Summary:
Problem-oriented, community, and hot spots policing are each more successful in policing drugs markets than the traditional approach of preventative patrol and reactive detection. Problem-oriented policing fared best, community policing fared nearly as well, while enforcement-focused hot spots policing had mixed results, but was still more effective than traditional approaches.

What is a ‘what works’ briefing?
This briefing has been developed by researchers from the College of Policing to summarise the best available research evidence on the effectiveness of various drug enforcement strategies and to highlight its implications for police policy and practice.

This document briefly summarises a Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review1, which is a longer and more technical report that trawls for all available evaluations of projects designed to reduce street-level drug-dealing. Only those evaluations with a design which attempted to rule out alternative explanations for changes in crime, and which had comparison or control sites were included. The Review then draws general conclusions from this pool of evaluations about how well these approaches compare to each other in reducing drug-dealing.

1www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/123/
Why is street–level drug–dealing such a problem?

Apart from the obvious fact that drugs are illegal and contribute to a variety of social problems, drug use can fuel other criminal activity because users often have to steal to fund their habits. Drug–enforcement activities also use a large amount of police resources that could otherwise be directed elsewhere.

The review cites a report by the Royal College of Psychiatrists which found that 75 per cent of the UK drug misuse budget was being spent on enforcement in the late 1990s; in the US, this figure was around 50 per cent. Despite decades of efforts (stretching back into the 1920s in the United States), the growth of the drugs trade illustrates the inability of traditional law enforcement methods - pairing routine preventative patrol and reactive arrests - to deal effectively with the problem. In this context, identifying the most effective way of policing drugs markets can help ease pressure on resources as well as offer a new approach to a previously intractable problem.

What distinguishes alternative methods of drug enforcement?

The Review looked at fourteen evaluations of police interventions to assess whether three alternative methods of policing drugs markets (problem-oriented policing, community policing and hot-spots policing) were more effective than the ‘traditional approach’ of preventative patrol and reactive arrests.

The Review characterises the “standard model” of policing as involving unfocused strategies, and relying typically on traditional law enforcement practices such as: rapid response to calls for service, routine patrol throughout a community, or increasing the number of police officers across a jurisdiction.

Alternative policing methods developed since the 1980s have focused upon identifying and responding to problems in a proactive and structured manner. These approaches vary in two important ways, (a) the geographical focus of the intervention, and (b) the involvement of third parties. The alternative models included in the review are described below.

‘Hot spots policing’ is characterised in the review as the most aggressive alternative style of policing, typically involving ‘buy–bust’ operations, visible raids on premises, enforcement of warrants, ‘street sweeps’, saturation patrol, ‘aggressive curfew and truancy enforcement’. In the review, the ‘traditional’ characterisation of hot spots policing is assessed which:

- Relies upon identifying the geographical location of repeated demands upon police resources and focusing police attention upon them.
- only involves third parties such as businesses or community groups incidentally.
- is seen as an ‘enforcement approach’ that has most in common with ‘traditional’ policing of the alternatives assessed in this review.

Traditionally hotspotting is characterised as above, however, it is not always a predominantly ‘enforcement’ approach. Some recent hot spots interventions (e.g. Braga and Bond, 2008) have increasingly adopted more of a POP (problem-solving) approach. Analysis to identify ‘hot spots’ is compatible with a variety of other policing approaches.
Community policing is characterised in the review as giving priority to engaging with residents and others with a stake in a neighbourhood to identify problems and decide how best they can collaborate in resolving them.

- Community policing aims to improve police-citizen relationships, build neighbourhood cohesion and increase contact with citizens to build trust and rapport.
- Community policing addresses interventions to the whole community, rather than isolated geographic areas or hot spots.

Problem-oriented policing (POP) is characterised by the review as bringing a more analytical approach to identifying problems and their solutions. Problem-solving, like community policing, anticipates that multi-agency collaboration will be necessary. POP therefore incorporates elements of both traditional hot spots and community policing:

- POP often uses collaboration with third parties to make life difficult for drug-dealers, by enforcing tenancy agreements or building code violations, or cleaning up areas to rid them of the ‘signs of crime’.
- POP may use ‘hotspotting’ analytical methods to identify areas where police responses should be focussed. All of the POP interventions involved in the review were geographically focussed on drugs ‘hot spots’, rather than on interventions across the wider community.
- POP tends to have a narrower focus than community policing approaches, both in terms of the specific problems being addressed, and the geographical focus of interventions.

