



# The Impact of Individualized Focused Deterrence on Criminal and Prosocial Outcomes

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## **Abstract**

Focused deterrence programs have shown promise in reducing crime, but the absence of randomized controlled study designs precludes strong conclusions about their effects. Our randomized controlled study evaluated the effects of an individualized focused deterrence program sponsored by the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department and the Missouri Department of Corrections. Findings indicate that the experimental treatment had a significant indirect effect on recidivism by boosting employment: treatment group participants were more likely than control participants to be employed, and employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be arrested or charged with a technical violation by the end of the study. Future research should seek to replicate the current evaluation on larger samples. Randomized controlled studies that show individualized focused deterrence programs to be an effective method of crime reduction should help to scale such programs and overcome suspicions that they are soft on crime.

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# Introduction

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Combating violent crime ranks among the Department of Justice's top priorities to improve community safety. Numerous law enforcement and criminal justice strategies target violent crime and gang violence, including both place- and person-based approaches. However, few of these strategies have been evaluated using the most rigorous of research designs, the randomized controlled trial (RCT). The current study helps to fill this gap by using an RCT to evaluate a focused deterrence program operated by the St. Louis, Missouri, Metropolitan Police Department (SLMPD) and the Missouri Department of Corrections (MODOC): the St. Louis Police Partnership.

In fall 2016, the SLMPD and the St. Louis offices of MODOC's Division of Probation and Parole entered into a partnership to monitor and facilitate service delivery to persons under probation or parole supervision at high risk for gun-related crimes (hereafter the Police Partnership). The Police Partnership is centered on face-to-face meetings in which a police officer and community corrections officer meet with a probationer or parolee who has committed a firearm-related offense. The meetings typically last between 15 and 30 minutes, and most meetings are held in the participant's home, with the remainder held in a probation and parole office, at the participant's place of employment, or via phone or video (the meetings are referred to hereafter as "home visits"). This evaluation focuses on meetings held since June 2020, when the National Institute of Justice began funding an evaluation of the program's effectiveness in reducing criminal activity and increasing prosocial outcomes such as education, training, employment, and drug treatment. A total of six police officers, including replacements, have been involved with the program since its beginning. The Police Partnership continues to date.

St. Louis is a strategically important site for this evaluation because it faces a critical problem of criminal violence, particularly firearm-related violence. In 2016, the year the Police Partnership began, the St. Louis homicide rate of nearly 60 per 100,000 city residents was the highest among the nation's cities (Mirabile and Nass, 2018) and approximately five times greater than the average rate for cities of comparable size. In 2016, 92 percent of St. Louis homicides were committed with a firearm (Metropolitan Police Department, City of St. Louis, 2016). St. Louis's rate of total violent crime (homicide, aggravated assault, rape, and robbery) was more than two-and-a-half times the rate in cities of similar size. The St. Louis violent crime rate of 1,913.2 crimes per 100,000 residents exceeded the rate in other cities confronting serious violent crime problems, including Baltimore (1,780.4), New Orleans (1,069.7), and Chicago (1,105.5). In 2016, 59 percent of aggravated assaults, the largest category of violent

crime in St. Louis, were committed with a firearm (Metropolitan Police Department, City of St. Louis, 2017). Firearm violence persists as a major public problem in St. Louis.

## Research Problem and Rationale

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The Police Partnership is based on an approach to crime reduction—focused deterrence—that has been shown to significantly reduce gang, group, and individual offending (e.g., Braga et al., 2001; Engel et al., 2010). As the authors of a recent meta-analysis point out, however, the absence of randomized controlled study designs “continues to be a key weakness in drawing conclusions about focused deterrence programs” (Braga et al., 2019, p. 27). Prior research is also hindered in that it measured program effects on geographic areas rather than individuals, and the programs themselves are limited because they engage with groups rather than with individual offenders. The current study overcomes each of these key limitations of existing research.

Focused deterrence conveys the deterrence message in two ways, first by targeting high-risk criminal offenders and then by delivering the message in face-to-face meetings with them (Kennedy, 2009). The rationale for focusing on high-risk individuals is that they account for a greatly disproportionate amount of crime, especially violence, both as offenders and victims (e.g., Piquero, 2000; Wolfgang et al., 1987). By meeting with these individuals, criminal justice officials, service providers, and family and community members increase the chance that their twofold message actually reaches the high-risk individual. Reduced to essentials, the message is this: *The violence must stop. We know who and where you are, we are now collaborating as a justice system, and we will pull all available levers to stop you from becoming the next offender or victim. If you want options and access to a law-abiding lifestyle, we will provide resources and services that can help. The choice is yours* (see Kennedy, 2009; Kennedy et al., 2001).

The face-to-face meetings with offenders, usually termed “offender notification meetings” or “call-ins,” typically consist of 20 or more participants, including family members. These meetings form the linchpin of the focused deterrence approach to violence reduction. There are undoubtedly some benefits to delivering the deterrence message “retail style” to offenders who have been gathered in groups, not least among them the efficiencies associated with spreading the message to 20 or more individuals at a time. Nonetheless, group meetings are not a requirement of focused deterrence, which requires that individuals at high risk for violence or other targeted offenses receive the deterrence message in face-to-face meetings with criminal justice officials, community stakeholders, and service providers whenever possible (Kennedy, 2009). That requirement may be met by meeting with offenders in groups, but it is also met, and its effect on offender behavior is arguably enhanced, by meeting with individuals one at a time.

Meeting with offenders one-on-one provides more time for individual engagement and discussion with family members or other loved ones, who are often present during the meeting.

Such meetings offer a greater opportunity than that afforded by group meetings to tailor advice and guidance to an offender's specific needs and behaviors. Moreover, individual meetings may be more effective than group meetings at enhancing the legitimacy of law enforcement in the eyes of wary offenders through extended interaction with a police officer in their social support role. The logic of individualized deterrence is similar to that of providing individualized tutoring and other educational services to students experiencing academic difficulties. In both cases, the focus is on the specific problems, needs, and progress of an individual, which is likely to be more difficult to achieve in a group setting. Finally, there may be practical reasons to prefer individual meetings over group sessions. It simply may be easier to hold multiple meetings with the same individual than to continually organize group sessions.

In summary, the St. Louis Police Partnership shares with other focused deterrence programs the delivery of a two-pronged surveillance and support message in face-to-face meetings with persons at high risk for criminal offending and victimization. The key difference is that the meetings are held with individuals in the Police Partnership and with groups in other programs. The current evaluation of the Police Partnership also differs in two fundamental respects from most evaluations of focused deterrence programs. Our study of the Police Partnership is based on a randomized controlled experiment that compares outcomes across treatment and control groups, and the outcomes are criminal and prosocial behaviors of individual research subjects rather than area crime rates.

## Review of the Literature

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Focused deterrence has been identified through systematic reviews of prior research as a “very promising” strategy to reduce violence and other forms of offending (Braga and Weisburd, 2012; Braga et al., 2019). The results of the most recent meta-analysis “suggest a statistically significant, moderate overall mean effect in favor of focused deterrence strategies” (Braga et al., 2019, p. 24). The crime-reduction effects of the programs differed, however, depending on the rigor of the evaluation design. Smaller crime reductions were found for studies based on matched comparison groups than for those based on nonequivalent groups. The authors recommended continued research on the efficacy of focused deterrence as a crime-reduction tool, including the use of RCTs to evaluate the effectiveness of focus deterrence, because “well-implemented randomized studies provide the strongest evidence of the causal impacts of programs or practices” (Braga et al., 2019, p. 15).

Braga et al. (2019) were unable to locate any randomized controlled studies of focused deterrence programs for inclusion in the most recent systematic review and meta-analysis of focused deterrence programs. Since the completion of the systematic review, a randomized controlled study of a focused deterrence initiative was conducted in St. Louis (Hamilton et al., 2018). The Hamilton et al. (2018) study evaluated the effect of participation in an offender notification meeting on the likelihood of rearrest among St. Louis probationers and parolees. Both the program participants and a control group of nonparticipants were randomly selected from a list of probationers and parolees eligible for participation. The study found that those who attended the notification meeting were less likely to be arrested during the 17-month follow-up than the control participants. That study was published after Braga et al. (2019) had completed the systematic review process, although Braga et al. mentioned the study in their conclusion.

