



Violence and Crime Prevention



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION

Where we stand: What can policymakers and public officials learn from research on violence prevention?

Violence remains one of the leading causes of death in the United States. It disproportionately affects our youngest and most vulnerable citizens, leaving them to face a devastating array of immediate and lifelong consequences – ones that severely constrain their life opportunities and ignite a downward spiral of violence begetting further violence.

Between 2000-2012, approximately **6,500 soldiers died on the battlefields** of Afghanistan and Iraq. During that same twelve year period, **165,000 people died on U.S. streets and in homes** as a result of violence and crime – an order of magnitude approximately **25 times greater**.

Communities laced with violence suffer painful and long-term repercussions as well. Residents and businesses flee from the communities. Our health care system becomes overburdened. Precious resources must be diverted to an expensive and stigmatizing criminal justice system and an overworked social services system. The University of Chicago Crime Lab, co-directed by SSA faculty **Jens Ludwig** and **Harold Pollack**, estimates that **the annual cost of gun violence alone to the U. S. economy is \$100 billion (\$2.5 billion each year in Chicago)**, factoring in lost worker productivity, medical costs, mental health costs, and costs to the government vis-à-vis the criminal justice system. “When violence drives people and business out of the city, it reduces the tax base, which degrades the ability of government to tackle the violence problem, which fuels still further violence in a vicious downward cycle,” Ludwig notes.

Using research and scientific tools to prevent violence

To address this complex problem, the School of Social Service Administration (SSA) has made a strategic institutional commitment to generate the knowledge and professional leadership that will prevent violence before it occurs. Never has a premier university undertaken such an ambitious and comprehensive effort to address the problem of violence prevention leveraging the full force of the University's practice, research, and evaluation resources.

Taking the lead among U. S. schools of social work, SSA is testing new approaches that are beginning to reveal promising strategies. Our goal is to build knowledge, promote evidence-based strategies, and inform practitioners and policy makers about what works to stop violence and its steep human and economic costs.

Several major SSA programs, including The University of Chicago Crime Lab, SSA's Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention (CCYVP), and studies housed at SSA on the early prevention of violence, are underway now. Leveraging multiple disciplinary vantage points, these SSA efforts are determining the soundest interventions and policies to prevent violence – and its dire consequences – thereby raising the potential to save lives and strengthen our communities, while saving the public significant dollars. *“In criminal justice, we spend hundreds of billions of dollars in interventions, but often we don't know what really works,”* says Harold Pollack, SSA's Helen Ross Professor.

Focused Research Programs on Violence Prevention

Three separate SSA research programs focus on different stages in the complex cycle that spawns violence. All of them draw on core strengths of the University: the pursuit of deep understanding and knowledge, the nurturing of leadership, and the application of scientific research to maximize human benefit – all within the context of fully engaged community partnerships, some as old as the school itself. When combined within SSA, these research programs represent a rare opportunity to strike at the core of one of society's most persistent and devastating ills.

The three SSA violence prevention programs include:

Crime and Policing –
the Crime Lab

Youths and Community –
the Chicago Center for
Youth Violence Prevention

Early Prevention
and Family Support

Crime and Policing – the Crime Lab

“What we are striving for is that in 10 or 20 years crime policy will be different – more effective, cost-effective and humane – because of the large-scale scientific research projects that we’ve done.”

Jens Ludwig, co-director,
UChicago Crime Lab

Too often, responses to violent crime are emotional or political and produce few measurable results. Little hard evidence exists on the effectiveness of crime reduction strategies, and few programs receive rigorous evaluation, so policy makers respond more often to anecdote, rather than to evidence. The University of Chicago Crime Lab, co-directed by Jens Ludwig, McCormick Foundation Professor of Social Service Administration, Public Policy and Law, and Helen Ross Professor Harold Pollack, has begun bridging the research gap between the causes of crime and violence, and the effectiveness of the policies implemented to address them.

Police officials and policy makers in the City of Chicago, as well as the White House, have turned to the Crime Lab to learn how to use resources most effectively and what strategies produce the biggest impact. As evidence of that commitment and the promise of the Crime Lab, former U. S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald, current Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy, and Department of Family and Support Services Commissioner Evelyn Diaz all serve on the Lab’s advisory board. Such partnerships allow researchers to collect real-time data from field tests, disseminating their findings directly and immediately to leaders who set social service and criminal justice policies and priorities. Beyond Chicago, the Crime Lab now is working with police departments in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and Baltimore to examine how guns used in crimes move around criminal networks.

