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Title: Getting through: Techniques used in CeaseFire interventions to prevent or de-escalate street violence

Text: CeaseFire is a community based violence intervention program that includes street-level outreach and conflict mediation in the attempt to reduce violence, particularly shootings. CeaseFire relies on highly trained outreach workers and violence interrupters to intervene in conflicts and promote alternatives to violence. A three-year study of CeaseFire funded by the Department of Justice found that the intervention has reduced shootings and killings, prevented retaliatory killings, "cooled" hot spots (high density shooting areas), weakened gang networks, and supported high-risk gang-involved clients to improve their lives by connecting them to job training and educational opportunities.

The purpose of our study was to identify behaviors employed by outreach workers and violence interrupters that contributed to successful or unsuccessful interventions. We used the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954) to gather accounts of 106 interventions from CeaseFire staff. Respondents included 28 outreach workers and 25 violence interrupters each of whom described two interventions in which they had been involved; one they identified as having a negative outcome and the other identified as leading to a positive outcome. Narrative data includes information on (1) the background of the incident and precipitating events, (2) the actions taken by the worker, and (3) the outcome of the intervention. In addition, for each intervention, respondents rated on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 6 (completely) the extent to which the outcome was under the control of the worker.

Initial content analysis involved assignment of descriptive, interpretive, and pattern codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify meaningful themes and patterns in respondents' descriptions of critical incidents. "Background" themes described the incident that precipitated the intervention (e.g., a gang shooting, an argument over a stolen item, a parent soliciting help to deter her child from joining a gang). "Action" themes describe the actual intervention behaviors employed by the worker (e.g., talking to both parties together, appealing to logic, attempts at engagement). "Outcome" themes describe the outcome of the intervention (e.g., thwarting an expected altercation; a shooting death; a community event). Results showed that perceptions of outcome as positive or negative were related to the worker's inability to engage the client in the intervention, indicated by the frequently used phrase "he didn't want to hear it." This presentation will explore behaviors that are consistent with failure and success in engaging people in the intervention. Findings will provide information about intervention strategies, which will be useful for staff selection and training.

Theme Groups: 1 Key social relationships

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