In addition to the lack of RCTs, previous focused deterrence studies have been limited by the way that program effects on crime are typically measured. In all but a few studies included in the Braga et al. (2019) systematic review, the researchers used area crime rates or related aggregate indicators to evaluate program effects. Few studies evaluated the effect of focused deterrence on the individuals who participated in the offender notification meetings, yet by design, focused deterrence targets individual offenders, even if the problem focus is gangs or drug markets and the delivery platform is a group meeting. As Braga et al. (2019) characterize their chief objective, “Focused deterrence interventions are aimed at *influencing the criminal behavior of individuals* through the strategic application of enforcement, community, and social service resources to facilitate desirable behaviors” (p. 3, emphasis added; see also Kennedy, 2009).

Examining a focused deterrence program's effect on the crime or arrest rate of the area in which it was implemented is certainly worthwhile, although it is more difficult to reliably assess the causal effect of the program on aggregate crime statistics than on the criminal behavior of the individuals who participated in the program. No matter the sophistication of the statistical methods used, absent evidence of a program's effects on its participants, some uncertainty will always exist regarding its effects on area crime rates. Our evaluation of the St. Louis Police Partnership builds on prior research by comparing the subsequent criminal behavior and related outcomes of program participants with those of a control group of nonparticipants randomly selected from the same population of individuals eligible to participate in the program.

## Study Design and Data

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Eligible participants for this study included probationers and parolees who had been placed under community supervision within the previous six months and who had been sentenced on firearm-related charges (including unlawful possession of a firearm, unlawful use of a firearm, firearm assault, firearm robbery, or another offense in which a firearm was possessed or used) or had a record of one or more arrests on firearm-related charges. Our original plan was to randomly allocate approximately 150 eligible participants to the treatment group receiving home visits and approximately 150 to the control group who would not receive home visits. We fell well short of these sampling targets, mainly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The home visits were greatly curtailed for nearly two years. The final number of study participants was 117—58 in the treatment group and 59 in the control group.

Although the number of participants was not optimal, it proved to be sufficient to carry out a reliable analysis of program outcomes. We had originally intended to conduct a separate analysis of gang members, which turned out to be unnecessary because, as we show in a later section, the number of gang members in the treatment and control groups was nearly identical. The smaller sample does mean that larger differences between the treatment and control group, or other group differences, are necessary to achieve statistical significance at conventional thresholds.

The following sections present the process evaluation and outcome evaluation of the Police Partnership. We conclude by discussing the implications of the study for future focused deterrence research. A report detailing the implementation of the focused deterrence program in St. Louis, specifically directed toward law enforcement practitioners and agencies interested in developing similar programs, has been submitted under separate cover. That report focuses on enabling criminal justice stakeholders to transfer the program to their jurisdiction, includes a discussion of challenges and lessons learned, and identifies aspects of local context that are important when implementing similar programs.

# Process Evaluation

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We anticipated that the evaluation of the Police Partnership project would last three years and include project preparation, participant identification and recruitment, data collection and follow-up, data analysis, and results reporting and dissemination stages. Instead, it lasted four years, with extended recruitment and data collection and follow-up periods. Both recruitment and data collection were significantly hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which impeded court operations and effectively curtailed face-to-face meetings with treatment participants for more than a year.

The proposed sample size for the evaluation of the Police Partnership was 300 probationers and parolees, with approximately 150 randomly allocated to the treatment group and 150 to the control group. The final sample, excluding refusals, was less than half as large (N=117, 58 in the treatment group and 59 in the control group). A sample of this size proved sufficient for reliable data analysis, as we show in later sections, but statistical efficiency was reduced. In other words, relationships among variables that might have been statistically significant in a larger sample were nonsignificant at conventional confidence thresholds. The risk of committing a Type II statistical error (acceptance of a false null hypothesis) was thereby increased.

## Data

We compiled data to assess program delivery from three sources: (1) coding forms devised by the researchers and administered by MODOC staff that documented participant eligibility, background characteristics, and progress; (2) written descriptions of the home visits with treatment participants prepared by the police detectives and probation and parole officers; and (3) semistructured interviews with eight treatment participants, five police officers, four community corrections personnel, and a judge who referred individuals to the program. The interviews with program staff and stakeholders lasted an average of 75 minutes, and those with program participants averaged about 60 minutes. All interviewees were asked about their views regarding the program's design, implementation, and effectiveness, as well as aspects of the program needing improvement. The coding forms and interview schedules used in the evaluation are available from the authors upon request.

## Analysis

We used RAND's Process Evaluation Planner (n.d.) to develop and carry out the process evaluation. The evaluation encompasses three program phases: (1) participant identification and recruitment; (2) data collection and follow-up, which we separate into program delivery and participant follow-up and exiting; and (3) data analysis. For each phase, we assessed fidelity to the program model, implementation challenges, and adjustments that were made to address unexpected obstacles (e.g., adapting to COVID-19). We include in our results an examination of participant, staff, and stakeholder perceptions of the program and its effects.

### Participant identification and recruitment

As we explained in an earlier section, we initially intended to identify, solicit consent from, and randomly assign a total of 300 study participants to either the treatment (n=150) or the control (n=150) group. Eligible participants would include probationers and parolees residing in the city of St. Louis who had been placed under community supervision within the previous six months and who had been sentenced on a firearm-related charge or had a record of one or more arrests on a firearm-related charge. Using protocols prepared by the researchers, MODOC staff were to record background information (e.g., sex, age, race, ethnicity, criminal history, current charge, educational attainment, risk classification, gang membership) for each of the approximately 300 eligible individuals who agreed to participate in the study.

We followed all the steps from the identification and recruitment phase, with the caveat that the COVID-19 pandemic considerably delayed the recruitment process and limited the program staff's ability to recruit the anticipated number of research participants. The study was extended one year, and participant recruitment took place until April 2023. All participants had to sign a consent form approved by an institutional review board to participate in the research. Those who consented were randomly assigned to the treatment or control condition, and MODOC program staff emailed background attributes of the treatment and control groups to the researchers in a timely manner.

Even with a one-year project extension, only 143 eligible individuals were recruited for the study. Of these, nine were removed from the study because they had been court-ordered to the treatment condition by a local judge and therefore were not subject to random assignment. Seventeen individuals refused to participate; thirteen of them did not provide written consent to participate, and the other four provided written consent but subsequently dropped out. One participant refused to participate just one day after consenting. Another refused after a home visit in which detectives picked him up at his job. He said that even though he understood the program's benefits, he could not work with the police. Two older participants, both of whom receive Supplemental Security Income, refused because they thought that they did not need

the program services. One of them found stable housing after leaving prison and inheriting property, was unable to work because of an injury he had sustained, and did not see a need for extra services or reporting requirements. The other has experienced serious health problems since being shot and declined the program because he did not need extra services. The final sample of 117 participants included 58 treatment participants and 59 control participants.

The research team and program staff addressed recruitment concerns in multiple ways. We expanded eligibility requirements to include probationers and parolees living outside of the city of St. Louis, those without prior firearm-related arrests, and those who entered community supervision more than six months before recruitment. Nonetheless, eligibility requirements were still largely met: 105 (89.7 percent) of the 117 participants resided in the city of St. Louis, 111 (94.9 percent) had a current or prior firearm charge, and 84 (71.8 percent) had been under community supervision less than six months before recruitment. The principal investigator and the research analyst met with program staff and stakeholders on multiple occasions to brainstorm ways to increase participant identification and recruitment, which led to an additional 11 participants recruited by law enforcement and a judge. In a few cases, detectives contacted and provided additional information to individuals who had originally refused to participate in the study, recruiting four more participants.

