The NYPD’s controversial ‘stop and frisk’ practice of stopping random pedestrians and frisking them for weapons and drugs has raised serious concerns about racial profiling and illegal stops. African Americans and Latino suspects are more likely to be stopped [1]. In 2012, New Yorkers were stopped by the police 532,911 times, of which 89% were innocent; 55% were black, 32% Latino and only 10% white [4]. Since stop and frisk was ruled unconstitutional by the federal court, new alternatives have emerged. Focused deterrence is the most promising in stopping crime without using racial discrimination.

Introduction

The materials used for this research included scholarly articles on focused deterrence, as well as on stop and frisk, as well as government data on stop and frisk stops in New York City for year 2012 from the New York Civil Liberties Union web-site. Also, government data on focused deterrence effectiveness was used from the National Institute of Justice web-site.

Materials

Methods

The materials used for this research included meta-analysis – reviewing and synthesizing empirical relationships across studies. Also, it included statistical data on stop and frisk and focused deterrence. Other methods that would be useful for this study are sociological surveys, such as opinion polls and questionnaires designed for criminologists and other specialists on crime control.

Findings

• Using focused deterrence in Boston's Operation Ceasefire, police reached out directly to gangs and warned them that punishment will be severe and they will “pull every lever” legally possible [2].
• Police would focus on gangs and repeat offenders, since those were the main sources of crime, instead of targeting innocent pedestrians and being racially biased in stop and frisk [2].
• Police would disrupt street drug violence, focus more on low-level street crime like public drinking, issue more warrants, conduct long-term investigations of gangs, enforce strict probation and parole, and use stiffer plea bargains [2].
• Police would also activate help from churches, community groups, and youth workers to offer their services through “call-ins” (meetings), specifically stressing violence is unacceptable and it would cause immediate response [2].
• After starting focused deterrence in Boston, there was a 63% reduction in youth homicide, 25% reduction in gun assaults, 55% reduction in illegal drug possession and 28% reduction in property crime. Out of 11 studies in different cities, 10 of them had a significant crime reduction [2].

Conclusions

As can be concluded from the findings, focused deterrence is an effective non-biased alternative to stop and frisk techniques used by the NYPD. Focused deterrence significantly decreased serious crimes in many cities throughout the U.S. Instead of harassing innocent bystanders and showing discrimination in stop and frisk, focused deterrence focuses on actual sources of violence (gangs and repeat offenders) and involves the community as well, which builds trust in the authorities. Unlike stop and frisk, focused deterrence uses stricter punishment and intense investigations of gangs, instead of stopping thousands of people in hopes of making easy arrests and frisking more people that belong to a certain racial group.

In a functionalist perspective, focused deterrence would be an effective alternative because it would lead to a well functioning society. In functionalism, a society must be kept in an equilibrium and focused deterrence brings that back by removing the dissatisfaction of stop and frisk in a society. Also, focused deterrence brings together the community and it works as a whole in order to stop crime. This can be seen in involving churches and community groups with the police to fight crime and build people's trust in the authorities.

References


A crime map below shows crimes committed in different areas of High Point, North Carolina before and after focused deterrence was introduced. White color means least crime and red – most crime.

2003

Source: “National Institute of Justice” (2013)

2006