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**EVALUATION OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF
GROUP VIOLENCE INTERVENTION
IN MALMÖ**

A strategy to reduce serious violence.

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INTRODUCTION

In Sweden, shootings and bombings have received growing attention in the past 10-15 years and are one of the most current political and police issues today. Shootings began to become a problem in Sweden in the 1990s and have increased drastically since. Khoshnood and Gerell (2019) have summarised the development of gun violence in Sweden in general and in Malmö in particular. They confirm that the violence has increased continuously and that the rate of increase has been higher in recent years and has become a serious problem in society. In Malmö, which is Sweden's third largest city¹, the number of shootings, for example, increased by 50% between 2011 and 2015 (Khoshnood and Gerell, 2019) and there was a need to try a new strategy to counter the serious violence that was at a high level at the time. In light of this, the work with the Malmö based project *Sluta Skjut* (here after Ceasefire Malmö) began in 2018. Within the framework of Ceasefire, the police, the municipality and the correctional service work together to reduce serious violence in Malmö. Ceasefire Malmö is a problem-oriented and collaboration-based approach that builds on the American strategy of Group Violence Intervention, GVI (NNSC, 2016). GVI focuses on the most serious violence and the violence committed by the individuals who can be linked to the groups that perpetrate violence in a city (Kennedy, 2009).

The GVI strategy was developed in response to the serious violence, above all fatal shootings, that occurred in U.S. cities in the 1990s. This violence was often committed by a few individuals who were members of various kinds of groups that perpetrated the violence. Put simply, GVI builds on different actors in society, such as the judicial system and municipality/social services, but also civil society², jointly conveying a clear

¹ Malmö is located in southern Sweden, has nearly 350,000 residents and is Sweden's fastest growing metropolis.

² Examples of civil society efforts are sports associations, religious communities and foundations, night and evening safety patrols and assistance efforts for the homeless. All of these activities build on voluntary involvement.

message to the most violent groups in the local community that: 1) violence is not tolerated, we care about you and do not want you to get hurt or to hurt anyone else; 2) future acts of violence will have legal consequences for every member of the group and not just the person(s) directly involved in the incident; 3) help is available for those who want to change their life situation and leave the criminal lifestyle (NNSC, 2016).

GVI has been implemented in several U.S. cities, often with good results (Braga et al., 2018; Braga & Weisburd, 2012). The strategy has also been implemented in a few European cities, such as London and Glasgow, with more mixed results (Davies m.fl., 2016; Densley & Jones, 2016; Graham, 2016; Williams et al., 2014). Ceasefire Malmö is the first attempt to implement the strategy in a Swedish context. The prerequisites for being able to implement GVI in Sweden have been called into question with reference to the differences between the U.S. and Sweden being too large (Knutsson, 2020). According to the project contract in place for Ceasefire Malmö, the objective is *to test if the GVI strategy can prevent the development of the increasing serious violence with firearms in criminal settings in Sweden*, and the project was expected to lead to a reduction of the deadly/serious violence committed by criminal groups in Malmö. In the longer term, it is hoped that the strategy will also contribute to increasing security among the residents of Malmö, reducing the need for police resources for deadly/serious violence committed by criminal groups, and reducing the need for medical care and other societal resources for the handling of deadly/serious violence. In connection with the initiation of the project, it was decided that the pilot would be evaluated regarding the process, meaning how the work with the project functioned, and regarding the effect on serious violence in Malmö, i.e. does the strategy lead to a reduction of serious violence? This text is a summary of the findings of the evaluation (Ivert, Mellgren & Nilsson, 2020; Ivert & Mellgren, 2021).

METHOD

The evaluation builds on two parts, a process evaluation of how the strategy was implemented and an effect evaluation where focus is on what changes in relation to serious violence took place in Malmö since the strategy was implemented.

Material

Within the scope of the process evaluation, the working process in Ceasefire Malmö was monitored and documented to get a picture of how and under what circumstances the project was implemented and carried out. This part of the evaluation is based on (i) interviews with key informers, (ii) participant observations of, among other things, call-ins, which is a part of communicating out the message, steering committee meetings and working group meetings, and (iii) various types of documentation, such as governance documents, meeting notes and documentation of efforts. This part of the data gathering began in February 2019 and ended in June 2020.