## Program delivery

A police officer and community corrections officer were to conduct home visits with each treatment participant no less than once every three months, with the frequency of meetings depending on the participant's adherence to community supervision conditions and requirements and progress toward meeting objectives discussed with the police detectives. It was expected that each treatment participant would have engaged in at least one home visit after five months. After each visit, a detective would be tasked with completing a form recording the participant's name and address; the detective's name; the date, time, and duration of the meeting; and a brief narrative description of the visit. Program detectives were to provide all completed home visit forms to their SLMPD supervisor, who would then send the forms to the researchers for data entry and analysis.

Home visits began on June 17, 2020, and were monitored until June 26, 2023. The researchers received a total of 268 home visit forms from detectives throughout the program's 36-month duration, or approximately 7 home visit forms per month. However, the SLMPD supervisor changed twice during the study, and this turnover, coupled with increased officer workloads due to staffing shortages and various scheduling conflicts, limited the number of home visit forms received by researchers. Moreover, home visit forms often lacked information, such as start and end times and whether contact was made with another household member during the visit, limiting the research team's ability to examine certain characteristics of home visits.

In addition to repeatedly reminding detectives to complete and send home visit forms to their supervisor, we took two steps to ensure that home visits were accurately and thoroughly documented. First, one of the researchers began attending monthly “staffings,” in-person check-ins between MODOC and SLMPD officers and supervisors, in the summer of 2020 and throughout the study. Program staff discussed updates about each treatment participant and the past month’s home visits. Attending these staffings allowed us to document each participant’s most recent home visit date and check it against existing records, but the verbal updates did not contain the same level of detail as the home visit forms. Fortunately, MODOC officers are required to document all contacts with clients, so the research team requested records of each home visit from the MODOC program supervisor, who then scanned and sent them to the researchers for analysis. These records increased the documented home visits to a total of 444 home visits, or approximately 12 home visits each month.

Not all home visits took place in the participants’ homes. About three-quarters of the meetings did occur in the participants’ homes, with the remainder occurring by phone or video, at the participants’ places of employment, or in the probation and parole office. The written descriptions of the home visits and monthly staffing and interview data indicate that meetings occurred outside of participants’ homes because of the pandemic, specifically to increase feelings of comfort and safety.

Both the qualitative data in the home visit notes prepared by detectives and MODOC staff and the interviews conducted with program staff and participants are valuable supplements to the quantitative data for determining program adherence and participant and staff perceptions of the program. The narrative descriptions of the home visits detail the treatment participants’ service needs, their recent law enforcement activity (e.g., arrests), their ties to family and loved ones, the progress that they have made in attaining their goals, and the obstacles that they continue to confront. These data clearly showed that the home visits were being conducted as intended.

Typically, a program detective would pick up a MODOC officer, and the two would discuss a treatment participant on their way to their residence. Participants would discuss their social service and other needs with the officers, who then would offer advice and support, consistent with program objectives. Most discussions centered on employment. For instance, an officer noted in a home visit form that participant T36 “wants to get a job in construction and was encouraged by detectives to enroll into a technical trade school to help him achieve that goal.” When T27 wanted “to get his CDL [commercial driver’s license] so he [could] explore better job opportunities, [a detective] advised him about a trucking school...that would pay for his CDL, forklift training, and shipping training.” In an interview, T51 noted that detectives told him about the Youth Build program, which led him to earn his construction certification and become valedictorian of his high school program. Treatment participants also received assistance with other social support services, including help with locating housing,

transportation problems, financial planning, and finding Red Cross and FEMA resources after a flood.

To be in line with program objectives, treatment participants were sanctioned when they were suspected to have engaged in crime and rewarded for prosocial behavior. For instance, during a home visit, T1 told the detectives about an arrest in which he admitted “having a little weed and that he drove off due to his being afraid due to his being a parolee,” and he was subsequently placed on GPS supervision. When T17 showed that he was “making positive strides toward employment search, sobriety, and reporting as directed,” he was given time off of GPS monitoring.

Interview and home visit data shed light on barriers that program staff and treatment participants experienced, as well as adjustments made to address the barriers. Challenges were associated most commonly with staffing and leadership issues, enforcement issues, participant motivation, and safety concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of the program in several ways, ranging from reluctance to participate in face-to-face meetings with police officers to the closing of agencies providing support services. Program staff viewed staffing problems as a major barrier to implementation. Two of the six original detectives were shot and forced to retire, and two others were promoted and transferred. They were eventually replaced, but changes to SLMPD leadership and organization meant that the program detectives were, according to a MODOC supervisor, “pulled in...many different directions,” meaning that they were “not as available as they used to be.”

Program staff were also concerned with their own safety and the safety of their clients. MODOC staff noted that detectives would sometimes end home visits early because of safety concerns, and one detective noted that he wanted “to look out for [clients], because we know once we leave, they still have to be in that environment.” He did not “want any kind of harm to come towards that family or just because [someone was] participating in the program.”

MODOC program staff adapted to detective staffing and safety concerns by planning ahead, sending reminders to detectives and participants, and allowing participants to choose meeting locations. They were also intentional about reserving several hours for batches of home visits and scheduling visits in dangerous neighborhoods during daylight hours. Sometimes MODOC officers would ask program detectives to conduct “spot checks” during their normal shifts in which they would check in on clients with issues or those who had been uncommunicative for some time.

The home visit descriptions and interviews also revealed challenges associated with treating participants who were unmotivated to change. Several staff members said lack of motivation was particularly prevalent among gang members, who were likely to live for the moment without regard for the future. In interviews, five treatment participants also emphasized the importance of motivation for program effectiveness, with one saying that program staff “can

do what [they] want to do all day long and...can roll a red carpet out and make this as easy as it can be” but that not everyone would cooperate. Several program staff and participants said that eligibility requirements should change to include only “motivated” individuals.

Program staff and treatment participants also took issue with “getting tough” on drug (namely marijuana) violations in light of recent changes in city and state law. The city of St. Louis decriminalized possession of small amounts of marijuana in 2021, and Missouri voters amended the state constitution in 2022 to legalize marijuana possession and cultivation for recreational purposes. T51 and T39 discussed being held back in the program because of marijuana violations. Four SLMPD and two MODOC staff members reported problems relating to marijuana enforcement, and three of the detectives and both MODOC officers said in interviews that they thought that program staff should be more lenient on marijuana. One detective described the negative effects of locking people up for petty crimes, stating that he looks “at the long game.” He said, “You can’t crack down on small stuff every time because if you do that to everybody in the community, where you going to get your information from when you really need it? When that child gets shot from somebody, whatever.” The preference for lenience on marijuana violations, however, did not extend to other infractions. Several staff members regularly checked participants’ social media communications for evidence of gun possession and other problematic information to ensure that they were not being lenient on more serious issues.

## Participant monitoring and exiting

Under the initial program design, administrators were to follow up with participants in the treatment group for a period of 18 months after their first home visit during a 5-month data collection period. The follow-up period for the control group was to begin at the midpoint of the data collection period for the treatment group. At the 18-month point, MODOC staff were to complete a form for each research participant, recording any felony and misdemeanor arrests, by date and charge, that occurred during the follow-up period, as well as technical violations, changes in educational status, job training, employment, and substance abuse treatment. The follow-up forms were to be provided to the research team for coding, data entry, and data analysis.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced changes to the follow-up procedures. We were unable to collect outcome data on enough participants for reliable analysis during the 5 months after the initial home visit. Therefore, the follow-up period for many participants was less than 18 months. Although we could not follow every participant for 18 months, participation in the study did last an average of 508.4 days, or just under 17 months.

Soon after the program began, it became clear that it would be easier to record follow-up and exit data for treatment participants than for control participants, primarily because treatment

participants were reviewed at monthly staff meetings. To ensure that all program participants were monitored, the researchers began scheduling regular meetings with the MODOC supervisor to review control participants' rearrests, technical violations, and other outcomes. We also recorded changes to participant supervision and risk levels in these meetings.

MODOC staff filled out an exit form whenever a participant left the program. Among other measures, the form recorded the reason for the exit, arrests and technical violations that occurred while the participant was in the program, and changes in educational status, vocational training, employment, substance abuse treatment, and attitude toward the police. MODOC staff promptly sent the forms to the researcher for data entry and analysis, although the forms were sometimes missing data and had to be amended subsequently in discussion with the MODOC supervisor. The MODOC supervisor said that she would have liked to have had more oversight over the form development and the exiting process, and we revised the exit form accordingly.

