

Innovations Suite: Researcher-Practitioner Fellows Community of Practice



Innovative Prosecution Solutions ***Chatham County, Georgia: Social Network Analysis***

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Introduction to the INV Suite

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Innovations Suite (INV Suite) refers to a series of BJA grant programs that follow a data-driven approach to support the effective implementation of evidence-based practices to reduce crime, enhance public safety, improve the delivery of justice, and support community revitalization. The INV Suite includes a training and technical assistance (TTA) component to support BJA grantees. A key element of the INV Suite TTA is the [Researcher-Practitioner Fellows Academy](#). The School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University leads this TTA program working with BJA and partners from the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, Center for Advancing Correctional Excellence at George Mason University, Justice Research and Statistics Association, the Center for Public Safety Initiatives at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and subject matter experts drawn from both the community of practice and research.

Michigan Justice Statistics Center

The School of Criminal Justice at Michigan State University, through the Michigan Justice Statistics Center, serves as the Statistical Analysis Center (MI-SAC) for the State of Michigan. The mission of the Center is to advance knowledge about crime and justice issues in the state of Michigan while also informing policy and practice. The Center works in partnership with the Michigan State Police, Michigan's State Administering Agency (SAA), as well as with law enforcement and criminal justice agencies serving the citizens of Michigan. For further information see: <http://cj.msu.edu/programs/michigan-justice-statistics-center/>

This case study was developed by the researchers and practitioners working in one of the INV Suite grant programs. The case study is one of a series produced by the Michigan Justice Statistics Center.

About the Author

The following Author is a graduate of the Innovations Suite Researcher-Practitioner Fellows Academy. The one-page summary and case study were submitted through a selective mini-grant process offered to Fellows Academy graduates.

Chad Posick is an associate professor in the department of criminal justice and criminology at Georgia Southern University. His research focuses on the causes and consequences of exposure to violence. Chad was the research partner for the Savannah Innovative Prosecution Solutions project and continues to work on various community violence projects. He teaches in the areas of victimology, statistics, and public policy.

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One Page Summary:

Innovative Prosecution Solutions: Social Network Analysis
Chatham County, Georgia

Bureau of Justice Assistance Grant Funded Program: 2016-YX-BX-0005

Name of the Project: Savannah Safe and Sound: Chatham County Innovative Prosecution Solutions Program

Grant Period: FY 2016 – FY 2018

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Brief Description: The Innovative Prosecution Solutions Program implemented in Chatham County was a three pronged approach that included a prevention effort called the Youth Intercept Program (YIP), an intervention effort called the Violence Intervention Program (VIP), and a focused law enforcement suppression effort called the Enhanced Prosecution Project (EPP). Young at-risk youth and first time offenders were identified by school personnel or family members for inclusion in the YIP. In YIP, they would learn strategies to avoid violence and improve educational outcomes. For those individuals who were actively identified as involved and/or injured in violence, the VIP provided case management services to avoid retaliation and further victimization. For violent, high frequency gun offenders, the EPP was developed in order to assign a designated prosecutor to seek quick and harsh penalties for these individuals.

Partners: Georgia Southern University, Savannah-Chatham District Attorney's Office, Savannah Youth Intercept Program, Savannah Police Department

Evaluation/Outcome Measures: 1) gun arrests in intervention hotspot compared to two comparison hotspots, 2) number of cases closed by special prosecutor, 3) number of youth diverted to the Youth Intervention Program

The Fellows Academy Attended: Winter 2017 – February 7-10, in Denver, CO

Spotlight on Innovation Strategy: We used an innovative strategy for our project which was inspired by attending the fellow's academy. After attending the session led by Dr. Matthew Fox, we began as a team to discuss how we could use SNA in our IPS program. While SNA is often used as method to identify people or groups for law enforcement or to develop theoretical models, we thought that it could also be used to identify at-risk youth who are associating with known violent individuals. These individuals could be focused on for prevention/intervention instead of solely suppression or law enforcement. For example, one youth who was under the age of 13 was arrested several times for auto theft. This youth was associating with older, known violent offenders but had not (to law enforcement's knowledge) engaged in frequent violence. SNA enabled law enforcement to identify an at-risk youth and could direct this person to prevention/intervention instead of the juvenile justice system. SNA makes this very efficient.

