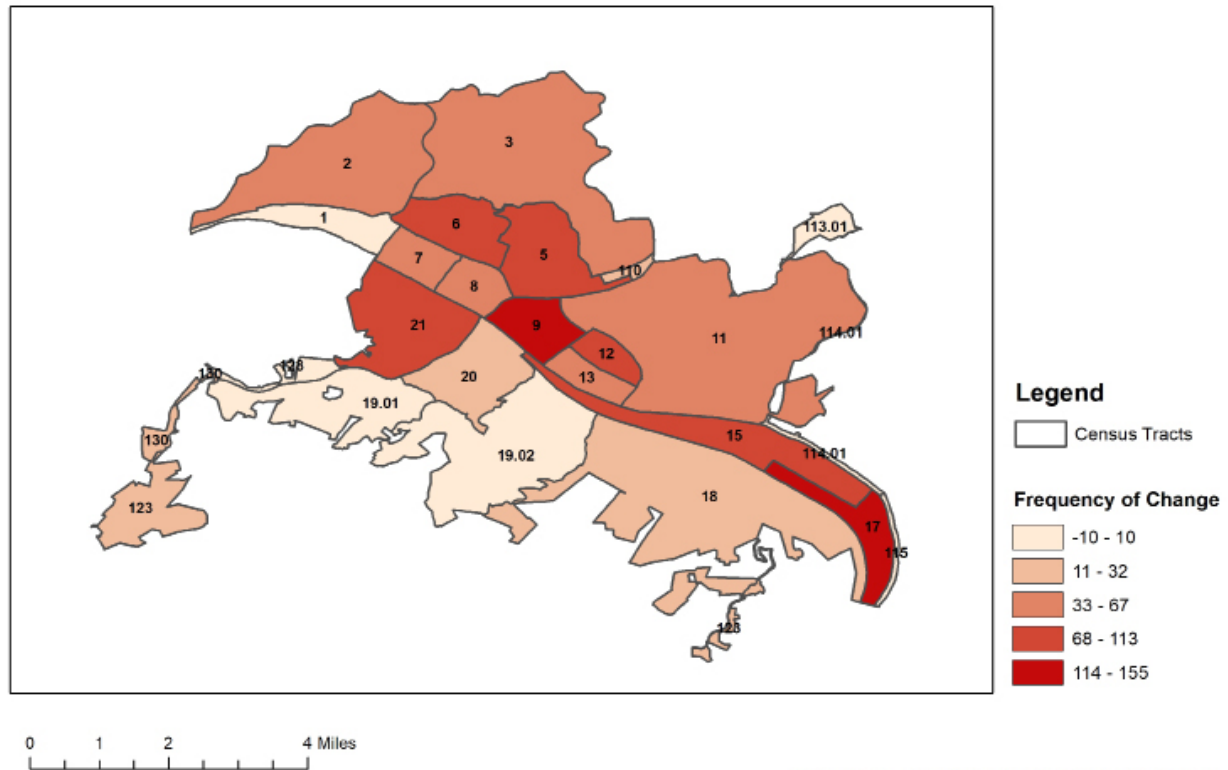
- Between 2012 and 2016, census tract 7, which contains the target area, experienced minimal increases in violent, drug, and property crimes.
- Census tract 8, located adjacent to the target area but within the West Side, experienced a substantial decrease in violent crime but minimal change in drug crime or property crime.
- Census tracts 5 and 6, comprising the hills of the West Side, experienced substantial increases in violent, drug, and property crimes, suggesting the possibility that the intervention may have displaced crime to surrounding areas (i.e., from flats to hills).

## Data Sources

Data were obtained for all crime incidents from the Charleston Police Department's records management system for the years 2012 (before DMI) and 2016 (after DMI). Addresses in the source crime data were then geocoded, or matched with addresses in the street or parcel data, resulting in points for each crime being placed onto the map. 93 percent of incidents were mapped and therefore used in the analysis.

A survey was conducted to measure changes in perceptions of neighborhood safety and police and community relationships. 2,000 mailed self-administered questionnaires were sent in July 2017 to a random sample of homes in the Charleston area. 186 completed surveys were returned (9.3 percent response rate).

## Change in Property Crime Incidents by Census Tract, 2012-2016 Charleston



## KEY FINDINGS FROM SURVEYS

- Compared to residents of other neighborhoods, West Side residents perceived crime of all types to be a greater problem affecting their neighborhoods.
- Compared to residents of other neighborhoods, West Side residents perceived that over the past year, there was a greater increase in all types of crime as well as physical and social disorder, a greater decrease in safety, and less positive changes in perceptions of the police and neighborhood collective efficacy (social control) on average.
- Nearly half (44%) of the residents of the West Side believed that there were multiple serious problems facing the city, while over half (55%) of the residents of other neighborhoods reported that drugs specifically were the most serious problem.
- Almost half of the residents of both the West Side (41%) and other neighborhoods (43%) believed that increasing police presence was the most important thing needed to improve public safety in Charleston.

- West Side residents were slightly more likely to have reported hearing about a crime reduction initiative in their neighborhood (36%) compared to residents of other neighborhoods (22%).
- Most residents of other neighborhoods (62%) believed that the initiative they heard of was a neighborhood watch, while most residents of the West Side believed that the initiative involved either a neighborhood watch or awareness meetings.
- The majority of residents of the West Side (88%) and other neighborhoods (83%) who heard of a crime reduction initiative believed that it made a positive impact in their neighborhood.
- Most residents of the West Side (83%) and other neighborhoods (82%) said that a campaign to reduce crime is likely or extremely likely to be helpful in their neighborhood.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

While survey results suggest that the small sample of residents from the West Side perceived that crime in general had increased, the findings from the analysis of crime data suggest that the level of violent crime in some neighborhoods near the target area had substantially decreased following the intervention. However, there was also a substantial increase in crime in the census tracts containing the West Side hills, suggesting that crime displacement may have occurred.

Ultimately, there are a variety of factors that can influence the actual and perceived effectiveness of Drug Market Intervention strategies. Several important considerations that have been identified in the literature on focused deterrence initiatives are outlined below.

- **Understand the social networks that make up the drug market.** Those responsible for running the DMI should understand who works for whom, who makes what kinds of decisions, how discipline is maintained within a criminal network, and how violent crimes are or are not related to drug-market operations (Scott, 2017).

- **Consider the size and type of market as important factors that might influence program success** (Corsaro, 2013). Smaller export markets with less organized dealers (i.e., sellers distribute to buyers from outside the community where the marketplace is located) are more susceptible to comprehensive policing strategies such as DMI. However, import markets (i.e., non-resident dealers selling to local residents) and public markets (non-resident dealers and buyers) are often larger in size and less susceptible to strategic policing. Larger drug markets likely have wider drawing power and are less susceptible to comprehensive policing interventions (Reuter & Pollack, 2012).
- **Maintain a visible police presence.** Police should maintain a visible presence and respond quickly to calls even after some time has elapsed after the original intervention. Residents who appreciate the benefits such as faster response time and greater police presence struggle with a perceived withdrawal or reduction of these benefits once crime declines (Corsaro, Brunson, & McGarrell, 2009).
- **Community mechanisms should play a part in place-based police interventions.** The largest and most consistent crime reductions have been observed in neighborhoods that had the strongest commitment of neighborhood resources. Complementary crime control tactics, such as place managers should take an increased role in crime prevention to increase guardianship and strengthen neighborhood social control (Corsaro, 2013).

## REFERENCES

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