

**A Comparison of Homicide Trends in Local Weed and
Seed Sites Relative to Their Host Jurisdictions,
1996 to 2001**

prepared for the
Executive Office for Weed and Seed
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice

by the
JRSA 
Justice Research and Statistics Association

November 2003

Acknowledgements

Principal JRSA authors: Jack O'Connell, Mathew Perkins, and Jim Zepp
JRSA research assistance: Jorge Rodriquez, Jason Trask

Justice Research and Statistics Association
777 North Capitol St., NE, Suite 801
Washington, DC 20002-4239
(202) 842-9330 - phone
(202) 842-9329 - fax
cjinfo@jrsa.org - email
jrsa.org - Web site

This document was supported by Grant No. 2002-WS-QX-0079 awarded by the Executive Office for Weed and Seed, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

A Comparison of Homicide Trends in Local Weed and Seed Sites Relative to Their Host Jurisdictions, 1996 to 2001

Operation Weed and Seed is a cooperative strategy involving local community social organizations and local law enforcement, the United States Attorneys' Offices around the country and the Executive Office for Weed and Seed (EOWS) of the United States Department of Justice, in addition to a multitude of public and private stakeholders. The goal of Weed and Seed is to systematically reduce crime in targeted high crime communities through the coordinated efforts of enforcement, prevention, and neighborhood restoration. Unlike other crime suppression or prevention programs, however, the efforts of Weed and Seed are aimed at meeting this end through the strategic coordination of pre-existing efforts and the marshaling of established community resources that go beyond the traditional activities of justice-related agencies.

In bringing together diverse community actors, the Weed and Seed strategy recognizes the need to first eliminate crime and criminals in an area (weeding) and to foster community and economic growth in the same area to allow for long-term reductions in crime and disorder (seeding). A Weed and Seed site can be as small as a few blocks, or as large as an entire county. But all of the Weed and Seed sites share the trait of having demonstrated susceptibility toward crime greater than their surrounding areas.

The challenge presented to EOWS and the Weed and Seed strategy is to make a demonstrable change in communities that may share few similarities beyond a high risk for crime. As part of this effort to demonstrate success, the number of homicides in the Weed and Seed sites as well as in the host jurisdiction (e.g. the city or county in which the Weed and Seed site is located) is an element of annual Weed and Seed reporting under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Despite similar overall goals, Weed and Seed sites and their host jurisdictions are operationally unique. Even in jurisdictions with more than one Weed and Seed site, individual sites may adopt different strategic approaches that are tailored to the communities' unique social structures and crime patterns.

The GPRA process is the means by which sites report common data elements that allows the Executive Office of Weed and Seed (EOWS) to summarize the site operations and outcomes. The review of homicide data described in this report shows the following results for Weed and Seed sites:

- Homicides decline in 122 (55%) Weed and Seed sites over the data collection period
- Homicides remain stable in 31 (14%) sites
- Homicides rise at a rate lower than the rise for the encompassing jurisdiction in 17 sites (8%)
- Homicides rose at a faster rate than for the encompassing jurisdiction, in 50 (23%) sites
- 75% of Weed and Seed sites experienced a proportional decrease in homicides when compared to the host jurisdiction

The analysis of homicide trends provides a number of advantages in this effort to collect a measure of effectiveness in Weed and Seed sites (BJS: January 2003). These advantages include;

Accuracy in reporting - Because of the seriousness of the offense, homicides are reported much more faithfully and at a much greater level than other crimes, even other Part I crimes. Particularly in distressed neighborhoods where mistrust of police, fears of retribution, low expectations of effectiveness, or dissatisfaction with government service result in the majority of crimes being unreported, homicides are far more likely to result in reports to or discovery by law enforcement agencies.

