

Working Paper # 2001-10 Rochester SACSI

Intervention Issues

Implications for the Implementation of Exit Interviews in The Monroe County Jail

Hypothesis:

The qualitative research gained from conducting focus groups in the Monroe County Jail has been instrumental in understanding the nature of homicide in Rochester. However, jail inmates remain an underutilized source of intelligence in the Criminal Justice system. We believe a permanent system of interviews with outgoing inmates at the jail will provide a constant stream of intelligence for the purpose of violent crime prevention.

Methodology:

In order to assess the feasibility of exit interviews, SACSI researchers conducted 23 interviews with inmates at the county jail over the course of two weeks. The inmates were questioned either on the day of release or the previous day. SACSI researchers discussed with inmates their beliefs about how they and other inmates would respond to such interviews and how the structure of the exit interviews should look. In particular, the researchers questioned the inmates on the kinds of information they or other inmates would be willing to discuss on disputes, violent persons, and drug robberies.

Exit interview Strategy:

The proposed exit interview strategy focuses on the key theme of intelligence gathering and prevention. We hope to create a process that will allow jail inmates to voluntarily provide information through an interview process. The aim of the exit interviews is to develop new information on perpetrators of dispute and drug-robbery related incidences of violence, so as to prevent future occurrences of violence by those perpetrators. Inmates possess much relevant information on these topics (for a variety of reasons), and even if only a small number of jail inmates interviewed choose to participate, information is generated that may be useful in preventing violence.

Inmate views on Exit Interviews:

On the inmates most likely to provide information:

A majority of the interviewed inmates indicated that self- preservation would be the leading motivator for participation in an exit interview process. Respondents believed when you provide information to the police that will be used against someone, there is a risk that the person you “snitched” on will find out and retaliate against you. Therefore, most respondents believed that in order for an interviewee to accept the risk of providing information to the police, he/she must receive a benefit. Some believed the benefit would have to be a sentence reduction, but many thought the benefit of getting the person who might retaliate against you off of the street was a sufficient incentive to talk (especially if you are scared of being the victim of violence when you are released). For those who preferred sentence reductions or money as the best incentives to talk, their reason was that they could not trust the justice system to get the person they “snitched” on off of the

street. A few men respondents fervently believed that most men would never talk because if they were personally involved in something they would want to handle it themselves, and they would not talk about anyone else because it's not their business.

The majority of respondents identified those currently involved in a dispute to be the type of person most likely to provide specific information to an interviewer. This type of person has specific incentive to talk because they can get the person with whom they have a dispute locked up. The majority of women respondents believed that most women inmates would divulge specific information regarding domestic violence in their own relationships or the relationships of friends. Some men respondents agreed, although most felt that it wasn't their responsibility to report domestic violence, but rather the responsibility of the one being abused.

Overall, the respondents believed most interviewees would not talk about drug robberies or drug robbers. Some of the reasons for not talking about the subject included: fear that drug dealers or robbers would find out who they were and retaliate against them (even when in jail or prison), acceptance of the risks associated with drug dealing, and that it was none of their business. However, a small portion of respondents indicated that information about drug house robberies and those who commit them would be provided in an exit interview if the inmate had a loved one or friend inside the location at the time of a robbery or the loved one or friend was hurt in the drug house robbery.

On the issue of confidentiality:

The majority of respondents believed confidentiality to be absolutely necessary in order to be interviewed. Although many were willing to give information, most of those would be unwilling to testify or engage in any other action that might link the information to them for fear of being a "snitch". Some respondents did not trust that their confidentiality would be assured, and others felt that confidentiality was irrelevant, and the only way to get people to talk was by providing them a tangible reward (sentence reduction).

On who should conduct the interview:

Among those interviewed, no consensus existed on who would be best suited to be the interviewer. Most respondents preferred the idea of an independent source, such as a researcher, conducting the interviews. Many respondents indicated they would feel comfortable talking to jail counselors, but some believed jail counselors would be untrustworthy and endanger their confidentiality. A few respondents thought police would be the best interviewers (if the interviewee knew the police officer) because they could trust that the police officer would follow up. Generally though, most respondents thought police officers would not maintain their confidentiality and that they could not trust police to apprehend the person they provided information on.

On when to interview inmates:

Respondents overwhelmingly supported the idea of exit, rather than entrance interviews. Those in favor of exit interviews thought that those in recovery may want to contribute to society by giving up information that would prevent violent crimes, or just save themselves by giving up someone they are afraid will hurt them when they are released. Those who favored entrance interviews felt that information gathered in exit interviews

would be old so interviews should be conducted when people are entering jail from being fresh off of the street.

Analysis:

After conducting the interviews, our overwhelming sense is that only a portion of all people who are asked to be interviewed will participate, and only a fraction of those interviews will yield pertinent information. However, even with the limitations that exist when considering the implementation of an exit interview strategy, law enforcement becomes empowered with information and can disrupt some dispute related violence. Given that exit interview strategies maintain the ability for *some* disruption of violent crime in the community, officials must recognize the positive implications of an exit interview program.

In particular, we believe exit interviews will cultivate a much needed source of specific information on disputants, especially partners involved in relationships with domestic abuse. Current means of gathering intelligence on disputes (particularly domestic disputes) are weak, so active prevention of disputes is difficult. If exit interviews are instituted, the jail will likely provide an intelligence resource to prevent disputes that will continue to grow, provided aggressive action is taken on the information that interviewees give. If that occurs, we expect more jail inmates to open up to exit interviews as word of mouth circulates on the effectiveness of the exit interviews.

Recommendations:

Intelligence gathering using the inmate population shortly before their reintroduction to society may elicit valuable information that police can use to disrupt and prevent potential violence in the community. The implementation of a new strategy in the jails maintains not only the ability to increase the capacity of law enforcement to know detailed information about potential incidents within the community, but enhance the ability of law enforcement to share the information with other law enforcement agencies should the need arise.

The inmates may feel more comfortable sharing information with people whom they already know, and given this fact it is recommended that existing counselors involved in the inmates' therapy while in the jail should be encouraged to ask a series of questions that include but are not limited to the following:

1. Are you currently involved in a dispute with someone on the outside?
2. Who are you currently in a dispute with and what is the dispute over?
3. Have you had previous violent incidents with the person/group with whom you are in a dispute?
4. Are you aware of drug house robbers in the community? Who are they?
5. Do you know of existing disputes? Who are the players? What are the disputes in regard to?

6. Are you afraid of your safety on the outside and why are you afraid for your safety?

The counselors must be encouraged to be clear that the information that the inmate provides will be shared with the police in an effort to alert them as to the increased potential for danger once the inmate is reintroduced to the community. It is also recommended that counselors must be directed to ask the aforementioned questions shortly before the inmate's release and share the information with designated personnel within the Monroe County Sheriff's Department and the Rochester Police Department.