Three-quarters of the 117 research participants had exited the program by the end of the study period on July 31, 2023 (45 from the treatment group and 43 from the control group). Most participants in both groups exited because they had been discharged from supervision or had been rearrested. Three participants in the treatment group and two in the control group died during the study.

## Data analysis

The quantitative analysis of the outcomes of the Police Partnership had two major objectives: (1) assessment of the equivalence of the treatment and control group participants on background attributes and (2) multivariate analyses of the effect of the experimental treatment on criminal and prosocial outcomes. We also planned to conduct separate analyses for research participants who were gang members. Both objectives were met, with some revision, in the outcomes analysis. As originally proposed, we entered background attributes on which treatment and control participants differed as control variables in the multivariate analyses. The study team investigated the effect of the home visits on employment, but data limitations precluded analyses of other prosocial outcomes such as educational attainment, vocational training, and substance abuse treatment. Assistance with employment was by far the most common form of guidance the police officers provided to the members of the treatment group. Although analyses of the effects of the experimental treatment on the degree of social support by family members and others to participants and on participants' attitudes toward police were not among the original study objectives, we did conduct those analyses. Separate analyses of gang members proved unnecessary because the proportion of gang members in the treatment and control group was approximately equal, as shown in the outcome evaluation in a later section.

## Perceptions of the program

We conducted interviews with staff members and participants in the Police Partnership to gauge their views on the process and outcomes of the program. We asked all of them how they felt about home visits. Program staff thought that their participation in the program positively affected people's lives in terms of lowering crime, improving prosocial outcomes, and mending relations with the police, and they also said that it increased their own job satisfaction. Program participants generally viewed the home visits positively and reported that the program had lowered their own risk of crime, increased prosocial supports in various ways, and improved their trust in the police. Most thought that the program had the potential to lower violence.

Reduced violence and improved prosocial support were not the only perceived effects. Another theme from interviews with treatment participants and staff was increased information sharing between treatment participants and detectives. One detective noted that program detectives occasionally receive information about a shooting in a way that "normal officers" cannot. Another detective noted that even though the program is not focused on information gathering, "it is true that if [a treatment participant is] caught up in something or they know something's happening in the community, sometimes they call" the detectives to give them information. This theme was echoed by treatment participants. One interviewee described contacting and cooperating with the program detectives after his son was shot and again after his son was caught robbing a store. T50 explained that improving police–community relations should be a program goal in and of itself because if "you don't trust [the police] and something happens where the police should be handling the matter, we take it into our own hands and then that's very bad. So that's more crime...And then we have more people in [corrections], so that's more tax dollars."

Participants and program staff viewed the SLMPD, in contrast with MODOC, as unsupportive of the Police Partnership. In several interviews, program detectives said that the program was referred to as "hug-a-thug" by other SLMPD officers. Detectives also noted that use of force and corruption issues in the SLMPD damaged the trust that program staff had built with treatment participants. To address these barriers and maintain trust, the detectives said that they made a point to always be honest and transparent with treatment participants about police corruption. On multiple occasions, detectives told treatment participants to file complaints against officers they felt had wrongfully arrested them.

We asked program staff and participants whether they favored individualized, recurring home visits over the one-time group notification meetings that are much more common in focused deterrence programs. All interviewees said that they preferred the individualized meetings. Some said that group meetings could encourage dishonesty and even foment violence. Others mentioned that individualized visits allowed treatment plans to be tailored to individuals'

specific needs, made things more “personal,” and changed participants’ views of the police and police views of their “clients.” Treatment participants appeared to be satisfied with the repeated nature of home visits. One said that the visits allow officers and participants to form “a better relationship and understanding of each other and really get to know each other.” Another reported that repeated meetings “keep you on your toes,” which can help with accountability and staying out of trouble.

Finally, we asked program staff and participants about the dual orientation or “carrot and stick” approach to enforcement and social services in the focused deterrence model. Should enforcement and services be equally balanced, or should one take priority over the other? Most of the program staff thought that social services and enforcement should be equally balanced, but four staff members (two from MODOC and two from the SLMPD) believed that support should be prioritized over enforcement. One MODOC interviewee emphasized the importance of balance, stating, “You can lead a horse to water, [but] you can’t make them drink...If we’ve given them the resources, they’re not taking advantage of them, and they’re continuing bad behavior, they’re...going to need more consequences.” Other MODOC officers shared this sentiment. Two SLMPD officers expressed concern that people might take advantage of a lenient or “soft” program. Six of the eight treatment participants thought that there should be an equal balance of support and enforcement, but the remaining two thought that social services should be emphasized more than punishment. T51 said that “the help should be more powerful than the discipline” because it is better to have officers pushing you in the right direction than “waiting on you to mess up.”

## Summary

Overall, the process evaluation demonstrates that the Police Partnership was well implemented and that RCTs of individualized, recurring meetings between police officers and individuals under probation or parole supervision are feasible, even in areas with high levels of firearm violence and tension between the police and community residents. The major impediment to program operations and delivery was the COVID-19 pandemic, which substantially reduced the sample size for the evaluation study. In spite of this obstacle, the program was, with some revision, implemented, monitored, and analyzed as intended and, according to interviews with program staff and participants, in ways that benefited both. The home visits, in particular, were faithfully implemented. Program staff addressed the treatment participants’ needs, obstacles, and setbacks; offered help and advice to ensure that participants continued working on their goals; and undertook enforcement actions when necessary. With increased staffing and administrative support, the Police Partnership could be scaled up in St. Louis and could serve as an exemplary model for adoption elsewhere. However, the future of

the program will also depend on evidence that it has had its intended effect on criminal behavior and prosocial outcomes. We turn to that question next.

# Outcome Evaluation: Methods and Results

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Our evaluation of the effect of the Police Partnership on criminal and prosocial behavior is divided into three sections. The first compares the treatment and control groups on multiple background attributes that we measured when the participants entered the study. Random assignment of participants to each group should guarantee that any differences are the product of random error, but given the small sample size, directly comparing the experimental groups on background characteristics such as age, employment, education, training, substance abuse, and criminal history is prudent. The results of this comparison are presented in Table 1. Subsequent tables present the results of logistic regression analyses of the effect of the home visit experimental treatment on criminal behavior, as measured by arrests, and on technical violations. We also examine the program's effect on two outcomes that were not part of the original study objectives: prosocial support by family and other loved ones and participants' attitudes toward the police. The final section draws from home visit descriptions written by the police and probation and parole officers to add qualitative context to the quantitative results.

## Equivalence of experimental groups

When we considered the 22 background characteristics shown in Table 1, we found few sizable or statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups. Nearly all the participants in each group were Black men with an average age of approximately 28. The two groups do differ significantly, or nearly so, with respect to having a prior drug arrest ( $p=.000$ ) and firearm rearrest ( $p=.079$ ). Members of the treatment group were far more likely than members of the control group to have a prior drug arrest, but members of the control group were more likely to have a prior firearm arrest. A sizable difference (i.e., 10 percentage points or more) between the experimental groups also exists with respect to employment and supervision level. Members of the control group were more likely to be employed when they entered the study than were members of the treatment group. Treatment group members were more likely than those in the control group to be under a high level of community supervision. These differences are not statistically significant, but they are large enough to prompt some concern regarding the equivalence of the treatment and control groups. We therefore include these attributes, along with prior drug charge and firearm charge, as control variables in the regression models presented in the table.

