

Short Term Results of the One Summer Plus 2012 Evaluation¹

Executive Summary

In 2012, Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services designed and implemented a youth summer employment program called *One Summer Plus (OSP)*. *OSP* combined a part-time summer job with proven cognitive behavioral therapy-based programming in order to reduce violence involvement and generate lasting improvements in youth outcomes. Importantly, *OSP* was structured like a clinical trial in medicine to generate rigorous evidence on the program's effects – a vital contribution given that there is almost no convincing research on the effects of summer jobs, especially on crime. The program was open to youth in 13 Chicago Public Schools located in high-violence neighborhoods. This brief reports on the early findings from the evaluation study, using administrative data on schooling and crime during a 7-month follow-up period. While participants attended less summer school (4 percentage points lower enrollment) and saw no change in other schooling outcomes, they also showed an enormous proportional drop in violent-crime arrests after 7 post-program months (3.7 fewer arrests per 100 participants, a 51 percent decline). Although it is too early for a full benefit-cost analysis, if these results persist, the program's benefits may eventually outweigh its costs given the extremely high social costs of violent crime. Future work will continue to track study youth, but even these preliminary findings provide convincing evidence that *OSP* was highly successful in reducing violence among adolescents.

Background

In 2010, over 600,000 American youth ages 14 to 21 were victims of violence-related injuries. Homicide killed more young African-American males than the 9 other leading causes of death *combined* (CDC 2012). Stemming this tide of youth violence has become a pressing policy priority in Chicago; national attention is focused on the city's search for successful strategies.²

An oft-repeated saying in Chicago suggests one approach: “nothing stops a bullet like a job.” Jobs could reduce violence and improve other outcomes among disadvantaged adolescents for a number of reasons. Work provides money, connections to employers, job-related training, and information on the value of schooling – and it keeps youth busy when they might otherwise be idle. If so, it is a particularly important time to help youth find jobs: Youth employment over the summer, when teenagers are most likely to work, is at a 60-year low, and the 2010 employment rate for low-income black teens is less than one-fourth the rate for higher-income white teens in Illinois (9 vs. 39 percent) (Center for Labor Market Studies 2012; Fernandes-Alcantara 2011).

On the other hand, there is no guarantee that providing a job is a cost-effective use of violence-prevention funds: Jobs also generate money that could be spent on drugs and alcohol, necessitate additional travel and exposure to new groups of peers, and tend to be limited to weekdays rather

¹ For more information on this research, contact Sara Heller (sbheller@uchicago.edu). For questions about the Crime Lab, contact Roseanna Ander (rande@uchicago.edu). Research funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The content is the responsibility of the author and does not represent the official position or policies of the Chicago Police Department or Chicago Public Schools. Many thanks to Kylie Klein, Tim Lavery, Stacy Norris, and Bob Tracy for their assistance with CPS and CPD data.

² See, for example, national media reports from PBS, NPR, and the Washington Post on youth violence in Chicago.

than the evening and weekend hours when crime is most prevalent. Prior research on job training programs also suggests other challenges, such as effects that fade out quickly after the program, the substitution of work for school, and high program costs that fail to outweigh benefits even when crime decreases (Jacobs 2012; Schochet, Burghardt & McConnell 2008).

In 2012, Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) designed an employment program called *One Summer Plus (OSP)* to address these challenges, focusing on summer to reduce the work/school tradeoff and target a peak time for crime, and adding an evidence-based program element (cognitive behavioral therapy-based programming) designed to improve youths' decision-making so program effects would endure. More than that, in partnership with the University of Chicago Crime Lab, DFSS constructed the program so it would produce some of the first rigorous evidence about the effects of summer jobs – which have received billions of dollars in funding over the past half-century but have been subject to almost no rigorous evaluation, especially in terms of crime impacts. This brief presents the early results of *OSP* after seven post-program months.

