A Primer on
CRIME DISPLACEMENT
&
DIFFUSION OF PREVENTION
BENEFITS

John E. Eck
Division of Criminal Justice
University of Cincinnati
Oh *#@%!
DISPLACEMENT!
GIVE UP!

Overview

1. Questions
2. Myth
3. Theory
4. Evidence
5. Prediction
6. Evaluation
BASIC QUESTIONS

• If we intervene at a place, what keeps offenders from moving to other places?

• If offenders have propensity to offend, then won’t they keep offending?

• Don’t we see offenders adapting to enforcement?
ORIGINS OF DISPLACEMENT MYTHS

- Sociological & Psychological theories claim offenders are compelled to commit crimes

- Practitioners often have limited, if not pessimistic, expectations

- Liberal-conservative alliance
  - Only deep societal changes matter (liberal)
  - Only offender removal matters (conservative)
POPPING THE MYTHS

• Evidence lacking on utility of societal changes or offender removal!

• Myth ignores choices made by possible offenders

• Myth ignores laziness, ignorance, and overemphasizes compulsion

• Myth ignores evidence about displacement itself

• Myth cannot account for diffusion of benefits
MYTH CANNOT EXPLAIN...

• Why crime can decline.
• Short term fluctuations in crime.
• Stability of hot spots and cold spots.
• Why offenders do not displace in advance of interventions.
• Why offenders spend so much time not offending.
THEORY

- Displacement and Diffusion
- Types
- Choices and familiarity
THEORY – Adaptation

• People make choices
  – Ignorance and uncertainty
  – Limited energy
  – Malleable perceptions

• Seek easy, familiar, and understood risk

• Avoid difficult, unfamiliar & uncertain

• Desistance – complete cessation

• Deterrence – partial cessation

• Diffusion of Crime Prevention Benefits – added curtailment

• Displacement – shifting
THEORY - forms

- Spatial – geographic shift
- Temporal – time shift
- Method – procedural change
- Target – target switch
- Crime Type – form switch
- Perpetrator (?) – offender replacement
THEORY - familiarity

- If offenders will displace,
- Then they will displace to
  - Places, Times, Methods, Targets, & Types
- That are most like the old ones
- Unfamiliar has greater uncertainty for
  - Risk, Reward, and Effort
- If non-crime is more familiar then little or no displacement
MEASURING DISPLACEMENT & DIFFUSION

Before

Response Area

Comparison Area

After

>100%

100%

0%

<0%

diffusion of benefits
EVIDENCE

• Multiple reviews of displacement literature in the 1990s –
• Never 100%
• Often no displacement detected
• If displacement, prevention still effective
• Evidence for Diffusion
Some Criminals Always Displace, all the time.

- Professor Moriarty
- Cruella de Vil
- Dracula
- Freddy Kruger
- The Penguin
- Lex Luthor
- T-X
- Wicked Witch of the West

But most don’t!
PREDICTION

• If displacement is to most familiar, then
• Knowledge of offenders could allow prediction.
• Displacement to existing crime locations.
• Most similar crime types, targets, and methods.
• Build this into planning the response.
Some (reasonable?) Speculations

- Offenders will waiting for crackdowns to end rather than displace
- Method displacement more likely than other types
- Opportunity blocking may have more diffusion and less displacement than enforcement
- Diffusion can be increased by increasing uncertainty of response scope
EVALUATION

• Displacement or Diffusion can contaminate comparison area
• If displacement, response will look more effective than it really is
• If diffusion, response will look less effective than it really is
EXPLANATION FOR CONTAMINATION EFFECTS

Crime displacing into C makes C get worse, relative to R.

Prevention diffusion into C makes C improve relative to R.
PREVENTING CONTAMINATION

- Area getting the response
- Spatial displacement/diffusion area
- Preferable control area
CONCLUSIONS

• The inevitability of displacement is a myth
• Diffusion of benefits possible
• Can to plan for and prevent some displacement
• Need to account for displacement & diffusion in evaluations
Oh Great
The End