**Table 1. Background attributes of treatment control groups at program entry**

	Treatment	Control	P-Value <sup>a</sup>	N
Probation <sup>b</sup>	56.9%	52.5%	.636	117
Male	94.8%	98.3%	.301	117
Black	94.8%	98.3%	.301	117
Age	28.4	27.9	.714	117
High school or GED	46.6%	49.2%	.778	117
Employed	38.6%	49.2%	.252	116
Vocational training	10.5%	11.9%	.819	116
Substance abuse treatment	8.6%	5.1%	.449	117
Special intervention <sup>c</sup>	36.2%	40.1%	.619	117
Mental health flag	10.3%	5.1%	.286	117
INED score <sup>d</sup>	8.0	7.9	.804	117
High supervision <sup>e</sup>	60.3%	50.8%	.301	117
Current violent crime	50.0%	44.1%	.520	117
Current firearm crime	62.1%	66.1%	.649	117
Current property crime	22.4%	23.7%	.866	117
Current drug crime	12.1%	11.9%	.973	117
Prior violent crime	43.1%	40.7%	.790	117
Prior firearm crime	48.3%	64.4%	.079	117
Prior property crime	29.3%	25.4%	.637	117
Prior drug crime	31.0%	5.1%	.000	117
No. previous arrests	1.7	1.9	.444	117
Gang member	44.8%	45.8%	.919	117

Source: CNA.

<sup>a</sup> Percentage differences evaluated by chi-square; mean differences evaluated by F-test.

<sup>b</sup> Contrast = parole.

<sup>c</sup> The most common special intervention was Gang CPR.

<sup>d</sup> Summary of supervision needs.

<sup>e</sup> Contrast = low supervision.

## Multivariate results: employment effects

To assess the effect of the home visits on the criminal and prosocial behavior of study participants, we regressed the likelihood of rearrest and receipt of a technical violation on the experimental condition (treatment versus control) and on employment status (employed full- or part-time versus unemployed) in logistic regression models. We focused on employment because, as indicated in the process evaluation, obtaining and keeping a job was the primary prosocial message of the police officers who met with the members of the treatment group.

The officers often referred participants directly to employers or employment agencies, as noted in the police, probation, and parole officers' home visit descriptions.

We examined the likelihood of rearrest, a technical violation, and employment at the time the participant exited the program or by July 31, 2023, the end of the study period, if the participant was still in the program at that time. The arrest data are from SLMPD records, and the technical violation and employment data are from MODOC records. We measured rearrest with five indicators: rearrest for any crime, a violent crime, a firearm crime, a property crime, and a drug crime. Participants could be rearrested for multiple crime types. For example, of the 36 participants rearrested for a violent crime, 24 were also rearrested for a firearm offense. Technical violations typically refer to breaches of community supervision rules, such as missing a mandatory meeting or failing a drug test. The logistic regression results for the rearrest indicators, technical violations, and employment status are shown in Table 2 through Table 7.

The regression coefficients are in the form of odds ratios (ORs). An OR greater than 1.0 represents a positive relationship between the explanatory variable and the outcome (i.e., higher values on the outcome correspond with higher values on the explanatory variable). ORs less than 1.0 reflect a negative relationship (i.e., higher values on the outcome correspond with lower values on the explanatory variable or vice versa). In addition to the experimental condition, the models contain the four measures of background attributes on which the treatment and control group initially differed (employment, supervision level, prior drug arrest, and prior firearm arrest). The results for these measures are not shown.

Table 2 presents the logistic regression results for rearrest on any charge. We see that there is no significant direct relationship between the odds of rearrest and the experimental treatment. Participants in the treatment group, however, were significantly more likely than those in the control group to be employed at the time they exited the program or by the end of the study period (OR=2.949,  $p<.05$ ). Fifty-two percent of the treatment group participants were employed, compared with 37 percent of the control group participants. Moreover, employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be rearrested (OR=.216, or .189 with the treatment indicator in the model,  $p<.01$ ). Just 31 percent of the employed participants were rearrested, compared with 65 percent of the unemployed participants. In summary, although there is no direct relationship between the home visits and rearrest for any crime, there is an indirect relationship that operates through employment. Meetings with the police officers increased employment among the treatment participants, which in turn reduced their chances of rearrest.

**Table 2. Odds of rearrest by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Rearrest	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest	Rearrest
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.072	2.949*	—	1.641

	Rearrest	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest	Rearrest
	(.434)	(1.329)	—	(.744)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	—	—	.216**	.189**
	—	—	(.095)	(.088)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	4.920	18.360**	18.140**	19.350**
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.031	.115	.113	.120

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05.

We find the same results for rearrest on a violent crime, as shown in Table 3. Those in the treatment group were more likely than those in the control group to be employed, and employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be rearrested for a violent offense.

**Table 3. Odds of rearrest on violent charge by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Rearrest Violent	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest Violent	Rearrest Violent
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.514	2.949*	—	.655
	(.233)	(1.329)	—	(.311)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	—	—	.271**	.295*
	—	—	(.129)	(.143)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	2.940	18.360**	9.020	9.830
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.020	.115	.063	.068

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05.

By contrast, those in the treatment group were *more* likely than those in the control group to be rearrested for a firearm crime, as shown in Table 4. We find a significant and positive relationship between the experimental treatment and firearm crime rearrest (OR=2.433, p<.05). As in the case of rearrest for a violent crime, we also find that treatment group participants were more likely than those in the control group to be employed and that employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be rearrested for a firearm offense (OR=.404, p<.05). In contrast with rearrest for a violent crime, however, a statistically significant and positive relationship between the experimental treatment and

rearrest for a firearm offense persists when controlling for employment status (OR=3.467,  $p < .05$ ). We consider a possible reason for this result following Table 7.

**Table 4. Odds of rearrest on firearm charge by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Rearrest Firearm	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest Firearm	Rearrest Firearm
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	2.433* (1.066)	2.949* (1.329)	— —	3.467* (1.665)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	— —	— —	.404* (.180)	.284* (.139)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	6.280	18.360**	6.430	13.560*
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.043	.115	.044	.092

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\* $p < .01$  \* $p < .05$ .

The results for rearrests for property offenses, drug offenses, and receipt of a technical violation are similar to those for rearrest for a violent crime. In each case, treatment group participants were more likely than control group participants to be employed, and employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be rearrested when they exited the program or by the end of the study period (see Table 5 through Table 7).

**Table 5. Odds of rearrest on property charge by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Rearrest Property	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest Property	Rearrest Property
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.962 (.487)	2.949* (1.329)	— —	1.476 (.805)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	— —	— —	.170** (.103)	.153** (.096)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	3.210	18.360**	13.660*	14.170*
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.026	.115	.113	.117

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\* $p < .01$  \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 6. Odds of rearrest on drug charge by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Rearrest Drug	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Rearrest Drug	Rearrest Drug
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.506 (.783)	2.949* (1.329)	— —	2.223 (1.249)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	— —	— —	.221* (.138)	.179** (.117)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	1.000	18.360**	7.370	9.430
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.009	.115	.067	.086

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05.

**Table 7. Odds of technical violation by experimental condition and employment (N=116)**

	Technical Violation	Employment <sup>b</sup>	Technical Violation	Technical Violation
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.660 (.295)	2.949* (1.329)	— —	.862 (.408)
Employed <sup>b</sup>	— —	— —	.280** (.132)	.290* (.140)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	8.760	18.360**	15.550**	15.650*
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.063	.115	.112	.113

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

<sup>b</sup> Employed full-time or part-time at program exit or by July 31, 2023.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05.

As we noted earlier in this section, we also find that employed participants were less likely to be rearrested for a firearm offense. Other conditions, however, increase the likelihood that those in the treatment group would be rearrested for a firearm offense. Those conditions are open to speculation, but we believe that police officers who visit offenders in their homes are more likely to detect illegal possession of firearms than the commission of other types of crime. The primary purpose of the Police Partnership is to reduce firearm violence, and the police officers in the program are particularly concerned with firearm possession and use by the probationers and parolees that they meet with, more than 90 percent of whom have a current

or previous arrest for firearm crime. The officers also warn them against displaying firearms or engaging in other incriminating communications on social media. In monthly meetings with MODOC staff, officers routinely described conducting Facebook checks, with one detective noting in an interview that young clients “might take videos where they’re holding...prop guns and all that kind of stuff.” Another SLMPD program supervisor stated in an interview that it was easier to see what participants “were actually getting involved in” if they had social media.