Indicative of escalating crime trends - Homicide is often the result of escalating levels of violence and retribution in communities, especially instrumental violence associated with the drug trade. Research has shown that more serious crimes (e.g. aggravated assaults) often follow on the heels of less serious offenses (e.g. simple assaults) as victims become offenders and conflicts escalate in a community (Rosenfeld and Decker: 1993). Research from Boston shows that fear of victimization during times of community conflict affect patterns of gun-carrying among youth, making the likelihood of fatal conflicts higher. As a result, homicides can reflect a pattern of increased conflict and fear within neighborhoods (NIJ: September 2001).

Insulation from enforcement bias - A major component of Weed and Seed activities is the intensive law enforcement efforts characteristic of the weeding process. In the initial stages of a Weed and Seed strategy law enforcement resources are concentrated in an area to remove criminals and criminal activity. This additional law enforcement presence inevitably leads to a rise in the number of arrests in an area. Even beyond this initial period of intensive law enforcement, the relationships forged as a result of Weed and Seed sponsored community policing efforts should lead to higher levels of crime reporting in the Weed and Seed area. As a result, other crime types may be subject to increases in reported incidents as a result of Weed and Seed activities, independent of fluctuations in the levels of actual criminal acts.

Homicide data for the Weed and Seed GPRA generally align with the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports statistics. Homicide figures for each site and its surrounding jurisdiction are reported annually for a three-year window, for the reporting year as well as the two prior years. When Weed and Seed homicide data reporting began in 1999, the contributing sites included historical homicide trend information back to 1996¹. To date, the longest Weed and Seed time series spans six years (1996 to 2001) through the 2002 GPRA reporting cycle.

Three-hundred and thirteen current and former Weed and Seed sites have reported homicide data through the Weed and Seed GPRA process. Thirty-five sites are new and as a consequence, their available data is for a period preceding Weed and Seed implementation and cannot be used to measure the impact of their strategies. Another 58, or 18.5 percent of the sites, have incomplete or inconsistent annual homicide reporting. The remaining 220 Weed and Seed sites have

¹ For the 1999 GPRA report, these figures were submitted for the reporting period (calendar year 1998) as well as one year prior (1997) and two years prior (1996).

complete and sufficiently applicable homicide data for a time series analysis which constitute the focus of this report's analyses. These 220 sites are hosted in 174 separate jurisdictions. Eighteen of the host jurisdictions have two Weed and Seed sites, and 12 jurisdictions have three or more Weed and Seed sites.

The expectation of Weed and Seed sites is that through the combined and coordinated efforts of Federal and local law enforcement, community policing, and community organizations and tailored programs, violent crime and illicit drug activity will be reduced. Because the Weed and Seed strategy includes prevention and neighborhood restoration components, there should be a greater likelihood of both short-term and long-term crime reduction and community improvement. However, this assumes a sustained commitment and adequate resources for creating and maintaining change in the community conditions conducive to crime. Such reductions in crime will of course be reflected in numbers for the jurisdiction as a whole and, optimally, Weed and Seed efforts and results will serve as a catalyst for reductions in crime and disorder beyond the boundaries of the Weed and Seed site.

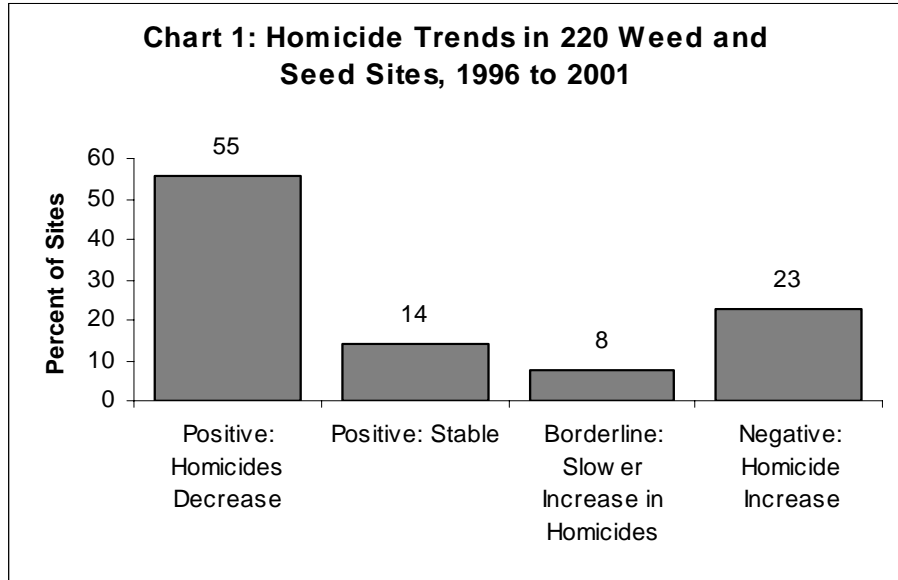
Of course, in measuring such results homicide is only one indicator of Weed and Seed success and cannot be considered fully representative performance indicator for a site's entire strategy. Some sites that may not do as well as expected regarding homicide may show positive results for other indicators of violence, illicit drug dealing, and other targeted crimes. Many sites, while crime prone, experience homicide as an anomalous event (many individual sites report no homicides for most years). By collecting data for over three hundred sites EOWS insures that the impact of anomalous events will be limited in the analysis.