Recently released results of the Crime Lab’s large-scale randomized clinical trial of the “Becoming a Man” (BAM) program, carried out in partnership with the Chicago Public Schools and two local nonprofits, were significant. The results revealed that high school youth who participated in BAM had a 44 percent reduction in violent crime arrests, as well as significant improvements in school attendance and class participation. A cost-benefit analysis of the program reported a minimum savings to the public of three dollars for every one spent on the program.

As part of President Obama’s initiative to address opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men, the Becoming a Man program recently received support from the National Institutes of Health and the Chicago Public Schools that includes a goal of expanding the program to three to five new cities in the next three years.

In addition, the Crime Lab received a distinctive grant in 2014 – the Award for Creative and Effective Institutions from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation – one of only seven recipients selected from around the globe. This prestigious award is the organizational equivalent to MacArthur’s “genius” awards for individuals.

Youths and Community – the Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention

SSA's Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention (CCYVP or the Center), led by Professor **Deborah Gorman-Smith**, a nationally recognized authority on youth violence prevention with two decades of experience, is one of only six U. S. Academic Centers for Excellence on Youth Violence Prevention funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Her team of SSA researchers at the CCYVP work collaboratively with community members, practitioners, and policy makers to test new integrated strategies to avert youth violence.

Working in the high-risk community of Humboldt Park, the Center has been building a comprehensive and integrated approach to address youth violence. This approach includes working with youth across a range of ages – from young children to older adolescents and young adults. It also involves families in teaching lifelong violence prevention skills and strategies. Center faculty and staff also provide training to schools and community agencies in selecting and implementing youth violence prevention programs.

The Schools and Families Educating Children (SAFE Children) program for first graders and their families is one remarkable example of CCYVP's work. The 15-week program emphasizes engagement of the entire family in school activities, development of the child's confidence and social skills, and building family cohesiveness. The first randomized clinical trial revealed that when SAFE Children students enter high school, they exhibited **substantially lower levels of violence, engaged in less risky sexual behavior, and were nearly twice as likely to be on track to graduate.** SAFE Children is proving that short-term interventions early in life can produce the life-time benefits of stronger families and engaged parents who are committed to the future of their children and communities.

The Center's comprehensive approach in Humboldt Park has yielded remarkable early results. Notably, during a period when the murder rate in other violent communities and in Chicago as a whole showed little change, the homicide rate in Humboldt Park fell by fifty percent. Extrapolating these results, if the Center's approach had been applied to the 17 Chicago communities with the highest rates of violent crime, the city would have averted more than 100 murders in 2013 alone.

“Working to have an impact at the school level and at the neighborhood level is a really different approach... the university-community partnership has the best chance of really making a difference.”

Deborah Gorman-Smith, SSA Professor and Immediate Past President, Society for Prevention Research

Early Prevention and Family Support

SSA Dean Neil Guterman's work is integral to these violence prevention efforts. As an international expert on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, Guterman seeks to advance evidence of strategies that prevents children's early victimization, itself one of the most potent drivers of later-life violent behavior. Child abuse is concentrated in the earliest years of life and almost 80 percent of the 1,700 children who die each year as a result of child abuse are three years old or younger. Neurological and psychological evidence shows that early parenting plays a strong role in steering either healthy or violence-prone behavioral trajectories in children.

"If designed and delivered right, early prevention strategies can prevent child abuse, and alter the long-term trajectory of children's lives, all delivered in a highly cost-efficient manner."

Neil B. Guterman, SSA Dean and Mose & Sylvia Firestone Professor

Scientific findings, including those released by Guterman, have found that intervening early using specialized home-based service strategies can prevent upwards of 60 percent of cases of child abuse, and alter the long-term life trajectories of children and their families. Cost-benefit analyses indicate that such programs can also save the public four dollars for every dollar spent. This inexpensive short-term service strategy can help eliminate early childhood trauma, subsequent medical and mental health consequences, and the precursors to violence perpetration later in life. The science, however, is far from complete. Early interventions are not uniformly effective, so capturing the greatest benefit means designing strategies that better map to the drivers of abuse, and Guterman's most recent work is testing a "second generation" strategy yielding early positive findings that widens the predominant focus of early home visitation services from the mother-child relationship to a more inclusive focus on both mothers and fathers.

