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Police Target Groups To Reduce Violent Crime

Gang-Related Slayings Down 60 Percent In 8 Months

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CINCINNATI -- It only takes a few bad apples to disturb the peace of an entire city.

According to research by anti-crime experts, nearly 75 percent of Cincinnati's homicides are connected to fewer than six-dozen loose-knit groups.

The Cotti Boys from Over-The-Rhine and A-1 from Avondale are among those 69 groups identified by researchers like Robin Engel of the University of Cincinnati Policing Institute.

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"We're talking about anywhere from 800 to a 1,000 individuals, and if you look at that, that's less than 1 percent of our total city population, and yet they're responsible for 75 percent of our homicides," Engel said.

Authorities decided to combat record levels of violence earlier this decade by specifically targeting members of those groups, whose members are nearly all unmarried and unemployed black men, researchers said.

Most of these men, whose average age is 29 years old, also have children and a felony record, and researchers said nearly half of the 176 members already arrested have dropped out of high school.

"And that vicious cycle continues," said City Councilman Cecil Thomas, a former police officer.

Thomas said many of the shootings, contrary to popular perception, are not related to the drug trade, but the result of a lack of emotional control.

"(They're) over a girl, or you disrespected me in some way or another," Thomas said.

Word has spread among members of those groups, police said, that officers won't let group members rest until arrests have been made for each shooting.

"Now your partner or your buddies are saying, 'Wait a minute, you're going to bring the cops down on us if you do this, (so) let's do something different, something less than gun violence,'" said Lt. Col. James Whalen of Cincinnati police.

Police said using peer pressure to discourage violence has changed the dynamic of community conflicts, and authorities said gang-related slayings have dropped by 60 percent in the past eight months.

Only three of Cincinnati's 2008 homicides are linked to those groups that police singled out for additional scrutiny.

Researchers said the data are encouraging, but they needed to see another 10 months of statistics to determine whether the approach has been successful.

In the meantime, Cincinnati has been a destination for law enforcement agencies such as Scotland Yard, which has sent officers to study the approach to crime reduction.

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