One Summer Plus 2012

Because *OSP* was designed mainly as a violence-reduction intervention, DFSS targeted 13 Chicago Public High Schools in high-violence neighborhoods. A total of 1,634 youth in 8th – 12th grade during the pre-program year applied. To fairly allocate the limited number of program slots, applicants were entered into a fair lottery. Youth were assigned by lottery into three groups: jobs only (n = 364), jobs plus social-emotional learning (SEL) (n = 366), or a control group (n = 904) who received no additional services but were free to pursue outside opportunities. All youth were offered 5 hours per day, 5 days per week of programming (jobs-only youth worked for all 5 daily hours; jobs + SEL youth worked for 3 and participated in SEL for 2). Youth earned Illinois minimum wage (\$8.25/hour) and received one meal per day, plus bus passes when appropriate.

Three non-profit community organizations (Sinai Community Institute, St. Sabina Employment Resource Center, and Phalanx Family Services) placed youth in part-time jobs for seven weeks (an optional 8th week was added during the program). Jobs were in the non-profit and government sectors, including positions as summer camp counselors, workers in a community garden, YMCA office and activity staff, office assistants for an alderman, etc. Youth were also assigned job mentors – adults who helped youth learn to be successful employees and to navigate barriers to employment (transportation, family responsibilities, conflicts with supervisors, etc.).

Because prior research suggests that the effects of subsidized jobs sometimes fade out quickly after the program, DFSS also offered some youth a social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunity (provided by Youth Guidance and SGA Youth and Family Services) designed to ensure that program effects persist. The motivating idea is that quick, automatic decision-making often drives youth behavior. Relying on initial, unthinking reactions may lead youth to behave poorly in the workplace or decide not to persist in pro-social programming. If so, then providing CBT-based programming – which teaches youth to reflect on their decision-making process and to think before acting – may improve youth engagement and generate lasting changes in the ways youth interact with their environment. Prior research has shown this strategy can reduce violent crime and create lasting improvements in school engagement (Heller, et al. 2013).

Table 1: Pre-Program Characteristics of Study Youth

	Control Mean (N = 904)	Treatment Mean (N = 730)
Demographics		
Age	16.79	16.78
African-American	96%	94%
Grade	10.15	10.12
Male ³	34%	44%
School and Crime		
% Days Absent (AY 2011-12)	18%	18%
GPA (Cumulative as of Fall 2011)	2.30	2.25
Ever Arrested	19%	22%
Neighborhood Characteristics		
Unemployment Rate	19%	19%
Below Poverty Line	33%	35%
Violent Crime Rate (per 100,000)	2,128	2,136

Notes: Data from program applications, Chicago Public Schools records, Chicago Police Department arrest records, and the 2010 American Community Survey. None of the pre-program differences are significant.

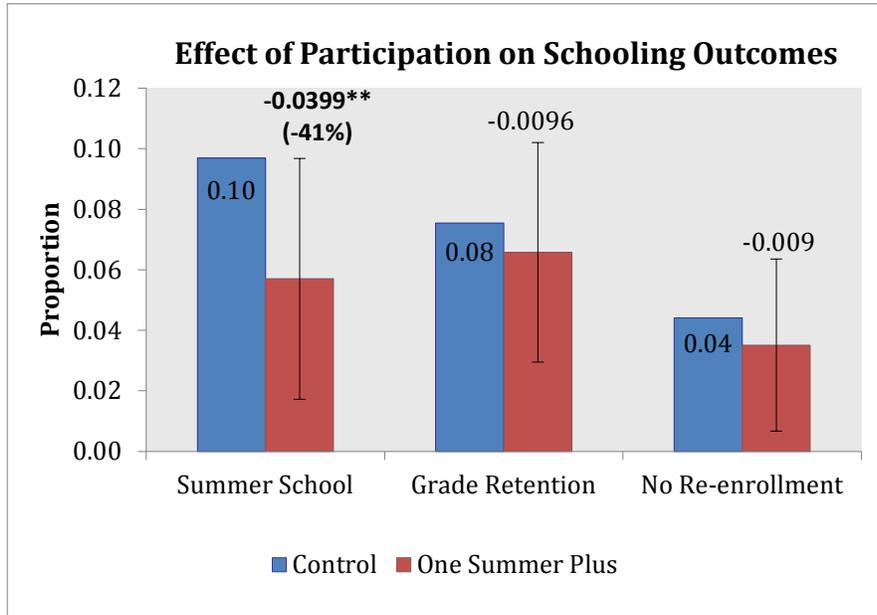
As Table 1 shows, the program successfully targeted youth in high-violence, low-income neighborhoods who faced significant challenges. Study youth missed an average of 18 percent of school (about 6 weeks) the year before the program, and about 20 percent had been arrested before the program started. They also lived in neighborhoods where over 30 percent of households are below the poverty line and 19 percent of adults are unemployed.

