ATLANTA
PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS

Tammy Meredith, Ph.D.
Project Director

The Atlanta Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) project is a strategic collaboration of local, state and federal law enforcement and corrections agencies with the sole purpose of identifying and apprehending the most violent criminals on the city streets. Under the leadership of the U.S. Attorney of the Northern District of Georgia, the work group, known as the Violent Repeat Offender (VRO) Committee, meets monthly to discuss identified offenders, share agency-specific information, report on investigation and apprehension efforts, and strategize on law enforcement and prosecutorial tactics. The goal is selective incapacitation of that small proportion of highly active career criminals with a large impact on local crime. The strategy is identification of the most active violent offenders for federal prosecution, where federal sentencing laws increase the likelihood of extended incarceration. Local bad guys are taken off the streets for the maximum amount of time, reducing violent crime in the neighborhoods where they operate.

The guiding tool of the VRO Committee is a list. Efforts began with a list of 40 offenders compiled by the partner agencies. With funding from the U.S. Attorney General's Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) initiative, a research partner joined the team in 2012 – Applied Research Services, Inc. (ARS). The VRO committee worked with ARS to develop a data-driven methodology for creating an annual list that (1) focuses on their crimes of interest, (2) accurately reflects their catchment area and (3) identifies offender targets with maximum potential for contributing to local violent crime.

ARS was selected because of their unique working relationship with the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI). The GBI's Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) provides ARS with regular electronic extracts of the entire state computerized criminal history (rap sheet) data. GCIC and ARS have collaborated for years on data-driven operational research projects. Data on all arrests and convictions from 1990 to 2012 in Georgia, representing 3 million offenders and 16 million arrest episodes, were analyzed to create the 2013 VRO offender list. The following discussion outlines the four steps of the ARS analytical strategy to select the Top 150 Atlanta Violent Repeat Offenders out of 3 million offenders statewide. While this process is specific to the Atlanta VRO committee, the methodology can be adapted to any jurisdiction.

Step 1: Define "Violent" Offenses

The VRO Committee developed a definition of a violent crime after careful review of the criminal histories of many offenders. They selected 17 offenses of interest and agreed upon a weighting scheme that could be used to measure the seriousness of an offender's entire criminal history by summing the points assigned to each of his "violent" arrest episodes.

VRO-Defined Violent Offenses & Weights

Offense	Weight
Rape	Severe (70)
Manslaughter	Severe (70)
Murder	Severe (70)
Aggravated Battery	Heavy (50)
Armed Robbery	Heavy (50)
Kidnapping	Heavy (50)
Hijacking/Carjacking	Heavy (50)
Battery	Medium (30)
Burglary	Medium (30)
Drug Trafficking	Medium (30)
Aggravated Assault	Medium (30)
Domestic Violence	Light (10)
Possess Drugs w/ Intent to Distribute	Light (10)
Affray (Public Fighting)	Light (10)
Obstruction	Light (10)
Terroristic Threats	Light (10)
Impersonate an Officer	Light (10)

Step 2: Identify Active Offenders in 6 Counties

Number of People Arrested in Target Counties in 2012 for a Violent Offense

County	Arrestees
Clayton	2,781
Cobb	3,545
DeKalb	4,641
Fulton	7,645
Gwinnett	3,299
Henry	899

The VRO Committee selected six Metropolitan Atlanta counties to focus their efforts. ARS identified the number of people arrested in any of the six counties in 2012 (indicating recent criminal activity) where the most serious charge at arrest was one of the 17 violent offenses. Over 20,000 offenders were arrested in at least one of the counties, some of them in multiple counties. As the City of Atlanta sits in Fulton and DeKalb Counties, their high volume of offenders is expected based on population.

Step 3: Select 3,200 VRO-Defined Violent Offenders

Next, the VRO Committee and ARS developed criteria for selecting the most violent among the 20,000 offenders arrested in 2012. The process was iterative, requiring a number of data mining steps to fine tune the selection criteria. From the pool of 20,000, over 3,200 offenders were identified that met the following criteria: they had two or more violent arrests in the last five years in one of the six target counties and they had at least one conviction for a violent offense (which could be any time period and any county).

Step 4: Rank VRO-Violent Offenders to Find The Top 150

Next, ARS created a series of algorithms to rank the list of 3,200 VRO offenders by seriousness from #1 to #150 (with #1 being the most serious). The VRO Committee worked with ARS to devise a plan that identifies the offenders not currently incarcerated in jail or prison and promotes offenders up the seriousness rank for being young and heavily active in Fulton and DeKalb Counties (City of Atlanta). Final ranking is based upon age, volume and type of violent arrests and convictions, volume of arrests with a weapon charge, volume of Fulton/DeKalb arrests, seriousness of all arrests, arrest frequency (arrests per year on the street) and arrest timing (days since last arrest). The final "Top 150 Offender List" was provided to each agency represented on the VRO Committee in a spreadsheet format to allow for searching and additional sorting. Each offender has a corresponding rank (#1 to #150). The list contains offender details to include name, fingerprint identification number (SID), age, sex, race, and all of the ranking factors described above. In addition, the data was merged to the Georgia Department of Corrections institutional data to include information on prison and probation history, incarceration time and violent prison disciplinary infractions.