## Multivariate results: social support and attitude toward the police

We examined the difference between the treatment and control groups and the effect on rearrest and technical violations with respect to two additional conditions: the degree of social support that probationers and parolees received from family, loved ones, and employers and change in the research participants’ attitudes toward the police. These conditions were measured either when the participant exited the program or by the end of the study period, and the measurements are based on assessments by the program staff. Both are dichotomous measures, with 1 = support or positive change in attitude toward the police and 0 = lack of support or negative or no change in attitude toward the police. We estimated the effect of the experimental treatment, social support, and attitude toward the police on the odds of rearrest and technical violation in logistic regression models with controls for initial differences between the treatment and control group in employment, supervision level, prior drug charge, and prior firearm charge (results not shown). We present the results for rearrest on any charge and receipt of a technical violation in the text and those for specific arrest charges in the appendix.

Table 8 displays the results for rearrest on any charge and social support. We see that there is no difference in the likelihood of rearrest between those in the treatment and control groups. Treatment group members were more likely than control group members to receive social support from family and others, and those who received social support were less likely to be rearrested, but these differences are not statistically significant. Given the small sample size, the possibility that this result is a Type II statistical error should be kept in mind.

**Table 8. Odds of rearrest by experimental condition and social support (N=115)**

	Rearrest	Social Support	Rearrest	Rearrest
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.072 (.434)	1.771 (.837)	— —	1.168 (.480)
Social support	— —	— —	.658 (.288)	.645 (.285)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	4.920	4.260	5.700	5.850

	Rearrest	Social Support	Rearrest	Rearrest
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.031	.032	.036	.037

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

By contrast, there is a very strong and statistically significant difference in attitude toward the police between the treatment and control group participants, as shown in Table 9 (OR=18.719, p<.01). Of the 58 participants in the treatment group, 20 (34.5 percent) developed a more positive attitude toward the police over time, compared with just 2 (3.4 percent) of the 59 control group participants. Moreover, those with a more positive attitude toward the police were less likely to be rearrested than those with a negative attitude or whose attitude did not change, a difference that is statistically significant at the .10 level. These results indicate that the Police Partnership has had a stronger effect on probationers' and parolees' attitudes toward the police than the social support they received. Whether those with a more positive attitude toward the police are less likely to be rearrested is less conclusive, but these data suggest that the likelihood of rearrest depends more on a participant's attitude toward the police than on social support.

The importance of social support for obtaining and keeping a job, however, is supported by our data. Research participants with a positive support system were twice as likely as those without such support to be employed when they exited the program or by the end of the study period (51.8 percent versus 25.8 percent, p=.013). Social support, therefore, may indirectly reduce the probability of rearrest by increasing employment.

**Table 9. Odds of rearrest by experimental condition and positive attitude toward police (N=116)**

	Rearrest	Positive Attitude	Rearrest	Rearrest
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.072 (.434)	18.719** (15.125)	— —	1.543 (.697)
Positive attitude	— —	— —	.407+ (.213)	.328+ (.187)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	4.920	24.710**	8.020	8.940
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.031	.219	.050	.056

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

Table 10 and Table 11 present the logistic regression results for social support, attitude toward the police, and technical violations. Treatment group participants were less likely than control group participants to be charged with a technical violation, but this difference is not statistically significant. Participants who received social support were less likely than others to be charged with a technical violation (see Table 10). This difference is significant at the .10 level but becomes nonsignificant when the experimental condition is entered as a control. By contrast, those whose attitude toward the police became more positive were significantly less likely than others to receive a technical violation charge by the end of the study period or when they exited the program (see Table 11). As with rearrest, being charged with a technical violation depends less on how much social support someone has than on their attitude toward the police, although social support may reduce the probability of being charged with a technical violation indirectly by increasing employment.

**Table 10. Odds of technical violation by experimental condition and social support (N=115)**

	Technical Violation	Social Support	Technical Violation	Technical Violation
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.660 (.295)	1.771 (.837)	— —	.696 (.316)
Social support	— —	— —	.394+ (.219)	.410 (.229)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	8.760	4.260	10.820+	11.460+
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.063	.032	.078	.083

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 11. Odds of technical violation by experimental condition and positive attitude toward the police (N=116)**

	Violation	Attitude	Violation	Violation
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.660 (.295)	18.719** (15.125)	— —	1.456 (.802)
Positive attitude	— —	— —	.153** (.088)	.123** (.082)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	8.760	24.710**	19.540**	20.020**
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.063	.219	.141	.144

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

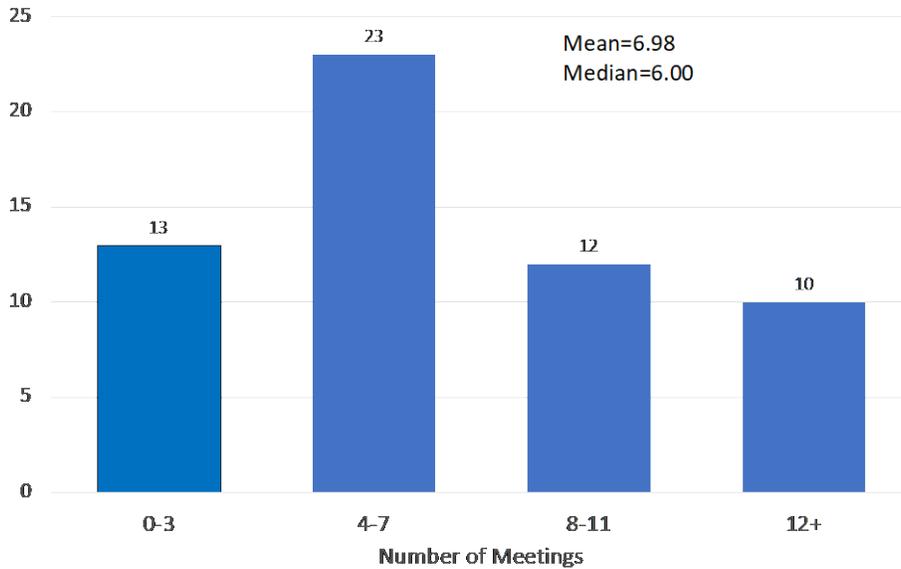
The logistic regression results for the likelihood of rearrest on a specific charge, presented in the appendix, are mixed. Participants with more social support were less likely than those with less support to be rearrested for a violent crime, a difference statistically significant at the .10 level (Table 12). Those with a more positive attitude toward the police were not significantly less likely than others to be rearrested for a violent offense (Table 13). Rearrest on a firearm offense is not significantly associated with social support (Table 14), but it is significantly less likely for those with a more positive attitude toward the police and with the experimental condition entered in the model as a control variable (Table 15). Rearrest for a property crime is less likely for those with more social support (Table 16) but is not significantly related to their attitude toward the police (Table 17). Finally, rearrest for a drug crime is not significantly related to either participants' social support or attitude toward the police (Table 18 and Table 19).

In summary, participants in the treatment group did not receive significantly more social support than did those in the control group, and, with few exceptions, those with more social support were not less likely than others to be rearrested by the time they exited the program or by the end of the study period. Those with more social support were more likely to be employed, however, which suggests that social support reduces the probability of rearrest indirectly by boosting employment. Participants in the treatment group were far more likely than those in the control group to develop a more positive attitude toward the police, and those with a more positive attitude were less likely to receive a technical violation or to be rearrested, although the latter result differs by arrest charge. We now turn to an examination of the home visits participants in the treatment group received and draw on the narrative descriptions of the visits to illustrate and provide context for the quantitative evaluation of the Police Partnership.

## Home visits

Between June 2020 and July 31, 2023, police officers conducted 405 meetings with the 58 probationers and parolees in the treatment group, an average of approximately 7 meetings per participant. The meetings took place primarily in the participants' homes and usually lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. Many of the meetings, depending on the setting, also included family members, other loved ones, or an employer. Thirteen (22.4 percent) of the treatment group participants met with the police officers three or fewer times, 23 (39.7 percent) of the participants had between four and seven meetings, and 22 (37.9 percent) participated in eight or more meetings, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Frequency of meetings with treatment group participants



Source: CNA.