Short-Term Study Findings

Because the program was set up like a clinical trial in medicine, any post-program differences between the treatment and control groups can be definitively attributed to the effect of the program. We measure these effects using data from the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Police Department, both available through mid-March 2013, about 7 months after the end of the program.

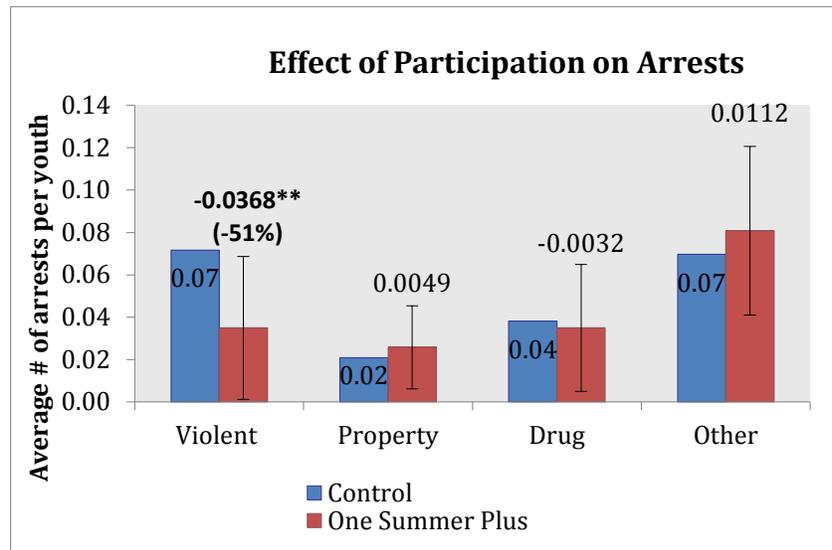
Overall, 75 percent of youth offered the program participated, and 90 percent of participants completed the full 7 weeks of the program. **Our initial findings show that participation decreases summer school enrollment, has little effect on other schooling outcomes, and decreases violent-crime arrests by 51 percent.** Because we do not find any significant differences across the two treatment groups (jobs only versus jobs + SEL), we present results for all participants relative to their control counterparts.

³ The lottery was structured to over-select male applicants, because males are disproportionately involved in violence. The treatment-control difference in gender representation is therefore part of the experimental design (gender was a “blocking” variable) and controlled for in all analyses.



As shown on the left, while 10 percent of the control group enrolled in summer school, only about 6 percent of participants did so. It is perhaps not surprising that **when offered paid work, youth attend less summer school**, although it is not yet clear whether this decrease will have any long-term effects on schooling outcomes. We find no significant differences in grade retention or failure to re-enroll the following school year (nor in fall GPA or attendance, not shown).

On the other hand, **we find an enormous proportional decrease in violent-crime arrests**. Participants experience 3.7 fewer arrests per 100 youth than their control group counterparts, a decrease of 51 percent. We find no differences in other types of crime.



Because these results are from a relatively short follow-up period, it is too early to complete a full benefit-cost analysis. However, violent crime is clearly hugely socially

costly. If the decrease in violent-crime arrests persists, it is possible that program benefits may eventually outweigh program costs (about \$3,000 per participant) – especially if the decline in summer school enrollment continues to have few measurable impacts on future schooling outcomes.

These results draw an early but optimistic picture about the ability of jobs and SEL to reduce violence, at least after the short follow-up period. If the crime decrease persists, this seven-month snapshot may capture only part of the violence drop. Other key outcomes will take more time to develop and measure – especially future employment, most likely to occur in later summers or after high school. The Crime Lab will continue to track study youths’ longer-term schooling and crime outcomes, and pending data availability, their future labor market participation as well.

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