

*The Dynamics of
Deterrence:
Youth Gun Violence in
Portland*

**Portland STACS Project
Research Team Final Report**

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Executive Summary

The Portland STACS Project is one of five project sites in a national initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice titled "Strategic Approaches to Community Safety."¹ SACSI envisioned a partnership, between the U.S. Attorney in a new role of leadership in cooperation with local law enforcement designed to address the most serious crime problems as perceived and defined by local criminal justice and political officials known as the "Core Group" (CG). The emphasis was for short-term crime control by targeting specific crimes, analyzing them and the people involved (the "target population"), formulating intervention strategies, and measuring success in reducing crime or achieving other goals.

Portland selected gun violence among youths age 15-24.² While designed to be a data-driven project including the identification of the problem, Portland chose its target crime category before STACS was initiated and before any research was begun. Rather than selecting the target crime through data analysis, the project emerged out of a sense of crisis with youth gun violence after a particularly violent summer in 1997. Research team activities were confined to post-problem definition stages.

All of the Research Team activities and projects were based on close collaboration with the CG and the Strategic Intervention Team (SIT), and were responses to their expressed needs. A notable difference between the role of the researchers in all SACSI sites and the normal or usual researcher role is that the researchers were active participants in the process. The Research Team members attended and actively participated in all meetings, essentially merging the usually separate roles of actively engaged "consultants" and the more or less disengaged observer, and evaluator roles of "researchers."

¹ The projects were known as SACSI or in Portland's case, as STACS. STACS was based upon the Boston Gun Project, described in David Kennedy, *Youth Violence in Boston: Gun Markets, Serious Youth Offenders and a Use-Reduction Strategy*, 59 Law and Contemporary Problems 147, (Winter, 1996) and David Kennedy, *Pulling Levers: Chronic Offenders, High-Crime Settings and a Theory of Prevention*, 31 Valparaiso Law Review 449 (Spring, 1997). See also, Kapsch, Stefan J. and Louis, Lyman, *The Dynamics of Deterrence: Youth Gun Violence in Portland*, in Pagon, Milan (ed), proceedings, The Fourth Biennial International Conference, Policing In Central And Eastern Europe: Deviance, Violence, and Victimization, Ljubljana, Slovenia, September 12-14, 2002. The literature on gun violence has been growing rapidly. Literature reviews are available in Zimring, Franklin and Hawkins, Gordon, Crime is Not the Problem: Lethal Violence in America, Oxford, New York: 1997 and in Tonry, Michael, and Moore, Mark, Youth Violence, Vol. 24, University of Chicago Crime and Justice Series, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1998. See also, Promising Strategies to Reduce Gun Violence, U.S. Department of Justice, OJJDP, Washington: 2/99.

² With the notable exception of the Memphis site, all of the SACSI sites focused on youth gun violence. Memphis chose sex offenses as their target crime category.

Section 1 is data on crime trends prior to the beginning of the STACS Project in order to set some rough "benchmarks," which are then compared to the same data at the end of the STACS project in a version of a pre-post design.

The first substantive research project generated by the needs of the SIT was the identification of the "target group," i.e., the broadest category of subjects of the project, which were violent or violence-prone youths age 15-24 (Section 4). This was necessary since the goal of the STACS Project was strategic intervention, i.e., reducing youth gun violence by directly influencing those thought to be engaged in it, or at high risk of engaging in gun violence. The establishment of the target population was followed by several projects designed to get as much relevant information as possible about the subjects in order to devise strategies that would reduce gun violence among them. The Research Team attended all Core Group and Strategic Intervention Team meetings, and participated actively in the discussion to identify specifically what kinds of information these groups needed in order to plan effective interventions. This included:

- Open-ended interviews with a small sample of the population (Section 3).
- Survey research of a larger sample using structured interview instruments or questionnaires (Section 6).
- Evaluation of four "Stop The Violence Meetings" between gang members and SIT members (Section 2) which was the main intervention strategy.
- Evaluations of a transition program, Project Re-Entry (Section 5) which involved persons returning to the community from prison who could be assumed to meet the target population criteria.
- Evaluation of the African American Program (AAP), a parole and probation supervision program specifically for African American males.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our specific conclusions are summarized below. In our opinion, it is fair to say that significant progress has been made in reducing gun violence with measurable drops in virtually all crime categories. However, it is also essential to point out that this is program based upon deterrence, i.e., based on the notion that a reduction in crime can be realized by identifying those likely to commit these crimes, and then telling them that (1) they are known to officials to be involved in the undesirable behavior; (2) that they will be watched carefully; (3) that any transgressions will result in immediate and strict enforcement including the possibilities of arrest and/or revocation of parole; and (4) that if they do desist, help is available to enable them to turn their lives around. In order to work, the relationship and contact between officials (i.e., police, parole and probation officers and outreach workers) must be maintained over time. This is because the "target population" keeps changing as new, younger violent youths who have never been exposed to the "stimulus" or intervention (the Stop the Violence Meetings), enter the risk group of 15-24. Also, deterrence works only if the threat of official action is real and present even when the target population remains stable. In sum, there is no reason to believe that violent or violence-prone individuals will cease to be violent if they have never been exposed to the threat of negative consequences, or if they perceive that the

threat has subsided. The “quiet” Portland experienced on its streets during the STACS years will take constant, sustained, long-term effort to maintain.

While it is important to keep in mind that STACS was never designed as an experimental project for which cause and effect could be validly and reliably ascertained, success for the STACS Project was attained on several levels. First, there was a significant reduction in all of the measured crimes as seen both in calls for service to 9-1-1 and in the incidence of person crimes. While attributing this overall drop in crime to STACS would be too broad of a claim to make (drive-by shootings, shots fired calls, etc.), the trend is in the right direction. It is reasonable to conclude that STACS had a positive impact. Alternative explanations are, of course, not eliminated, but STACS was a concerted and serious effort to achieve the observed results and there is no reason to think it did not play a significant role.

Second, during the STACS Project, none of the target population of the STV clients was involved in a homicide (either as perpetrator or victim). Since these clients were hand selected as the worst offenders by experienced and knowledgeable criminal justice experts, this is a triumph for the project. Furthermore, the recidivism rate among these same clients was substantially below that of clients who received no intervention and also less than the paroled population at large.

Third, the Project Re-Entry effort was also successful. Clients who were at a high risk of recidivism upon their return to the community, were much less likely to re-offend during their first year out of prison if they were participants in Project Re-Entry.

Of all the projects and initiatives implemented during the STACS tenure, there is convincing evidence that each played a part in reducing violence among the target population. Foremost among these initiatives was the appointment of a cross-designated prosecuting attorney capable of bringing charges in either state or federal court. The possibility of federal charges against youth was well known in the target population and the possibility of incarceration far away federal prisons, separated from friends and associates was widely feared. This is also linked to a key finding in Portland that the vast majority of the target population were either born here or are long-term residents, meaning that all or nearly all of their social ties are local. This is contrary to the assumption that it is immigrants from larger cities that make up the bulk of the target population. Many of the youths indicated a change in their gun carrying habits as a direct result of the cross-designated prosecutor policy. Furthermore, the cooperative effort of this cross-designation was noted and was also effective. Offenders are well aware of the difference between state and federal prosecution and that cross-designation was a new and serious development. What mattered in STACS was the new, cooperative relationship between levels of government. This made the threat of federal prosecution much more credible and produced the deterrent effect.

Recommendations:

1. **The intended deterrent effect of the STV meetings was clearly accomplished.** There were no homicides involving any of the 41 subjects of the STV meetings and drive-by shootings declined markedly. In structured open-ended interviews after one year, both attendees and non-attendees understood the message and remembered it well. An important factor in the success of STACS was that it was based on "target general deterrence" and aimed at very carefully selected specific individuals.
2. **The deterrent effect was based on the multi-agency cooperation, including but not limited to the threat of "going federal" in gun cases.** Interviews revealed that this was because federal prosecution was perceived as meaning prison in a faraway place, without support of local peer groups.
3. **Federal-State cooperation in the form of cross-designation of state prosecutors as federal Assistant US Attorneys is not typical anywhere in the country, this constitutes a major achievement of the Portland STACS project.** Subjects clearly understood what this meant and distinguished this from simply serving more time by being sentenced to a federal prison.
4. **The incorporation of community outreach agencies into both the "carrot" and "stick" strategy is a key accomplishment of STACS.** This includes outreach as part of the surveillance and interdiction aspects of prevention and deterrence, and the strictly preventative approach of the "Community Based Initiatives" (CBS). CBS was a serious attempt to fulfill the "carrot" part of the strategy, but was not fulfillable in the short time frame of STACS. CBS established the groundwork for addressing the impediments to employment through marshalling community resources and needs to be revitalized to continue to fruition as a full "partner" to traditional methods of assisting target populations in reforming their lives. In the time period allowed (approximately one year), it is remarkable that so many programs were developed and implemented successfully. Both the tattoo and license renewal programs were fully developed, but it is premature to assess whether they led to desired outcomes (e.g., whether people with gang tattoos were able to have them removed resulting in employment). If so, the absence of the tattoos will undoubtedly be useful.
5. **Preventive programs require resources and commitment from agencies as much as the deterrence aspects of the project.** Adult Community Justice did commit to the CBS process, but CBS never had the resources to make it work in the short run. The service providers in the CBS effort were all non-profits who were cooperative and worked on the initiative, but lacked the resources to actually work with these subjects. Understaffed and under-budgeted non-profits cannot be expected to assume programs without additional resources, especially in the short run where they are already fully or over committed. CBS had no staff of its own or commitments of staff time from other agencies (such as the designation of specific staff from police and prosecution for the STV deterrence part of the project). Full implementation is impossible under these circumstances.

6. Non-profits who are recruited to provide services must be paid for the services; at least their costs need to be covered. Otherwise, they will see it as zero-sum. Whatever they put into CBS will have to come out of something else in their budget and programs.
7. The key CBS programs that were established must be continued. STACS provided the necessary groundwork for what is a long-term solution to problems of employability that were not previously addressed (e.g., driver license restoration and tattoo removal). Unless young people stop driving without licenses or tattoos become unfashionable, the need for these programs will be long-term. Recent resurgence of gang activity both inside Oregon prisons and on the streets suggest that the problem is under control, but not eliminated.
8. Leadership at the highest levels is necessary, and it must be visible leadership. High level visible political support for the deterrence part of the program was a key to its success, but was never a part of CBS, or at least not consistently and visibly a part of it.
9. Deterrence is a short-term phenomenon. It must be renewed to be effective. The STACS Project realized this after a year and had a second round of STV meetings. Also, a new generation of potential offenders is always emerging as juveniles enter the risk group or target population who have never been exposed to the deterrent.
10. Project Re-Entry clients should be re-interviewed by the PRE parole officer at regular intervals. New offenses occur most frequently during the period from 180-365 days after release. There should be significant efforts between 60 and 90 days prior to each client entering this period of heightened risk to improve the deterrent effect.
11. Since most PRE clients re-offend in the PCS/DCS crime themes, extra efforts should be made to enroll PRE clients in drug and alcohol treatment programs. Additionally, since many of these clients offend as sellers, not users of drugs, extra efforts should be made to enroll these clients in educational and employment programs such that illicit income opportunities are less appealing.
12. In the event of a firearms charge, PRE clients should be prosecuted according to the PRE threat of increased scrutiny and federal prosecution. As stated elsewhere, the deterrence model only works when the deterrent is consistent and sure.
13. Better record keeping for PRE clients is necessary including the development of or access to databases. The PRE parole officer is charged with a substantial workload and no additional tools with which to accomplish that work. Organization of information from the DOC and other agencies is required. Further, inclusion of specific variables not currently monitored would make future evaluations more valuable.

14. **Educational and employment opportunities are keys to reducing youth violence.** The absence of these, along with recreational opportunities, create both the free time and boredom which precipitate the violence associated with gang involved youth.
15. **Interventions to reduce weapons in the target population should be created based on the specific information garnered from the confidential and anonymous surveys.** Respondents gave researchers highly detailed information on gun usage and carrying habits. Further, a comparison between the types of guns carried and the types of guns seized may reveal a gap pointing toward other types of interventions and interdiction projects.
- The results suggest that our participants could benefit from more education and more job opportunities. Such intervention (as CBS was designed to do) seems quite important.
 - Our results further illuminate the types of situations when respondents report actually carrying and using guns or report believing that it is appropriate to use guns. Such a detailed understanding of these places and times could be used to create interventions that reduce gun carrying and use in specific situations.
 - Our results reveal where survey respondents report acquiring guns and what qualities they prefer in handguns. Future research could explore both how acquisition patterns change and whether the preferred characteristics of handguns are similar to the characteristics of guns actually seized in Portland.