Case Study:

Innovative Prosecution Solutions: Social Network Analysis *Chatham County, Georgia*

Savannah Safe and Sound: Chatham County Innovative Prosecution Solutions: Social Network Analysis as Violence Prevention

Executive Summary

The Savannah Safe and Sound (TRIPLE S) program is a three-pronged approach to violence prevention and reduction. Through funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Innovative Prosecution Solutions program, TRIPLE S was able to set a foundation for violence prevention, intervention, and suppression in the city. As part of the prevention and intervention approach initiated through TRIPLE S, the command staff from the Savannah Police Department collaborated with researchers at Georgia Southern University to utilize Social Network Analysis in an effort to identify youth at risk of violent behavior and victimization.

Background Information

The Savannah Safe and Sound project is a collaboration of the Savannah-Chatham District Attorney's Office, Savannah Police Department, the Youth Intercept/Violence Intervention Projects, and Georgia Southern University. The core team collaborates with other local organizations including neighborhood groups, schools, and recreation centers. The philosophy of TRIPLE S is to provide broad, comprehensive, wrap-around services for youth with a focus on youth at-risk for being the perpetrators and victims of violence. Individuals involved in violence often present with multiple, co-occurring, issues and addressing just one area is inadequate and will likely result in failure to make sustained changes. Therefore, our approach is to be comprehensive and collaborative at every step in the process to ensure individuals have access to the services needed to improve their overall health and well-being. This is in keeping with a participatory action research approach (PAR) that ensures various

stakeholders – and youth themselves – are involved with research and the implementation process.

Purpose Statement and Grant Goals

The proposed program added value to current efforts already underway in Savannah (e.g., the End Gun Violence program) paving the way for a reduction in violence and an increase in public trust of law enforcement. The overall goals of the Smart Prosecution Project were to: 1) identify local hotspots for gun violence in the Savannah area; 2) identify the most violent offenders within local hotspots; 3) track and prioritize prosecution within hotspots and individuals within those hotspots; 4) divert non-essential cases to alternative programs; 5) engage with community groups within active hotspots through regular meetings, social media, and other outreach strategies; and 6) evaluate the program using a mixed-methods approach. Using social network analysis was intended to be used for both suppression strategies (e.g., who needs to be focused on to reduce gun violence) and to identify youthful offenders for prevention/intervention (e.g., who might be on the road to engaging in violence or at risk of being the victim of violence). These efforts are in line with the second and fourth goals of the program.

Strategies, Solutions, and Changes Made

We used an innovative strategy for our project which was inspired by participating in the [Bureau of Justice Assistance Researcher-Practitioner Fellow's Academy](#) led by Michigan State University in the winter of 2017 in Denver, CO. After attending the session led by Dr. Andrew Fox from Fresno State University, we began as a team to discuss how we could use Social

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory action research is an approach to action research emphasizing participation and action by members of communities affected by that research. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection.

Network Analysis (SNA) in our Innovative Prosecution Solutions program. While SNA is often used as method to identify people or groups for law enforcement or to develop theoretical models, we thought that it could also be used to identify at-risk youth who are associating with known violent individuals. These youth could be focused on for prevention/intervention instead of solely for suppression or law enforcement. For example, one youth who was under the age of 13 was arrested several times for auto theft. This individual was associating with older, known violent offenders but had not (to law enforcement's knowledge) engaged in frequent violence. SNA enabled law enforcement to identify this at-risk youth and direct them to prevention/intervention instead of the juvenile justice system. SNA makes this very efficient and can be a tool with multiple uses in prevention, intervention, and suppression.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

Social network analysis is the process of investigating social structures through the use of networks and graph theory. It characterizes networked structures in terms of nodes and the ties, edges, or links that connect them.

Network analysis (NA) broadly examines the interconnectivity of objects, ideas, and other phenomena, such as the spread of disease, using statistical methods. This theoretical and methodological approach recognizes the interrelated and epidemiological nature of society. SNA begins with the premise that individuals are embedded within social contexts characterized by relationships and interactions (Radil et al., 2010). These relationships and interactions are important for individual behavior. This is particularly so with violent delinquent and criminal behavior which is often a group activity (Warr, 2002). By considering these social networks, researchers can identify a range of relationships that are of theoretical and practical interest.