Although most of the treatment group participants engaged in multiple meetings with the police officers, we cannot use the frequency of meetings as an indicator of their success or failure. The officers often met more frequently with participants who were not making progress or were falling back into patterns of misconduct. Participants who ultimately were rearrested averaged slightly more home visits (mean=7.19) than those who were not rearrested (mean=6.74), although this difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, participants who were employed also met more frequently with the officers (mean=8.57) than those who were unemployed when they left the program or by the end of the study period (mean=5.29), a statistically significant difference. In short, the officers used the home visits *both* to encourage positive behavior and to respond to negative behavior.

The written descriptions of the meetings with probationers and parolees prepared by the police and probation and parole officers provide important context for interpreting the quantitative findings presented in the previous tables. They also contain information on aspects of the Police Partnership not covered by the quantitative indicators, such as the mood and outlook of the program participants and their professed commitment to obtaining employment, training, and other resources to facilitate a move away from criminal involvement. Several themes that emerged from the case narratives are briefly documented in the sections that follow.

## Steady progress

Some participants showed clear commitment to the program and to improving their lives. For example, a 30-year-old probationer who had been convicted recently of an unlawful use of a weapon offense was able to maintain employment at a nursing home throughout her participation in the Police Partnership and consistently displayed a positive attitude toward the program. A month following her first visit, she said that she was considering going back to school for nursing or interior design. By the third home visit, she had not had any violations, had produced negative urine analysis results, had maintained employment, and had always made her scheduled appointments. Her brother was killed during her fifth month in the program, and she was responsible for helping her mother make the funeral arrangements. Despite this family crisis, the participant continued to willingly engage in the program and maintain full-time employment.

## Lack of progress

Other participants showed little desire to improve their lives through employment, education, training, or drug abstinence. For instance, a 25-year-old probationer with a recent drug conviction initially showed a willingness to cooperate with the Police Partnership and take advantage of its resources, but he then made little progress toward reaching his professed goals. During his initial meeting with police officers in September 2020, the participant stated that he wanted to study for his driver's exam and obtain his license by the end of the month. The officers gave him a Missouri driver's guide to study. He also wanted to obtain his GED in order to attend a trade school and said that he would start actively looking for employment. Officers noted at the time that the participant "is motivated to change his life for the better" and that "he understands everything starts with him and he must apply himself in order to change."

Two weeks later, however, the participant had not been studying for his driver's test, working toward his GED, or actively looking for a job. Three months after the initial home visit, he was still unemployed. He said that he had stopped studying for his driver's test because his mother's vehicle was not registered. The officers advised the participant to reach out to Mission St. Louis, a nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting people with opportunities for employment and education. A month later, the participant had not contacted Mission St. Louis or worked toward his other goals.

Officers routinely reminded participants that they could request rides to their assigned appointments and programs. Nonetheless, when officers advised a participant to go to Mission St. Louis for help with obtaining employment, he "didn't go because he didn't have a ride." Some participants appeared to lack interest in the program and resisted following the advice of the detectives. For example, a detective reported a lack of effort for one participant, T23:

[He] has not found a job and he is not really looking for one. [He] advised he's been out of jail for a year and hasn't caught any new cases and he thinks he's doing great....He began to explain that he knows he can't be sent back to prison for not having a job or going to school. He has proven he has no interest in bettering himself because he doesn't have to. He has no motivation to do anything that would be productive in furthering his life skills and make him marketable for employment. In the future we will conduct spot checks to keep close attention to his activities.

## Confronting obstacles, building relationships, and finding common ground

The narratives also shed light on the multiple obstacles faced by parolees and probationers. Some participants were in poor physical health, including some of those showing signs of success. After documenting one participant's successes, the officer noted that he "further stated at the current time he is dealing with health issues that [are] somewhat setting him back." A few participants contracted COVID-19; others were shot. In a November 2020 visit, for example, officers noted that the participant "is still not working because of his leg being injured after being shot a few months ago." Another participant was shot in a domestic incident between home visits in early 2021. Detectives took him to medical appointments after his shooting.

Other participants confronted money, family, or employment issues. Many participants faced employment barriers because of their records and the COVID-19 pandemic. In one case, a detective reported that a participant "stated he was laid off due to the Covid Pandemic and now he wants to attend school. He is still taking care of his mother, due to her illness and it's very challenging at times." Another participant said that "he feels his mother and sister are taking advantage of him financially." He stated that he was unsure "where his money was going each month." When the officers asked whether he had considered getting his own place, he said that he would like to and wants to live somewhere "more quiet." During visits such as this one, the officers advised participants to remain positive and continue working on their goals. They recommended possible solutions (e.g., student loans) and offered help with school and job applications. In one example, an officer directed a participant to make a list of all of his bills so that she could assist him in developing a budget. She also advised him about a trucking school in Troy, Missouri, that would pay for his CDL, forklift training, and shipping training and about a trucking class that is offered more locally.

Although some participants believed that family members were obstacles to their successful reentry into society, others received support and encouragement from family and other loved ones. A participant who was working two jobs was described as "stay[ing] busy to stay out of trouble and most importantly provid[ing] for his family." He "stated [that] he really wants to improve himself and really work on getting his GED for the first time and stop making excuses."

His girlfriend “agreed and stated she will do everything in her power to help him achieve that goal.” Officers observed another participant arrive at his residence and “hug and comfort all [of his] children, [who] were happy to see him also.” The officers then spoke with the participant and his partner about possible job opportunities.

Transportation issues were a significant obstacle for many participants in the Police Partnership. According to officers, many participants were reluctant to take public transportation because of the risk of encountering an enemy, but some did not have a driver’s license and others did not have access to a car. Such issues had serious repercussions, including unemployment. For instance, a 27-year-old parolee who had been convicted on two counts of armed criminal action had been working as of August 2020 as a crane operator for the past two years and was serving as a union representative. He was “very motivated to stay active and make himself a better man.” By January 2021, however, he was no longer working because of transportation issues. Although he desires to be a personal trainer, without a job he was unable to pay the \$400 fee to attend classes. The officers suggested that the participant contact Mission St. Louis and provided him with additional employment information.

During the next month’s visit, the participant was still unemployed but was scheduled to begin engaging with Mission St. Louis in March. By March, he was employed, had obtained his driver’s permit, and was looking forward to getting his driver’s license. The participant’s sister was present at one of the visits and expressed how happy she was with the support that her brother was receiving from the program. She stated that she would continue to do her part to assist officers with helping him achieve his goals and become a productive citizen.

One probationer who had a history of violence and had been convicted recently of firearm- and drug-related offenses had difficulties after being shot and spoke of his desire to move out of St. Louis to start a new life. He wanted to become a truck driver and said that he needed to get his driver’s license to obtain his CDL, but whether he followed through is unclear. The participant’s father described a willingness to serve as his son’s support system and help him overcome any obstacles that he might face, but approximately a month later, the participant was still waiting on approval of disability benefits and had not obtained employment. Three months later, he had been jailed on a warrant for a prior offense, and he was placed on GPS monitoring. He was still waiting on disability to be approved. During a visit at this time, the officers noted that the participant seemed to lack motivation and needed to find a job. Two months later, the participant remained unemployed and unmotivated. He was subsequently arrested for unlawful possession of a firearm, unlawful use of a weapon, and distribution of a controlled substance.

In addition to discussing current and future goals with participants, officers often encouraged them to consider barriers and past mistakes that led to their imprisonment or probation. During a visit with one participant, for example, officers discussed “negative associates, lack of

strong support system, occasional substance misuse and how [the officers and participant] will all work together to get past these things now.” They used small setbacks as motivation to do better. In one home visit, officers documented that a participant “continues to move in a positive direction, [aside] from testing positive on his uranalysis test.” They spoke with the participant about this “minor setback” and helped to get him “back on track without any distractions.”

Other themes run through these illustrative cases. Many home visits included the participant’s relatives and intimate partners, who often shared their support of the program and desire to see participants succeed, especially in obtaining and keeping a job. Perhaps the most common theme, however, was the evident patience and persistence of the officers, even against resistance, in identifying and addressing the participants’ educational, employment, and personal needs. This willingness to help clearly impressed participants and their family members and likely contributed to the upbeat and positive attitude of most participants during the meetings.