Section 1: Benchmark and Final Crime Trends

Our first opportunity to examine violent crimes in Portland came through a standardized report by the Portland Police Bureau allowing us to scrutinize pre-STACS violent crime. Person crimes from 1994 to 1997 saw a drop of 11% while murders fell by just 4%. However, from the inception of the STACS Project in 1998 through its conclusion in 2000, person crimes in Portland decreased by 29% and murders by nearly 36%.

An additional focus area for gang interventions is the tracking of 9-1-1 calls for “shots fired.” The STACS research team carefully followed these calls (Figure 4). In 1997,³ Portland’s Bureau of Emergency Communications received 3,588 9-1-1 calls for shots fired averaging nearly 300 per month. The graph trend line shows these calls were on the increase in 1998, the year that STACS began its efforts. By the end of the STACS Project, there was an average of 155 calls per month, totaling 1,843 calls for 2000; a drop of 49%.

Similar declines were seen in other calls for service that are traditionally, albeit not exclusively, gang related. For example, 9-1-1 calls for assaults (including domestic and other assaults) fell by 8% from 1998 to 2000, while calls for shootings declined by 37%. Armed robberies dropped 31%, while calls for stabbings fell by 15% during the course of the project. Each of these crime categories also included non-gang and/or youth related crimes, but shows a significant downward trend in crimes that are popular among youths in the target population.

³ The earliest available data.