Weed and Seed communities are not isolated entities but rather are parts of larger environments and subject to many external factors and forces. This fact could explain the limited expectations for some sites that may have spatial characteristics such as being adjacent to interstate highways or commuter routes that make them attractive to criminal elements from outside the target communities. Consequently, these Weed and Seed sites would have to undergo massive internal change to be immune from these external forces. Alternatively, other anticrime efforts would have to be successful in eliminating their targeted regional, national, or international criminal activities to reduce the influence or encroachment of these ongoing threats.

GENERAL RESULTS FOR ALL 220 WEED AND SEED SITES WITH ACCURATE HOMICIDE TIME SERIES DATA

Considering that an overriding goal of the national Weed and Seed strategy is to reduce violence in some of the nation's most crime-ridden neighborhoods, the Weed and Seed homicide results are clearly positive. The average number of homicides per Weed and Seed sites has decreased by 34 percent between 1996 and 2001: from 6.3 to 4.1 per site. In comparison the host jurisdictions, during the same time period, experienced a 38 percent reduction in homicides. It is important to note that a decrease in Weed and Seed site homicides is counted as well in homicide figures for the wider jurisdiction. In this analysis, over one third of the decrease for homicides in the host jurisdictions is due to decreased homicides in Weed and Seed areas.

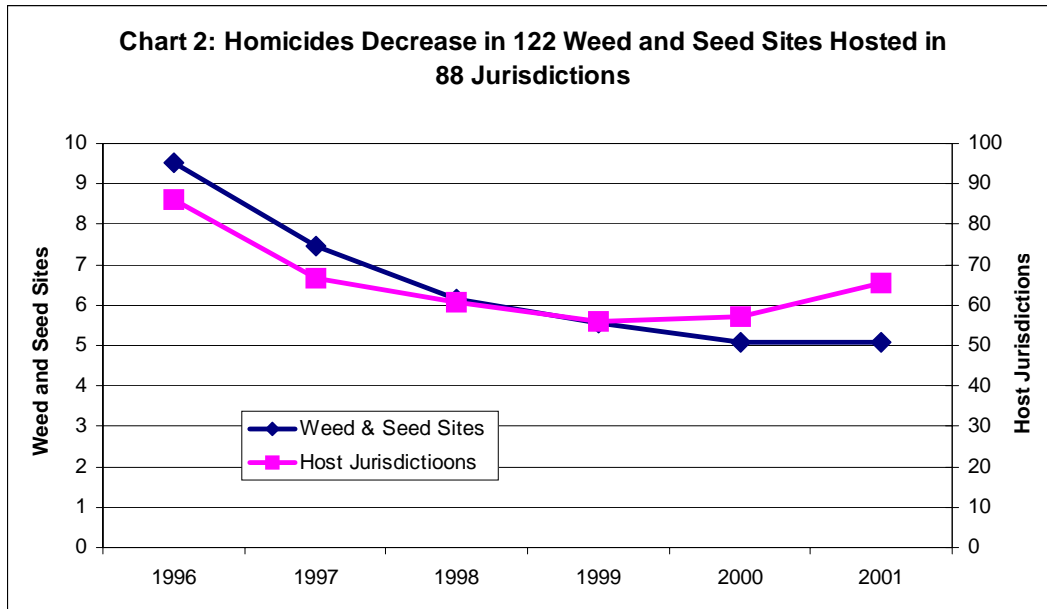
An even more interesting outcome is that while homicides rose in the Weed and Seed host jurisdictions in 2000 and 2001, homicides in the Weed and Seed sites did not follow this increasing trend, but often remained low.