To use a recent example in criminology and criminal justice, SNA was used in the study of gang activity. While individuals in gangs are important for explaining and predicting

individual behavior, the networks between people can strengthen understanding of important outcomes of gangs such as violent offending and victimization. It is known that more central players with many social connections are at elevated risk of offending and being the victim of violence (Schreck et al., 2004; Swartz et al., 2012). Knowing about “who is connected with who” allows researchers and practitioners to identify instances of contagion and reciprocity which “transcends” the individual (Sierra-Arévalo & Papachristos, 2017).

Furthermore, SNA assists in developing and implementing violence intervention strategies. The most common strategy is focused deterrence. In focused deterrence, the individuals who are “key players,” or individuals who commit the most violence and are the most connected, are spotlighted by law enforcement for enhanced suppression efforts (Braga, 2003). This approach can have appreciable effects on the level of violence in a community since a small number of networks commit the bulk of all violent crime in an area (Papachristos et al., 2012). By identifying, arresting, and prosecuting these offenders, the most violent and frequent individuals can be removed from the street and these enforcement actions can be communicated among other network members as part of the focused deterrence strategy.

In the Savannah Safe and Sound project, we envisioned SNA as a tool for crime/violence prevention along with its ability to identify violent offenders for prosecution. Still considered a focused approach, we wanted to also implement focused prevention for individuals that are at risk of becoming violent and/or frequent offenders. While other aspects of our project did that in schools (Youth Intervention Project-YIP) and in hospitals (Violence Intervention Project-VIP), we used SNA to identify youthful offenders who associate with more frequent, violent offenders who were often older and had longer criminal records. We intended to offer these youth alternatives to delinquent behavior by engaging them with other programs such as the YIP. The

following section included a few elements of training that was necessary to provide law enforcement for them to understand and use the results of SNA for suppression and prevention efforts.

The Elements of Training

Density – It is important to consider the strength of a tie between two or more people. When considering arrest, are two individuals arrested once or twice together? If so, these two individuals might be acquaintances or new friends. If two individuals are arrested 4 or more times together, this may indicate they are very good friends, or at least that they are often hanging around each other.

A dense relationship can inform prevention efforts. Does a younger, youthful offender have dense ties with older offenders? Are these older offenders violent or carry guns? If so, it is likely that the younger offender will “graduate up” to more violent offenses themselves; or at least get caught up in a very violent incident. Still, it is worth intervening at this point. Instead of focusing on this young offender for enhanced enforcement, it is worthwhile to consider intervention before they mold their behavior to the older/violent individuals.

Centrality – Some individuals in a social network are very “popular” and exist in the middle of several individual relationships. These people have access to a lot of information and have more opportunities to spread information. When considering arrests, young offenders who are central may already be “go-to” members of their network or they may be someone that older offenders are using for illegal activities such as “holders” that will be in possession of drugs or guns if needed by the real key players of a group.

Additionally, youthful offenders who have dense ties with central players may be at increased risk of being a victim or offender of crime. Individuals who are central to delinquent

social groups are at heightened risk of being exposed to violence themselves. These youthful offenders deserve priority in situations of prevention as their time may be limited before they end up arrested or injured.

Brokers/Bridgers – Social network analysis can distinguish a unique group of individuals who act as “brokers” or “bridgers.” In other words, they are “go-between individuals.” A bridger will have their own social network group but also be connected to an individual or small groups of individuals from another social group who don’t have much connection to the broker’s larger network. This may indicate that this person is working with both groups and making that connection.

If youthful offenders are themselves bridgers – which is less likely than older, more experienced offenders – they may have familial connections in both groups and serve as a go between. Again, this is likely to increase the likelihood that this person will experience victimization. If the two groups (or more groups, theoretically) begin to conflict with one another, the bridger might become a target. They are also more likely to be arrested as they are dealing with two delinquent groups.

Many of the factors just mentioned for increasing the likelihood of offending and victimization for the youthful bridger pertains to a youth who has dense ties to a bridger. It may also indicate that the youth has a relationship with a well-connected older offender. This person can be an older family member or friend. For prevention specialists, identifying and offering services to this individual is essential and it may also be warranted to offer services to the family if there are family members in the delinquent network.