The material that still forms the basis of the effect evaluation comprises confirmed shootings for the period January 2017 to February 2020 when the pilot project was concluded. The material is based on information from the Regional Intelligence Unit of the Southern Police Region. Data has been compiled so that it shows the number of incidents per month, which results in a 38-month time series where the last 16 months (November 2018 to February 2020) represent the time after the first intervention was implemented. The Ceasefire Malmö pilot project began in February 2018, but the first intervention (a call-in) was carried out in October 2018 and in line with several other evaluations of GVI (see t.ex. Engel et al., 2010.; Sierra-Arevalo et al., 2017), the point in time that is principally used as the breakpoint between the before and after analyses. Since it is likely that an effect will not appear immediately after a call-in was done,

analyses were also done with an alternative breakpoint three months into the project.³

³ These analyses are done on the entire time series, but also by excluding the three-month period that falls between the beginning of the project and the new breakpoint (November, December and January).

FINDINGS

The process evaluation shows that despite apparently large differences between the U.S. and Sweden, our assessment is that the people who worked with the pilot project Ceasefire Malmö have been able to follow the American strategy closely and organise the work according to the American model. With some adjustments and adaptations to Swedish circumstances in general and legislation in particular, activities similar to those in the U.S. were able to be conducted in Sweden. At the same time, GVI is a strategy that must be adapted to local conditions (NNSC, 2016). The collaborating participants feel that the new approach that Ceasefire Malmö entailed has worked well and that there are many lessons learned regarding authority cooperation. However, there were some challenges. Among other things, they included difficulties in identifying the boundaries between the groups that perpetrate violence in the city since individuals move between different groups and loyalties can quickly change. This can lead to an ambiguity as to what group should be subject to sanctions. Another challenge was finding the role of civil society in Ceasefire Malmö. The project was largely an authority project and civil society was mainly involved in connection with call-ins. This could be seen as a shortcoming since an important part of the work with GVI is the confidence-inspiring work between authorities and civil society and finding a model for how civil society and authorities can collaborate to reduce serious violence. However, this is something that there has been an awareness of and efforts were made to increase civil society's involvement.

Based on the process evaluation, our conclusion is that it is possible to implement the American GVI strategy in a Swedish context. But the

conclusion is also that whoever wants to implement the strategy must make use of the lessons that can be learned from the pilot project in Malmö since local adaptations must always be made and GVI is a strategy that requires knowledge and commitment. In Malmö, the parties involved were always careful to follow the strategy and not deviate from it more than local conditions required. Moreover, every part of the strategy was implemented, not just certain selected parts.

An important conclusion is also that Malmö had good conditions for implementing a project like GVI/Ceasefire Malmö. There was already a functioning cooperation between the police and social services, an established programme for those wanting to leave violent groups and a municipal organisation where the social services are gathered under one administration. In addition to this, there was specialist expertise within the local police that could carry out the advanced mapping of individuals. Another important part of being able to implement the work is that there was a clear involvement from the management in the respective collaboration organisations and managers that clearly showed that the project was important and something the organisation would invest in. This probably contributed to the collaboration and implementation working. Ceasefire carefully followed the original strategy and carefully considered and justified every deviation.

The findings of the effect evaluation show that the average number of shootings per month decreased by around 25 per cent after Ceasefire Malmö was implemented (October 2018), from an average of 4.4 shootings to 3.3 shootings. The number of shootings that can be linked to criminal groups also decreased. However, the change is not statistically significant, which means that it is not possible to link the decrease to the implementation of Ceasefire Malmö for certain. The declining trend is confirmed when time series analysis is applied, but the findings also show that Ceasefire Malmö was implemented during a period when the number of shootings was already on the way down and it is difficult to link the continued decrease to Ceasefire for certain.

Figure 1 shows all confirmed shootings per month during the time period studied. The vertical line marks when the first intervention (call-in) within Ceasefire Malmö was carried out and it is this point in time that was used as the breakpoint in the analyses.

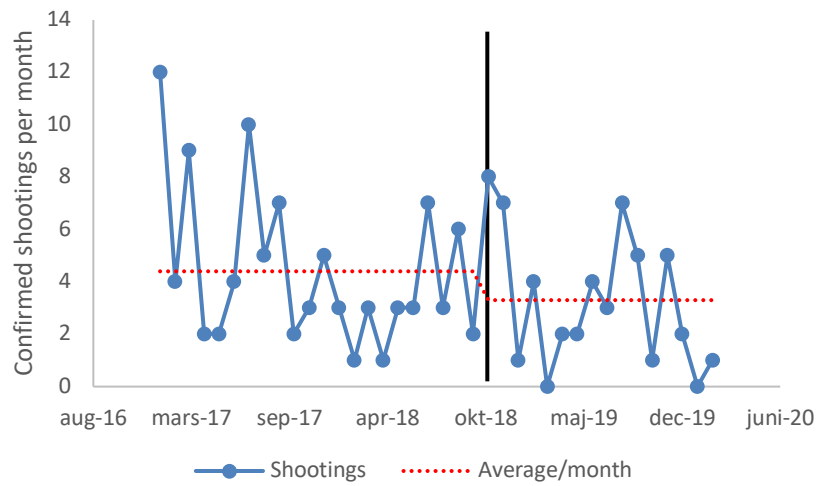


Figure 1. Trend, Shootings, Malmö, January 2017 to February 2020.