There were four steps in the ARS analytical strategy to select the Top 150 Violent Repeat Offenders out of 3 million offenders statewide. While this process is specific to the Atlanta VRO committee, the methodology can be adapted to any jurisdiction.
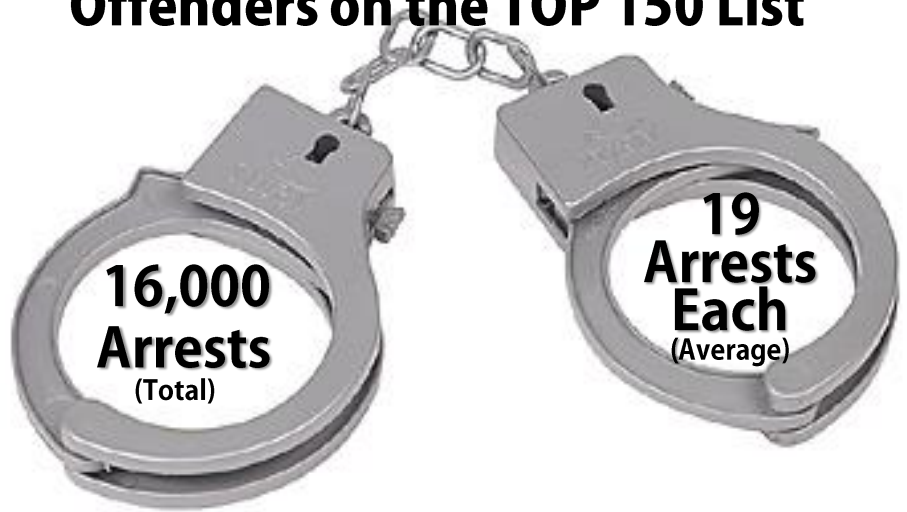
Offenders on the Top 150 List are primarily male (one female) and African American (96%). The average age is 25 years and the average age at first arrest was 17. The 150 offenders have accumulated nearly 16,000 arrests, an average of 19 each. The number of convictions ranges from one to 50, with an average of 8. Nearly half (42%) are under probation supervision, another 7 are on parole. Three out of four (77%) have been arrested with a weapon and one-third committed a violent personal felony on their most recent arrest. Since identification on the list, 11 of the top 20 offenders have been re-arrested at least once. Their new offenses include: simple battery, theft, drug possession, failure to appear, conspiracy to commit a felony and probation violations. The high level of re-arrests lends validation to the methodology's ability to identify highly active offenders.

Demonstrated Success

An example of the collaborative power of the VRO partners is the case of Dequavious Johnson who, by 21 years of age, had accumulated 10 felony arrests, including five weapons charges. On his most recent gun charge, the U.S. Attorney's Office pursued federal charges for "felon in possession of a firearm" which resulted in a conviction with a 70-month prison sentence. The team worked together closely to share information, summarize substantial criminal history data, and provide critical testimony. Federal prosecution resulted in substantial prison time, keeping this violent offender off the streets for nearly six years.

Another example of success is the arrest of #61 on the VRO Top 150 List. In September of 2013 there was a very high profile early-morning abduction of a 14-year old girl from her home in Ellenwood, GA (Atlanta suburb) by two men at gunpoint. This story was covered nationally and ended two days later with the safe recovery of the child 25 miles east of Atlanta. Wildrego Jackson (#61) was one of two suspects arrested at the site where the girl was recovered. He has since been charged with federal "conspiracy to kidnap" charges. He is currently in jail awaiting disposition of his case in court.
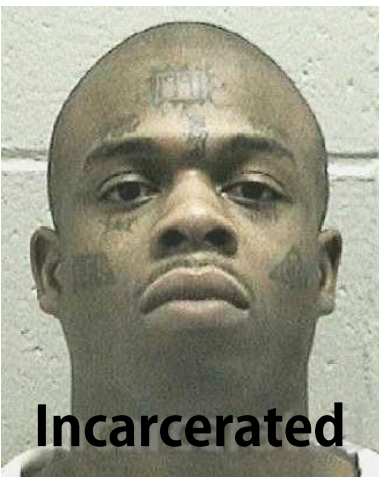
Offenders on the TOP 150 List

16,000 Arrests
(Total)

19 Arrests Each
(Average)

VRO Success - Dequavious Johnson

Incarcerated

- First adult arrest at age 17 for robbery
- 10 felony GA arrests by end of 2012
- 5 weapons charges
- 3 arrests with probation/parole violations
- Entered prison in 2009 (age 22) for robbery
- Released on parole with "probation to follow"
- Returned to prison for both a probation & parole violation
- 48 prison disciplinary reports accumulated – 7 for violent offenses

VRO team efforts result in a 70 month federal sentence (9/5/13) for "Felon in Possession of Firearm" with three years supervision to follow.

Over half of the top 20 offenders had at least one new arrest within four months of identification.

The collaboration between law enforcement, corrections and the U.S. Attorney's office ensures that violent offenders are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. This unique alliance has brought together a team of agencies that utilize cutting edge analytical strategies. An unprecedented mining of automated data and multi-agency collaboration ensures that the toughest, most violent criminals are off our city streets.

For more information on this project, contact Dr. Tammy Meredith, Project Director.

Applied Research Services, Inc.
663 Ethel Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 881-1120 ext. 106
www.ars-corp.com

Applied Research Services, Inc. is a private research consulting firm operating in Atlanta, GA. Since 1994, ARS has specialized in complex research design and analysis to support public policy, programming and legislative decisions.

VRO Profile - #61 Wildrego Jackson

Arrested

- First adult arrest at age 17 for Possession of Cocaine
- 22 felony GA arrests by end of 2012
- 4 weapons charges

- 13 arrests with probation/parole violations
- Entered prison in 2006 (age 23) for law enforcement obstruction

Arrested on 9/18/13 on federal conspiracy to kidnap charges (in custody).