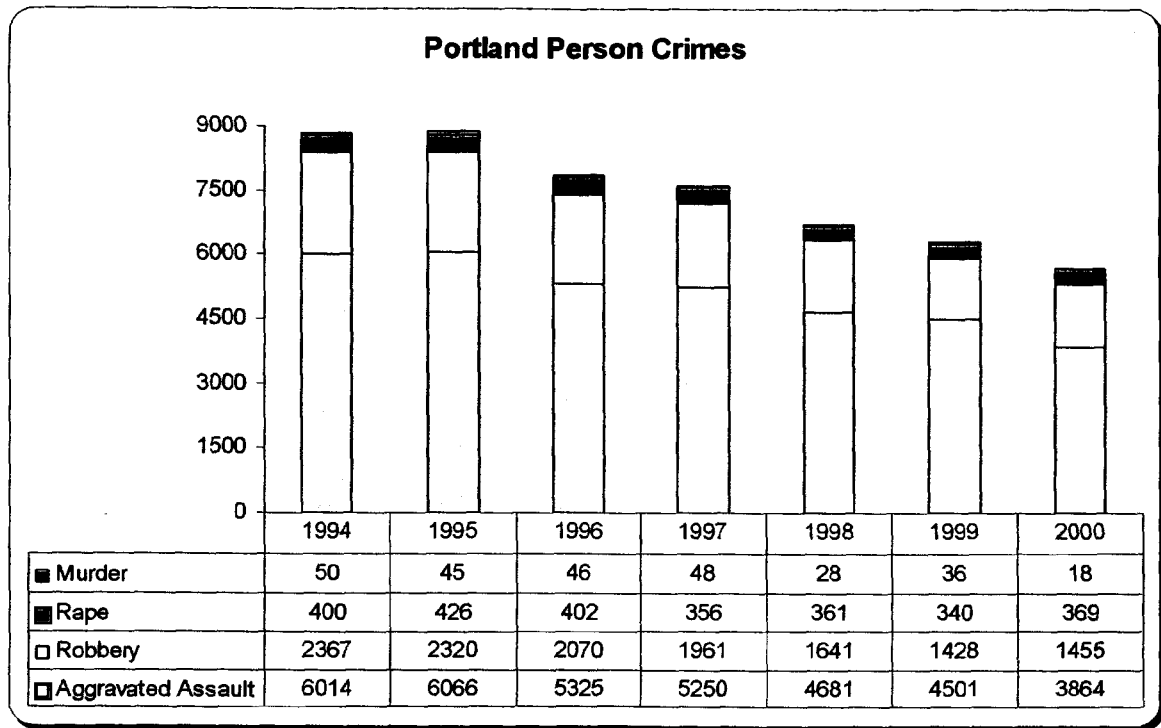


Figure 1: PPB Person Crimes, 1994-2000

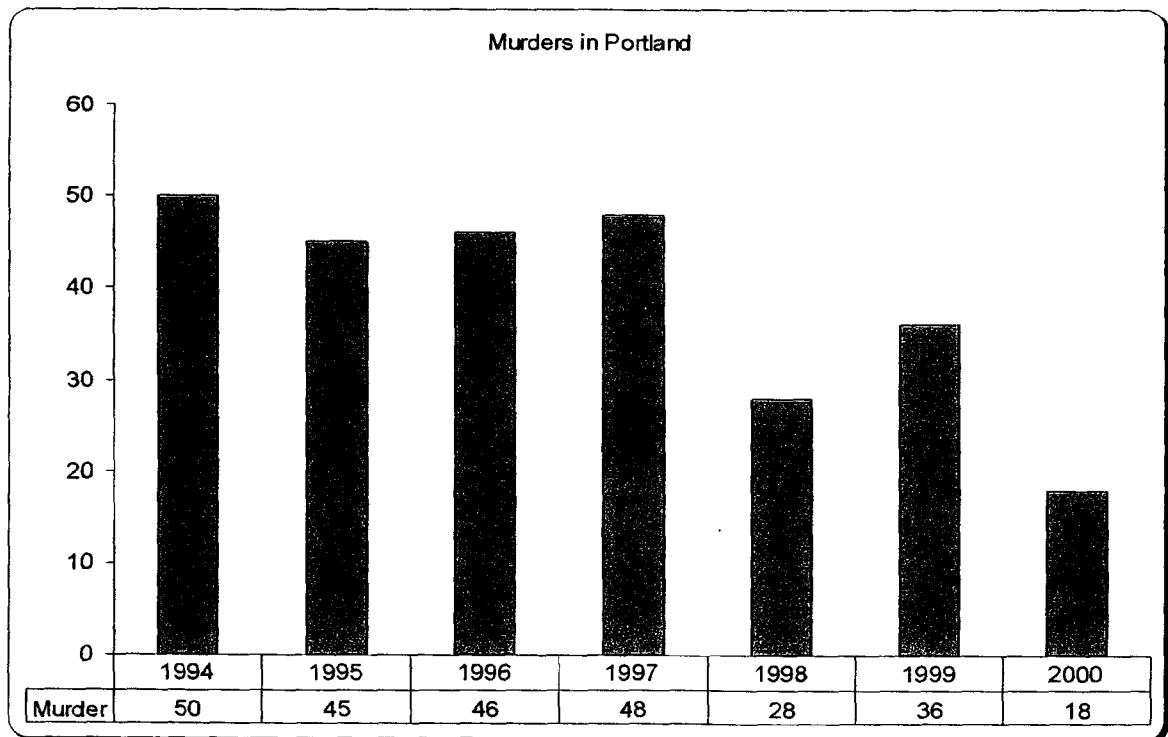


Figure 2: PPB Person Crimes – Murder, 1994-2000

Calls for Service

The following figures detail 9-1-1 calls for service for assault, stabbing, armed robbery shots fired, and shootings. Trend lines are included; all of which show a significant downward trend.

