Community engagement, greening, and violent crime: A test of the greening hypothesis and Busy Streets

Using mixed effects regression models, we analyzed trends in violent crime density over the summer months from 2016 to 2018 at 2,102 street segments in Youngstown, OH.

Busy Streets Theory (BST) suggests that residents who are involved in the greening process can help to improve physical environments and build social connections that deter crime and violence.

We applied BST to test the effects of community-engaged vacant lot greening compared to vacant lots that received either professional mowing or no treatment, on the density of violent crime around study lots.

Vacant lots were randomized to three groups:
- Community-engaged maintenance
- Professional mowing
- No treatment (control)

Violent crime decreased the most in lots that received community-engaged maintenance. There was also a decrease in violence in lots that had professional mowing.

Our findings support BST and suggest that community-engaged greening of vacant lots in postindustrial cities with a concentrated vacancy can reduce crime and violence.