BREAKDOWN OF WEED AND SEED SITES BY DEGREE OF SUCCESS

70 Percent: Homicides Decrease or Remain Stable

Seventy percent of the Weed and Seed sites (153 out of 220) have outcomes where the homicides were stable or decreased. These 153 Weed and Seed sites operated in 118 different host jurisdictions. In 122 sites homicides actually decreased and in 31 sites homicides remained stable.



Of special note are 17 Weed and Seed sites where homicides have decreased while in the host jurisdiction homicides have actually increased. In these sites, the number of homicides not only decreased over time, but as the number of host-jurisdiction homicides increased in 2000 and 2001, an event parallel to national homicide statistics, the number of homicides continued to decrease in the Weed and Seed sites. Of the stable sites, 19 reported no homicides in the first year of reporting, eliminating the possibility of decreases in the local site. Sixteen of these 19 sites never experienced more than one homicide over all reported years and seven of these had zero homicides for all reported years combined.

In the other 105 Weed and Seed sites where homicides decreased, the decrease either explained all or a portion of the decrease in homicides in their 77 host jurisdictions. Overall, the decrease of 484 homicides in these 105 sites explained 37 percent of the host jurisdictions' total decrease in homicides (1,303).

8 Percent: The Increase in Homicides in the Weed and Seed site is smaller than the Host Jurisdictions

The increase in homicides in eight percent (17) of the Weed and Seed sites was smaller than increases for the host jurisdiction. These 17 sites operated in 16 different host jurisdictions. This increase in borderline Weed and Sites accounted for 39 (42 percent) of the host jurisdictions' 92 additional homicides. Of these 17 sites, ten reported no homicides in the first year for which homicide data was provided. Of course with a baseline of zero, these sites could not experience a decrease in homicides, though three never reported more than one homicide in any year.

These sites are in challenging situations, where in one year homicides would decrease and then in the next they would increase. 2001 was a particularly difficult year for these sites and their host jurisdictions. Both the borderline Weed and Seed sites and their host jurisdictions experienced their largest increase in homicides in 2001 when the average number of homicides in borderline Weed and Seed sites increased from 2.1 to 3.5 and the host jurisdictions average increased from 12 to 15.6.

23 Percent: Higher Homicide Increases in Weed and Seed Site When Compared to the Host Jurisdiction

In 23 percent (50), of the Weed and Seed sites homicide increased more in the Weed and Seed sites than in the host jurisdictions. These 50 Weed and Seed sites operated in 40 different jurisdictions. While these results are obviously contrary to the desired outcomes in Weed and Seed areas, it is important to note that in 24 of the 40 jurisdictions (28 sites) the increase in the Weed and Seed sites over time was only 1 or 2 homicides. In eighteen of the sites, the first year's report was for no homicides, and in seven of these there were no years for which homicides were greater than one. In most of these sites, homicides did not show a steady rise, but rose and fell within the study period, though ending up with a greater increase in homicides for the final year as compared to the first.

Just as there are some very successful Weed and Seed operations (where the homicides decrease when the jurisdiction's homicides increase), there are Weed and Seed sites that increased by more than 2 homicides over time while homicides in the host jurisdictions decreased. These sites for various reasons have not been able to affect a positive change in the most violent of crimes. EOWS recognizes that there may be as much to learn from these ineffective sites as we do from the very successful sites. For instance in five of these jurisdictions, the spike in 2000 and 2001 homicides, reversed the fortunes of Weed and Seed sites as homicides increased significantly. These sites are candidates to receive special analysis and technical assistance from EOWS.