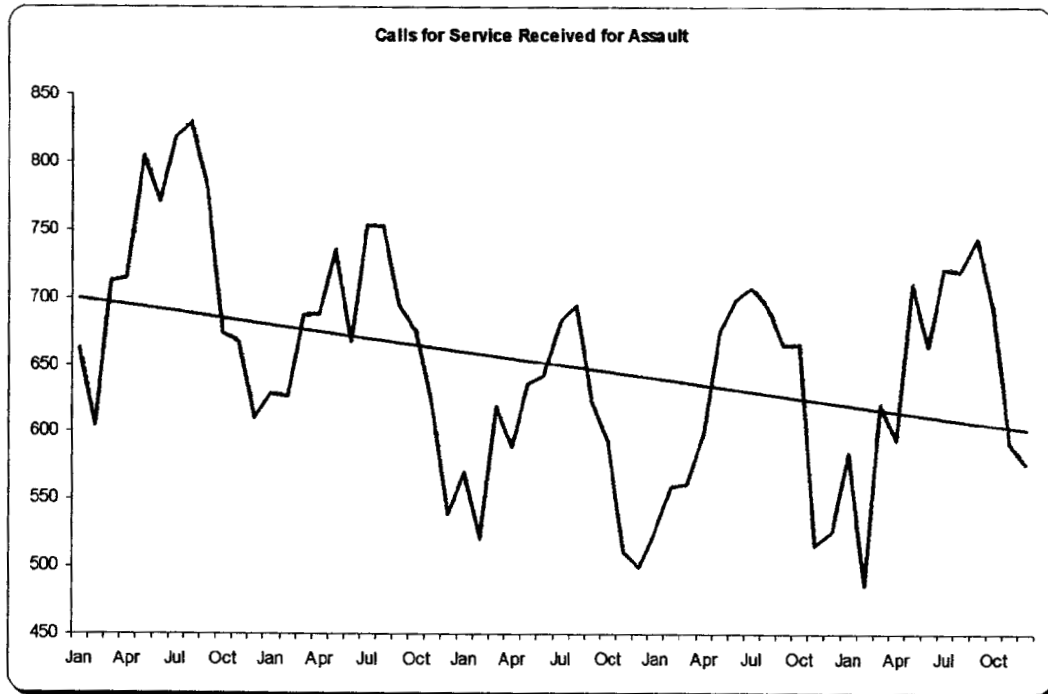


Figure 3: 9-1-1 Calls for Service Received for Assault, 1997-2001⁴

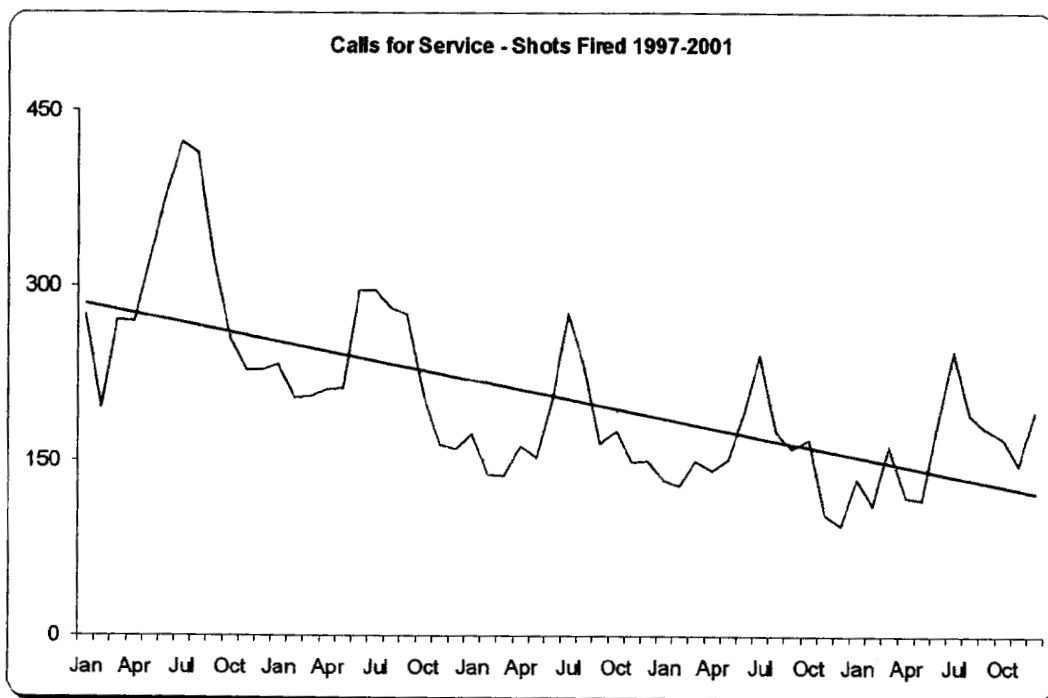


Figure 4: 9-1-1 Calls for Service Received for Shots Fired, 1997-2001⁴

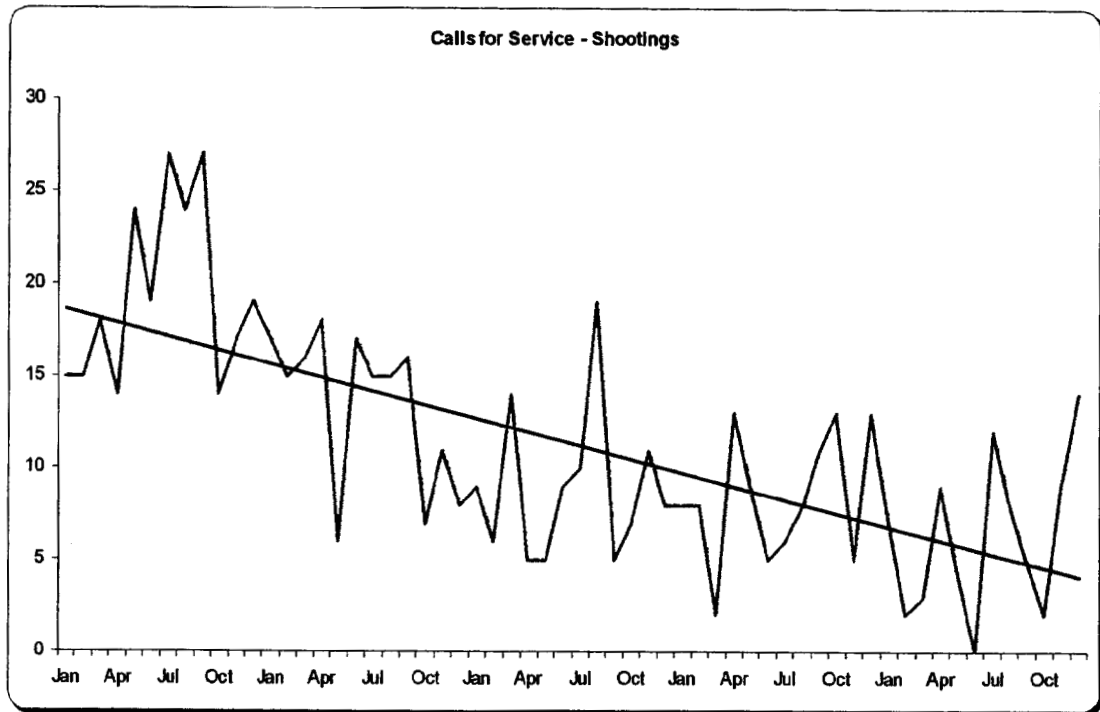


Figure 5: 9-1-1 Calls for Service Received for Shootings, 1997-2001⁴

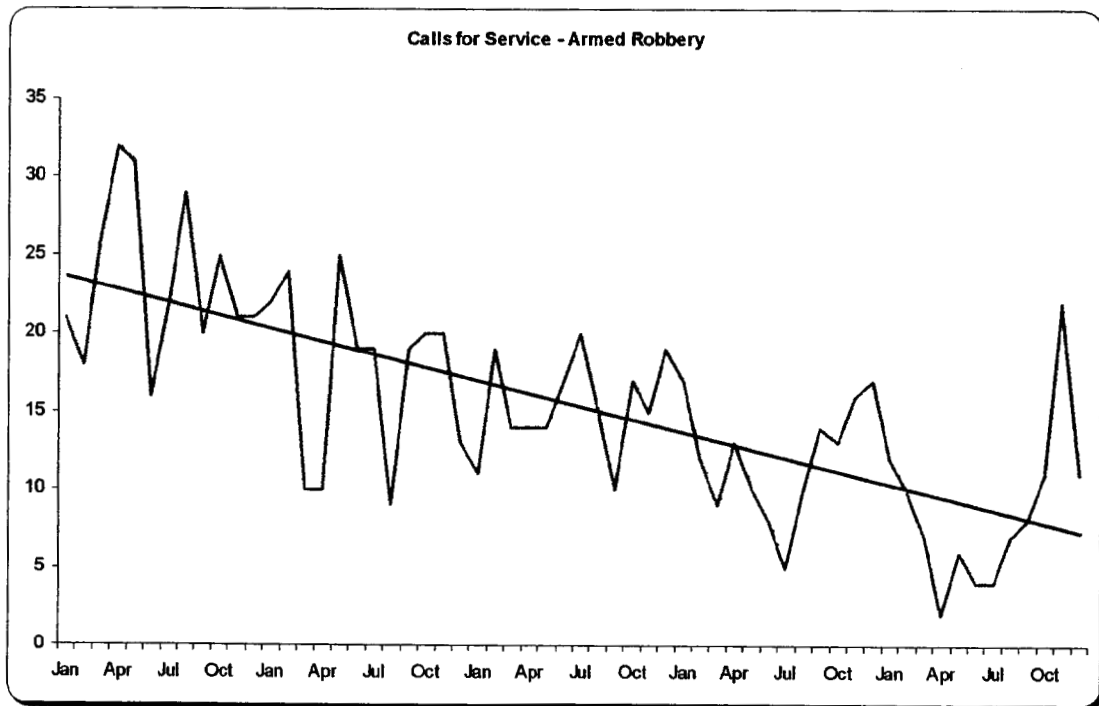


Figure 6: 9-1-1 Calls for Service Received for Armed Robbery, 1997-2001⁴

