Friendly or Unfriendly Confines: Impact of Chicago Baseball Stadiums on Vicinity Crime Patterns

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Facilities/Events - Other (Professional Sport)
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Sport stadiums have been heralded as catalysts of urban redevelopment and economic growth (Chapin, 2004). However, various social costs accompany stadium sport events, including excessive crowding, strains on public resources, impact traffic, and increased crime (Rees & Schnepel, 2009). Routine activity theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), suggests that the opportunity for crime occurs because of the presence of a motivated offender, attractive target, and a lack of capable guardians, explaining much of the crime occurring around sport stadiums (Breetzke & Cohn, 2013; Kurland, Johnson, & Tilley, 2014). Crime pattern theory highlights that when a target enters a hot spot or offender’s crime space, likelihood of crime increases (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993), explaining the criminogenic effect of sport stadiums on law enforcement activity (Kurland, Tilley, & Johnson 2014; Kurland & Piza, 2018; Vendeviverm, Bernasco, & Van Daele, 2018). Additional research confirms that crime clusters around sport venues on game days (Billings & Depken, 2011), increases at college football games due to environmental factors (Menaker & Chaney, 2014), and crime increases 2.6% in eight large cities with NFL teams (Kalist & Lee, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to examine crime pattern near the two Major League Baseball stadiums in Chicago. Research questions consider whether a difference exists in crime pattern around the two stadiums on all days and whether baseball games alter venue vicinity crime rates. Data analysis was based on reports for all crime within a 3km radius of Wrigley Field (Wrigley) and Guaranteed Rate Bank Field (GRB), during a three-year period (2015-2017). Multiple regression analyses were performed on the following variables: Independent variables were Wrigley game day (yes=1; no=0), GRB game day (yes=1; no=0), and location of reported crime (Wrigley=1; GRB =0). Crime frequencies within a 3km radius of baseball stadiums and crime frequencies within 1km of stadiums were dependent variables, respectively.

Results show that the model for crime frequency within 3km of the stadium was statistically significant [R2=.41, F(3, 2188) = 508.69, p < .001]. Wrigley game day (β=.17, p<.001) significantly predicted an increase of 6.50 crimes, GRB game day (β=.08, p<.001) predicted an increase of 3.24 crimes, and location (β=.65, p<.001) predicted a 16.14 difference in crime in the radius around Wrigley versus GRB. The model for crime frequency within 1km of the baseball stadiums was statistically significant [R2=.14, F(3, 2188) = 113.28, p< .001]. Wrigley games (β=.20, p<.001) accounted for 3.03 more crimes than non-games and location of stadium (β=.24, p<.001) predicted a 1.64 crime increase around Wrigley versus GRB. GRB games were not a significant predictor (β=.01, p=.83).

Findings suggest that crime increased on game days in the 3km radius of both stadiums, but only increased significantly within 1km of Wrigley on game day, while this effect is not experienced by GRB. This suggests that crime increases around baseball stadiums on game day, but not necessarily in close proximity to venues. Accordingly, stadium managers and law enforcement should consider crime patterns and plan law enforcement strategies accordingly, as opposed to assuming game days automatically cause more crime near stadiums.