Since changes in administrative staff at the police department, the use of SNA in violence prevention and intervention has been limited. Fortunately, the core team established with the IPS

grant remains and will make a push to continue SNA activities. We believe this highlights the importance of always having a core team that can speak to administration in law enforcement agencies regardless of the staff and turnover in the department. Together, along with staff in the schools and community, youth can be identified by analytic tools like SNA and recommended for interventions such as the YIP program.

Challenges and Solutions

The prosecutors and police officers involved with the TRIPLE S project were knowledgeable about social networks generally. Their everyday work already considered the importance of “who knows who” or “who hangs out with who.” However, they were unfamiliar with the formal statistical modeling of these networks and the importance of different types of connections. A short workshop in SNA and violence prevention was extremely important in our case as discussed earlier.

During the 30- month-span of the project there were a number of things that shifted which impacted the project and training on research tools and methods.

Demerger of the police department: Savannah Chatham Metropolitan Police Department became the Savannah Police Department (SPD) and the Chatham County Police Department (CCPD) in February 2018. While this did not affect the project directly, the data collection became a challenge. Precincts were rearranged and overall county data collection changed. As a result of the demerger, the Savannah Area Regional Analysis Center (SARIC) staff manager left to go to CCPD, changing the leadership and focus at SARIC.

Change in SPD leadership: The SCMPD Chief of Police Jack Lumpkin left Savannah in December 2017, just two months before the demerger took effect. Chief Lumpkin was a driving force in the already established End Gun Violence (EGV) project and very supportive of the

Smart Prosecution project. The change in leadership (and interim leadership for the following year) meant a change in priorities. While the Smart Prosecution project still had support in the police department, leadership changes meant staffing changes as well.

Change in SCMPD/SPD Staffing: Chief Lumpkin's departure brought interim leadership to the police department for a year. Replacement Roy Minter was not sworn in as Chief until December 2018. Several Assistant Chiefs left the police department during the grant cycle. Additionally, several assistant chiefs were demoted to majors during the same grant cycle. These changes created challenges in finding the appropriate staff to handle information requests and institutional knowledge of the project and data efforts were lost. Luckily, the SCMPD/SPD gang violence team stayed fairly consistent and they worked closely with the TRIPLE S team to resolve informational issues.

Changes in prosecutor team: The gun prosecutor on the project changed three times during the life cycle of the grant. The main reason this didn't adversely affect the grant results as much as it might otherwise have is that the main supervisor remained the same the entire time. In fact, aside from the gun prosecutor and the leadership at the police department, most of the partners stayed the same the entire project.

Neighborhood Association leadership changes: The hotspot identified for this project was chosen in part due to the active Neighborhood Association and the relationships the partnership had with the president of that association, Ronald Williams. Towards the end of the grant cycle, Mr. Williams began preparing for a run for political office. He stepped back from some of his community activities in preparation for that political campaign. He suffered a stroke and passed away in the final months of the grant, prior to announcing his run for office. At the time of his death, there was no successor to his position. Since the conclusion of the grant, his successor has

been found and taken office. That individual is very active in the community, well-known to the partnership, and supportive of positive change in her community.

An effort is currently being made to more fully incorporate SNA into the routine activity at the SPD. Moreover, SNA is being explored as a prevention and intention tool in the neighboring Statesboro area (where the main campus of Georgia Southern University is located). Early discussion with the police chief has led to promising collaborations in this area.

Despite the challenges, the project was a success from a number of different angles. Some of the takeaways to this project include:

Communication is key: Partnerships are a must for this type of project to work. Building relationships with those partners develops understanding that will overcome a lot of barriers. Our community support was very good because the partners communicated with each other: good, bad, and ugly.

Regular meetings: Monthly meetings to discuss progress was crucial. Additionally, prosecutors were in constant contact with police partners to discuss cases in real time. Those relationships helped identify potential issues quickly and address solutions to those issues. Data issues were discussed on a regular basis and databases for SNA and other analyses were able to be kept updated in nearly “real-time.”

Training: Gangs and groups were often the drivers for the types of crimes that the project tracked. As such, the partners were provided with some gang training and regularly attended gang conferences. Understanding the use of social media and other social networking helped build intelligence for the crime in a given area. The research partner also created and delivered trainings that familiarized practitioners with various tools, including SNA, which could lead prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.