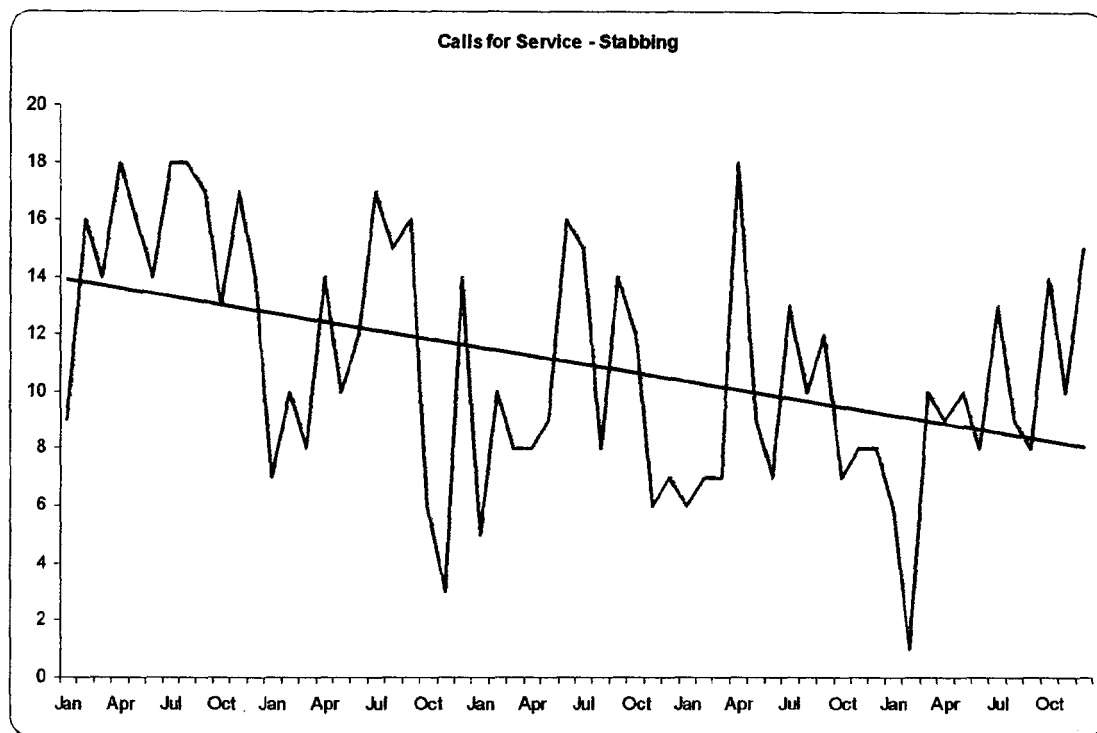


Figure 7: 9-1-1 Calls for Service Received for Stabbing, 1997-2001⁴

In every crime statistic measured, calls for service were reduced substantially during the STACS Project. Additionally, the Portland Police Bureau recorded a consistent and considerable reduction in overall person crimes during the same period (1997-2001) after having observed a nearly static trend previously (1994-1997). Perhaps most important, murders were down by 36% during the tenure of the STACS Project. It is also important to note that none of the subjects of the Stop The Violence meetings were involved in murders during this timeframe either as offenders or as victims.

⁴ (NOTE: LEDS summary reports, PPDS Crime Data File and PPDS on-line CAD System. Report uses "Reported Date" for time placement of crime. STACS Project, January 2002.CFS codes used: ASSLT, SHOTS, SHOOT, ROBARM, and STAB.)