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on the GPRA forms submitted to the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA) for the Executive Office of Weed and Seed. The number of homicides in individual Weed and Seed sites and the host jurisdictions were first reported on the 1999 GPRA submissions. These first returns, which include sites that were already active, provided three years of homicide activity back to 1996. By the end of 2002, 313 sites had submitted some homicide data. After extensive verification and checking with sites, via JRSA staff, it was determined that of the 313 sites submitting data, 220 Weed and Seed sites had complete and useable homicide time series data. Thirty-five of these are new sites and have only historical data that cannot yet be used to indicate the impact related to the implementation of Operation Weed and Seed.

Another 58, or 18.5 percent of the sites, have incomplete or inconsistent annual homicide reporting. EOWS offers training and technical assistance to all sites to assist in data collection efforts and JRSA provides help specifically on GPRA-related issues. A site was considered as "inconsistent" if in their annual homicide reporting, the most recent report differed by more than two homicides when compared to any of the past GPRA submissions by the site. If the difference was less than 2, the most recent submission was considered the correct submission.

Homicide data reporting can be subject to late reporting and after-the-fact revisions based on medical examiners findings. Therefore small differences from year to year are not unexpected. Of the 58 sites excluded from the analysis, about half of them with intensive review and verification of information could be added the "accurate" list. On the other hand, over twenty of these sites/jurisdictions are unable to differentiate between homicides occurring in a Weed and Seed site and the host jurisdiction.

The analyses in the report focus on the 220 fully reporting Weed and Seed sites. These 220 sites are hosted in 174 separate jurisdictions. Eighteen of the host jurisdictions have two Weed and Seed sites, and 12 jurisdictions have three or more Weed and Seed sites.

Homicides reported in the Weed and Seed GPRA generally align with the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) processes. In many cases, the jurisdiction reports were cross-verified with UCR annual reports. Small differences may appear between local and report UCR numbers

because of local differences of counting, coding, and updating of numbers after reporting to UCR or on the GPRA.

The calculation of whether a site showed an increase, stability, or a decrease in the number of homicides over time is based on the sum of the difference scores between the oldest and next years number of homicides. This process of calculating difference scores is performed for each year of reporting for both the site and the host jurisdiction. This methodology is favored over trend analysis, or peak versus most recent results, because it directly answers the question, "Over time did the number of homicide increase, remain stable or decrease?"

For example, in 1996 a site reports 10 homicides, and then in 1997 and each year after the number of homicides decreases by one. The annual change scores of "1" over a six year period sums to a decrease of 5. This would be coded as a successful site. This method also captures the effect of any periodic increase. Therefore, if a site had a decrease of 1 homicide for 4 years and an increase of 5 in the middle of the time series, the net result is a "-1." This would be coded as a negative site. The net result for this site is the success for four years is offset by one particularly bad year.

Jurisdictions with multiple sites represent complicated combinations regarding the number of sites that are active at any one time as well as their different start and end dates. The approach taken in this analysis was to consider the impact of the combination of the sites within a jurisdiction, rather than by site by site. Therefore, it is possible under this approach that the success in one site within a jurisdiction is offset by poor results in a second site. What are reported here are the "net" results for multi-site jurisdictions.

Notes:

1. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime Data Brief; Homicide Trends in the United States: 2000 Update; January 2003.
2. Individual Weed and Seed GPRA Reports can be found on the EOWS Data Center Web site at: www.WeedandSeedDataCenter.org.
3. Rosenfeld, Richard & Scott Decker; *Where Public Health and Law Enforcement Meet: Monitoring and Preventing Youth Violence*, American Journal of Police, XII; pp 11-57.
4. National Institute of Justice; Reducing Gun Violence: The Boston Gun Project's Operation Ceasefire; September 2001.