

Problem-oriented policing is associated with reductions in crime and disorder



The results of this systematic review update suggest that problem-oriented policing is associated with an overall reduction in crime and disorder of 34%.

What is the aim of this review?

This update of a Campbell systematic review assesses the effectiveness of problem-oriented policing in reducing crime and disorder. It summarises the evidence from 34 studies: 28 from the USA, five from the UK and one from Canada.

Problem-oriented policing (POP) is associated with statistically significant reductions in crime and disorder. Place-based POP programs are more likely to produce a diffusion of benefits into areas adjacent to targeted locations than to lead to crime displacement.

What is this review about?

POP is a proactive policing strategy developed by Herman Goldstein, who argued that the standard reactive model of policing was ineffective as it was overly focused on the means of policing (number of arrests, average response time, etc.) rather than the end goal of reducing crime and enhancing community safety. He suggested that police could be more effective if they were more proactive and researched root causes of crime, and developed tailor-made responses.

This review assesses the effectiveness of POP interventions – defined as those programs which generally followed the tenets of the SARA model (scanning, analysis, response, assessment) developed by Spelman and Eck – in reducing crime and disorder and fear of crime, and improving citizen perceptions of police.

What studies are included?

This review includes both randomized and quasi-experimental evaluations of POP, where a treatment area or group received a POP approach while a control area or group received standard police services.

Thirty-four studies are assessed in the review – an increase of 24 studies from the original review (Weisburd et al., 2008, 2010). All studies were published between 1989 and 2018. Most studies (28) were conducted in the USA, five in the United Kingdom and one in Canada.



How up-to-date is this review?

This authors of this review update searched for studies up to December 2018.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary is based on Hinkle, JC, Weisburd, D, Telep, CW, Petersen, K. Problem-oriented policing for reducing crime and disorder: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2020; 16:e1089. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1089>.



Problem Solving and
Demand Reduction

Does problem-oriented policing reduce crime and disorder?

Yes. The results of this updated systematic review suggest that POP is associated with a statistically significant overall reduction in crime and disorder of 34%.

There are positive impacts for POP across a wide variety of crime and disorder outcomes, among studies that targeted problem places and problem people, at a variety of different units of analysis and featuring a wide array of types of interventions. The effect size is smaller in randomized experiments and after accounting for publication bias.

POP had limited impacts on police legitimacy, fear of crime, and collective efficacy. Few studies incorporated cost-benefit analyses, but those that did suggest POP can be cost-effective and provide substantial savings through prevented calls-for-service and incidents.

What do the findings of the review mean?

Findings from this review support the notion that proactive policing strategies that identify specific problems, conduct analyses to determine underlying causes, and develop and deliver tailor-made responses, are more effective in reducing crime and disorder than standard, reactive methods of policing. Moreover, in place-based interventions, diffusion of crime-reduction benefits are more likely than displacing crime to nearby areas. As such, police departments should incorporate the use of problem-solving into their crime prevention strategies.

However, the impacts of POP on crime are highly heterogeneous. This result may reflect the tremendous variability in the types of problems identified and targeted and the types of tailored intervention strategies used, suggesting that more studies are needed to allow more robust analyses of factors that influence POP program impacts. In turn, future evaluations should be designed to capture more data about the problem-solving process so that future reviews can more directly assess what types of problems seem most amenable to POP efforts and what characteristics of problem-solving interventions are associated with larger effects.