Of note, the interest in home visitation programs has grown steadily, as has research support from such entities as the McCormick Foundation, the Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Pew Foundation, and the Oscar G. & Elsa S. Mayer Family Foundation. Moreover, in response to the demonstrated success of home visitation programs, a growing number of state agencies have begun to incorporate such programs into their delivery systems, driving more focused national growth in this transformative strategy.

First Violence Prevention Training Program in U.S.

As SSA continues to develop evidence-based strategies through these three major research efforts, we also have established the nation's first violence prevention training program in a school of social work. SSA's program trains students to think and act strategically and implement evidence-based strategies that are effective, practical, and results-oriented within communities.

Already, SSA graduates of the first five cohorts have assumed leadership positions in varied violence prevention settings around the U. S., ranging from home- and center-based early prevention services, school-based youth and domestic violence prevention programs, and advocacy and community-based organizations.

What's Next?

Our aim now is to accelerate our research of successful violence prevention strategies, share our findings with practitioners and policy makers, and continue to train leaders to apply this cutting-edge knowledge to directly lower violence and save lives. Specifically, we intend to:

Develop sound new knowledge. Through scientific experimentation and implementation of programs, SSA is setting a standard of knowledge on violence prevention. Our faculty, with backgrounds in social work, urban planning, economics, sociology, and health policy, bring a diversity of thinking and experience to develop the most reasoned, effective, and practical responses.

Create a knowledge center for researchers to interact and collaborate with city officials, community partners, and stakeholders. SSA seeks to build a center consisting of physical and scholarly spaces where scholars, community activists, and government officials from around the world can learn, interact, examine strategies, and develop sound solutions.

Continue leadership development initiatives. In the next decade, SSA expects to educate dozens of master's and doctoral students who will be specially trained and skilled to be violence prevention policy makers, advocates, clinicians, and researchers.

Expedite knowledge dissemination and influence change agents. SSA is leveraging its work to influence, inform, and inspire private and public sector leaders about proven violence prevention strategies and policies.

The Impact of Philanthropy

The aforementioned SSA efforts can thrive with philanthropic support in the following areas:

Research support. Increasingly, officials look at hard evidence to inform their decisions, and SSA is one of the few places generating science that can provide this evidence. Support for SSA research will allow faculty to further pursue, accelerate progress, and expand the scope of our violence prevention programs. Already, current SSA research has identified misalignments in practices and policies within nonprofit and government programs and suggested improvements that can save tax dollars and lives. Additional endowment and expendable funds for capacity-building efforts will increase collaborative and interdisciplinary research at the Crime Lab, the Chicago Center for Youth Violence Prevention, our studies in child abuse prevention, and other efforts among our partners in the community. It also will allow us to apply our findings and strategies more broadly, thereby yielding even more savings, in economic and human terms.

Fundraising goal: \$13 million

Building expansion and enhancement. Currently, SSA's research and engagement activities in violence and crime prevention occur outside of our University campus building, across three different spaces not designed for supporting or sustaining such work. Having a centralized, designated building with state-of-the-art technology, expanded research space, and meeting areas for scholars, community leaders, and social welfare practitioners can encourage further community engagement, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and deeper discovery to support and sustain our path-breaking work.

Fundraising goal: \$10 million

Scholarship support for next generation leadership development. Our students, superbly trained to advance and apply the scholarship conceived and tested at SSA to drive down violence in our communities, often do so without significant compensation. Their skills, ambitions, intelligence, and training equal those of students at the University's medical, business, and law schools. Yet SSA graduates face job prospects at a markedly lower pay scale – average salaries range from the upper \$30,000's to upper \$40,000's – and they graduate with close to \$70,000 in student debt. To lower the economic barriers, and attract the best and the brightest individuals to tackle the difficult problem of violence, SSA must make a concerted effort to help students graduate without heavy academic debt so they are undeterred from pursuing a career in service.

Funding goal: \$10 million

Focused knowledge resource and change agent. Philanthropic support can help bolster the visibility and reach of SSA's pioneering work among private and public sector leaders who are positioned to implement violence prevention strategies and policies. In this regard, we seek to recruit new leading researchers who can further accelerate our programs and make SSA the foremost destination for the most advanced scholarly work in violence prevention. We also seek to create outward facing efforts and forums for scholars, stakeholders, and policy makers – at local, national, and global levels – where we can share our research, strategies, and results to help shape violence prevention innovations.

Funding goal: \$7 million

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