Resource assessment: As mentioned earlier, the partnership leveraged resources from other local projects to maximize the impact of the TRIPLE S project. The EGV project had already developed some of the data and intelligence necessary to the success of the BJA funded initiative. The City of Savannah had a number of community projects in our target hotspot. Those projects which included a blight project and an economic development project supported our community outreach partners. The final clean-up project conducted by the team on the last day of the grant was done in conjunction with the Mayor's blight project which included the removal of six derelict/dilapidated homes along the clean-up route. The final phase of the project included the creation of a park at the end of the clean-up route. That park will create a convening point for the children of the community.

Summary of Findings

In the TRIPLE S project, we found social network analysis could be profitable as both a suppression and prevention/intervention tool. Researchers, in collaboration with the District Attorney's Office and local Law Enforcement, were able to use SNA to identify frequent, violent, gun offenders for enhanced enforcement and prosecution as well as identify youthful offenders who were at risk of offending and victimization. Efforts could therefore be developed to provide both suppression activities and intervention programs.

Sustainability

Sustaining our efforts to use SNA as a crime prevention tool has been challenging. Anytime a new strategy is used for crime prevention and intervention, buy-in and training are necessary. Turnover, changing priorities, and funding for crime analysts were barriers to sustaining the current efforts.

Conclusion

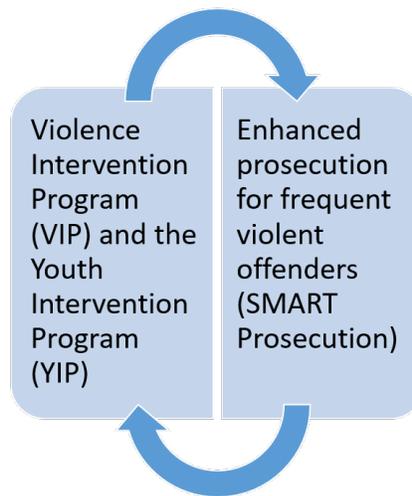
Through support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, we were able to increase the capacity of local law enforcement to prevent and intervene in crime. Linking researchers to the Savannah Police Department and the Savannah-Chatham District Attorney's Office was always on the back-burner for the area, but the grant made it a priority. Bringing in an innovative tool – social network analysis – to help law enforcement identify new avenues to prevention and suppression, was possible through BJA funding and training through the Smart Suite Fellow's Academy. Once funded, this researcher-practitioner partnership was solidified and the team could plan for sustainability.

Appendices:

Innovative Prosecution Solutions: Social Network Analysis
Chatham County, Georgia

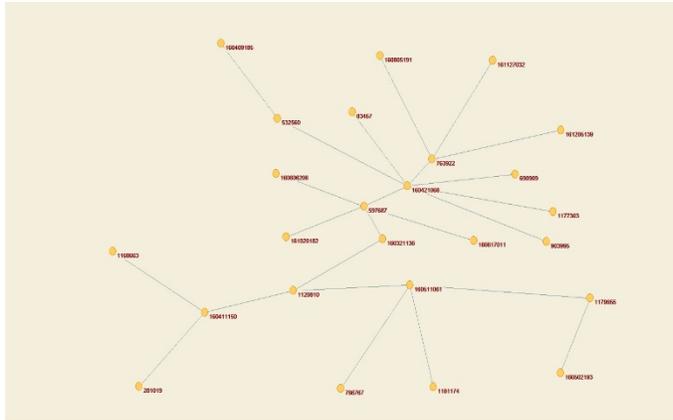
Supporting Materials

The three prongs of the TRIPLE S program are integrated and interactive. For example, younger siblings of frequent, violent, gun offenders who are identified through focused prosecution (the suppression component of the strategy), are targeted for preventative services through the Youth Intervention Program (the prevention component of the strategy). The associated figure illustrated the overall foundation of TRIPLE S.



A simple social network map is included here to illustrate our approach to focused prevention using SNA.

Numbers starting with 160 and 161 are incidents of arrests by the Savannah Police Department. The other numbers are individual identification numbers. For the SNA, the youth mentioned is in the middle (597687). The youth was arrested five times. One incident (160321136) was with a violent gun offender (1120810) and another incident (160421068) was with a group of older



gun offenders. Individual 1120810 appears to be a “bridge” as well, connecting his social network with others such as individuals 1160663 and 281019. Podcast episode with the Director of the YIP/VIP:

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/breaking-cycle-violence-reaching-youth-school-0>

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