Figure 2 shows the trend in shootings that can be linked to groups during the period of time studied. A decrease in the number of shootings during the period after Ceasefire Malmö

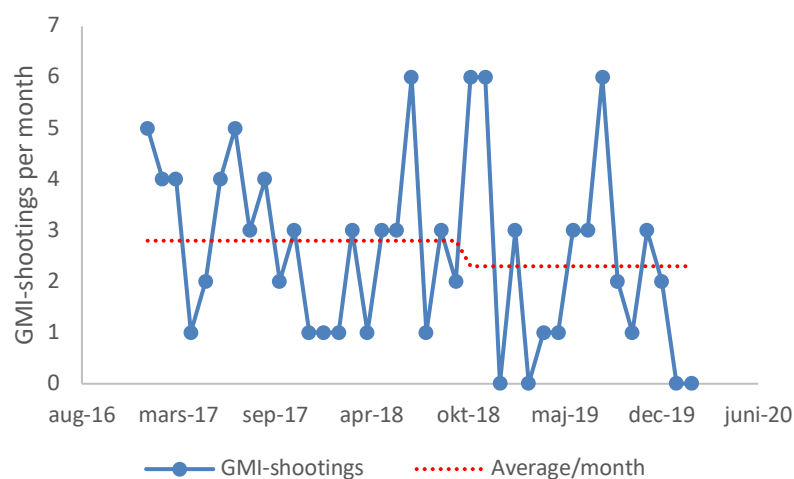


Figure 2. Trend, GMI shootings, Malmö, January 2017 to February 2020.

was implemented can be seen here as well.

In the effect evaluation, a comparison was also done of the trend in Malmö relative to three other Swedish cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg and Uppsala (the first two of which are larger than Malmö and the last is smaller). The trend looked differently in the cities during the period of time studied. In Gothenburg, just like in Malmö, there was a decrease in the number of shootings between the before and after period. In Stockholm, the number was essentially unchanged and in Uppsala there was an increase. A calculation of the relative effect sizes shows that the number of shootings in Stockholm and Uppsala increased relative to the trend in Malmö at the same time that the number of shootings in Gothenburg decreased relative to Malmö. However, none of the differences are statistically significant.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, to be able to answer the question whether it is possible to implement GVI/Ceasefire Malmö as a national strategy for managing serious violence, the strategy needs to be tested and evaluated in more cities. Working with focused deterrence is something that has increased in the past 10-15 years and even if there is scientific support that this kind of strategy can work to reduce the most serious violence in society, the model is still new in a Swedish context. Based on the international state of knowledge and the experiences of the implementation in Malmö, the conclusion is that focused deterrence in the form of Ceasefire Malmö is possible to implement and worth trying in cities with major problems with serious violent crime.

Is Ceasefire Malmö a crime prevention strategy that can contribute to reducing serious crime in a Swedish context? In Malmö in recent years, there has been a clear positive development with regard to shootings. The findings from the process evaluation show that GVI is a strategy and an approach that is possible to implement in Sweden. At the same time, based on the effect evaluation, it is not possible to clearly point out Ceasefire Malmö as the cause of the decreased number of shootings in Malmö in recent years. In order to be able to draw any conclusions for certain regarding the effects of the strategy, a longer follow-up period is necessary.

Based on the empirical support available internationally, that the implementation of GVI in Malmö was possible and the decrease in the serious violence that occurred in the city, it may be worth also trying such a strategy to manage the most serious violence in other cities with similar problems. However, this should be done only after careful consideration of the local circumstances and problems and a plan for follow-up and evaluation should be in place when the work begins. In order to build up a knowledge base regarding these kinds of strategies, a focused effort is required to develop an organisation that can work long term to reduce the

violence and that this work is done in close collaboration between crime prevention actors. The collaboration takes time and requires a joint commitment to be able to deliver and live up to the shared message that violence is not tolerated, that violence will be met by consequences and that there is support for anyone who wants to leave crime.

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