These results illustrate the potential of focused deterrence programs generally, and perhaps individualized focused deterrence in particular, not only to increase communication between the police and criminal offenders but also to build legitimacy-enhancing *relationships* between them. And, as Kennedy (2019) points out, “It is now well understood that...as legitimacy goes up, crime goes down, and as legitimacy goes down, crime goes up” (p. 207).

It is also clear that one or more positive meetings with the police and community corrections officers did not guarantee that someone would remain crime free. It is not obvious from the narrative accounts who would be arrested during the next few months and who would avoid further arrests. Probationers’ and parolees’ multiple problems and continuing ties to criminal peers and family members made it difficult for them to avoid the pressures and opportunities to engage in criminal activity. Transportation problems loomed large both as an obstacle to cutting ties with criminal associates and as a victimization risk. More than a few participants were concerned about their safety on public transportation and in the area where they lived. In one instance, a participant sought assistance from the police officers to relocate to a safer neighborhood. These problems will not be easy to address because they will require resources and supports beyond those that a few diligent and caring police officers can furnish.

## Discussion

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Despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, both the process and outcome evaluations indicate that the St. Louis Police Partnership has been a success. The process evaluation indicates that the program was implemented largely according to plan and benefitted from strong support by both program staff and participants. A major result of the process evaluation is further evidence of the feasibility of conducting a randomized controlled study of focused deterrence and related criminal justice interventions. The outcome evaluation highlights the effectiveness of the program's key operational mechanism—individualized and recurring meetings between police officers, probation and parole officers, and offenders—in reducing criminal behavior by increasing employment and improving attitudes toward the police (see also Papachristos et al., 2007). Although we believe that these results are quite promising, the current study's limitations should be carefully considered before expanding the program in St. Louis and adopting the model in other jurisdictions.

Future research should seek to build on the procedures and results of the current study and overcome its limitations, the most important of which is the study's small sample size. Appreciable sample attrition is inevitable in studies that depend on the voluntary participation of criminal offenders, most of whom are reluctant to engage with the police. Meanwhile, few studies have to contend with anomalous calamities like a worldwide pandemic. Even so, the importance of recruiting a sample that is substantially larger than needed, costs permitting, is a key lesson learned in this research.

Although unavoidable, the small sample rendered potentially meaningful effects of the experimental treatment statistically nonsignificant. Another limitation is uncertainty regarding the causal direction of many of the relationships revealed in the analysis. For example, we have interpreted the positive relationship between social support and employment as meaning that a high level of social support increases employment. But it could also mean that employed probationers and employees are more likely than those without a job to receive support from family members and others.

The same uncertainty applies to the relationship between employment and recidivism. Employed participants were less likely than unemployed participants to be rearrested, but is that because employment reduces criminal behavior or because involvement in crime reduces the prospects of employment? A larger sample could help to clarify the causal meaning of this and other findings in future research.

The robust negative relationship between employment and rearrest found in this study merits additional consideration. This result aligns with recent research on employment and recidivism among those recently released from prison (Kolbeck et al., 2023). However,

research on the relationship between employment and desistance from crime has generally produced mixed results (Nguyen et al., 2023). Our findings imply that the relationship between employment and desistance may be strengthened by the strong social support received by those probationers and parolees who have obtained and kept a job. The home visit narratives offer vivid evidence of such support. The general propositions prompted by this study and meriting future investigation are that a strong support system both facilitates employment and strengthens the effect of employment on desistance from crime.

Although the Police Partnership is clearly promising, it must contend with traditional views of policing, uncovered in this study, that regard such programs as being soft on crime and criminals. Those views are unlikely to disappear soon. The challenge will be to protect such programs from these attitudes, which are inaccurate as well as antiquated, while providing the resources needed to bring the programs to scale. Most of all, safeguarding the integrity and effectiveness of these programs depends on staffing them with police officers who are dedicated to assisting individuals who want to improve their lives without absolving them of wrongdoing—the twin tenets of focused deterrence. If successful implementation of such a program can happen at an agency such as the SLMPD, which is not known for indulging criminals, it can happen in any urban police department. Choosing the right officers and providing them with the resources that they need to succeed will require strong and continuing support from police administrators, policy-makers, and the public. We hope that the results of this study will help to bolster the requisite administrative, political, and popular support for individualized focused deterrence as a feasible and effective evidence-based method to reduce crime.

## Appendix: Additional Tables

Table 12. Odds of rearrest on violent charge by experimental condition and social support (N=115)

	Rearrest Violent	Social Support	Rearrest Violent	Rearrest Violent
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.514 (.233)	1.771 (.837)	—	.570 (.262)
Positive support	—	—	.431+ (.192)	.456+ (.205)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	2.940	4.260	4.240	5.760
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.020	.032	.030	.040

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

Table 13. Odds of rearrest on violent charge by experimental condition and positive attitude toward police (N=116)

	Rearrest Violent	Positive Attitude	Rearrest Violent	Rearrest Violent
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.514 (.233)	18.719** (15.125)	—	.563 (.276)
Positive attitude	—	—	.571 (.323)	.744 (.457)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	2.940	24.710**	1.760	3.180
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.020	.219	.012	.022

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>b</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 14. Odds of rearrest on firearm charge by experimental condition and social support (N=115)**

	Rearrest Firearm	Social Support	Rearrest Firearm	Rearrest Firearm
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	2.433* (1.066)	1.771 (.837)	— —	2.781* (1.254)
Positive support	— —	— —	.618 (.274)	.531 (.245)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	6.280	4.260	3.600	8.930
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.043	.032	.025	.061

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 15. Odds of rearrest on firearm charge by experimental condition and positive attitude toward police (N=116)**

	Rearrest Firearm	Positive Attitude	Rearrest Firearm	Rearrest Firearm
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	2.433* (1.066)	18.719** (15.125)	— —	3.649** (1.770)
Positive attitude	— —	— —	.518 (.293)	.281* (.173)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	6.280	24.710**	3.530	10.980+
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.043	.219	.024	.075

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 16. Odds of rearrest on property charge by experimental condition and social support (N=115)**

	Rearrest Property	Social Support	Rearrest Property	Rearrest Property
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.962 (.487)	1.771 (.837)	—	1.127 (.589)
Positive support	—	—	.319* (.159)	.315* (.158)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	3.210	4.260	8.230	8.280
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.026	.032	.068	.069

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 17. Odds of rearrest on property charge by experimental condition and positive attitude toward police (N=116)**

	Rearrest Property	Positive Attitude	Rearrest Property	Rearrest Property
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	.962 (.487)	18.719** (15.125)	—	1.254 (.677)
Positive attitude	—	—	.442 (.306)	.400 (.292)
Likelihood Ratio Chi <sup>2</sup>	3.210	24.710**	4.780	4.950
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.026	.219	.040	.041

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 18. Odds of rearrest on drug charge by experimental condition and social support (N=115)**

	Rearrest Drug	Social Support	Rearrest Drug	Rearrest Drug
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.506 (.783)	1.771 (.837)	— —	1.510 (.791)
Positive support	— —	— —	1.295 (.737)	1.231 (.706)
Likelihood Ratio	1.000	4.260	.630	1.250
Chi <sup>2</sup>				
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.009	.032	.006	.011

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

**Table 19. Odds of rearrest on drug charge by experimental condition and positive attitude toward police (N=116)**

	Rearrest Drug	Positive Attitude	Rearrest Drug	Rearrest Drug
Treatment group <sup>a</sup>	1.506 (.783)	18.719** (15.125)	— —	2.076 (1.147)
Positive attitude	— —	— —	.399 (.317)	.288 (.238)
Likelihood Ratio	1.000	24.710**	1.980	3.730
Chi <sup>2</sup>				
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.009	.219	.018	.034

Source: CNA.

Note: Logistic regression odds ratios. Standard errors in parentheses. Prior drug charge, prior firearm charge, high supervision, and employed at program entry incorporated as controls, not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Contrast = control group.

\*\*p<.01 \*p<.05 +p<.10.

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