This ‘classification’ of the different approaches needs to be qualified by two observations; (1) these approaches can have a considerable degree of overlap and (2) within each of the three styles of policing evaluated there will be important variations between individual programmes. For example, there are more and less effective ways of undertaking ‘problem-oriented policing’ or ‘hotspotting’ interventions. See the other ‘What Works’ briefings on Problem Oriented Policing and Hot Spots for more information about these approaches.
What works?
A clear and unequivocal conclusion was reached: any of the three alternative approaches are superior to the traditional approach of preventative patrol and reactive detection.

What worked … Best?
We can also compare the relative merits of the three alternative styles of policing by assessing how much better they each were when compared to traditional methods:
• ‘Problem–oriented policing’ fared best
• ‘Community policing’ fared nearly as well
• Enforcement-focussed ‘hot spots policing’ had mixed results, but is still better than traditional methods as it identifies the source of problems and focuses police resources on these areas.

Key conclusions
• POP interventions which were both (a) geographically targeted and (b) involved cooperative partnerships with third parties were more effective at disrupting street-level drug markets than interventions spread across a community. This suggests that the benefits of policing interventions can be diluted if they are spread across too wide an area.
• Combining geographical targeting and forming cooperative partnerships was found to be most effective, but, of these two strategies, community engagement appears to be the most important factor in determining success. Both problem-oriented and community-wide partnerships were more effective at disrupting street level drug markets than traditional, law enforcement-only interventions, whether they were focused on geographically defined hotspots or not.
• In summary: focus your intervention on the specific area and groups affected, and engage with third parties and the community in addressing specific problems.
Implications for good practice

• **Go beyond simple law enforcement strategies.** Both ‘problem–oriented’ and ‘community policing’ share a willingness to engage with diverse partners, using a range of methods to address problems in a suitably tailored way. These approaches were both more successful than ‘hotspotting’, which relies predominantly upon law enforcement tactics.

• **Focus on developing partnerships with third parties.** Convincing or even requiring third parties to fulfil their obligations can disrupt drugs markets every bit as effectively as smashing down doors. Requiring landlords to maintain their property or enlisting the help of other agencies (like the Fire Service who can insist upon fire regulations being adhered to) was found to give drug–dealers fewer locations in which to hide.

• **Focus interventions on clearly defined geographical areas.** Evidence from the review suggests that interventions are more effective when focussed on specific problem locations. Interventions that attempt to cover an entire community may dilute the benefits of police (and community) action. It is in this sense that POP is superior to community policing in addressing drugs markets.

• **Make efforts to understand the problem**
  It is important to understand the underlying social and economic conditions that exist in places with street-level drug market problems, and how these might contribute to crime. It may be possible to address these sorts of issues in partnership with third party organisations, (schools, churches, community groups, etc) and through the employment of POP strategies.

• **Analysis, deliberation and planning are key to success.** All the ‘alternative approaches’ show that focussed police activity has clear benefits over traditional methods of preventative patrol and arrest:
  ◊ ‘Problem–oriented policing’ employs the SARA method (Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment). This involves careful searching to identify what problems there are, the analysis of these problems to identify their causes (which may not be initially apparent), tailored responses to address those causes, and assessment of outcomes to ensure responses are having the desired effects. See the Problem Oriented Policing What Works Briefing for more information.
  ◊ Traditional ‘community policing’ is less systematic, but is in its own way just as reflective, as it is based upon consultation and multi–agency approaches, which bring together diverse perspectives. UK neighbourhood policing therefore has promise, because it overtly incorporates problem-oriented policing (problem solving).
  ◊ Traditional ‘hot spots policing’, while more reactive: identifies problems from the analysis of data on calls for service and offences. It is not as effective as careful consideration of the underlying problems before acting, but at least directs interventions to the most relevant area. See the Hot Spots What Works Briefing for more information.
  ◊ Collect data and evaluate your interventions. Drugs markets are a very clear test of competing approaches to policing. What is apparent from this evaluation is that structured responses that involve other community organisations are likely to be more successful than routine patrol and reactive arrests. However, there is an overall lack of high quality evaluations of drug law enforcement interventions, particularly in the UK. Given the amount spent on policing drugs markets, investment in high quality experimental studies of drug law enforcement would be worthwhile.
Advice and guidance

Community policing
The most sustained and successful ‘community policing’ venture has been in Chicago. Northwestern University hosts an on-line resource centre that provides access to a range of helpful material. 
http://www.parc.info/community_policing.chtml


Additional Home Office Research publications can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-neighbourhood-policing-in-partnership

Problem–oriented policing
In the US, the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) was instrumental in advancing and developing POP. Resources can be downloaded from their library at: http://www.policeforum.org/library

PowerPoint slides and a facilitator’s guide for training others about POP may be particularly useful: Excellence in Problem Oriented Policing http://www.policeforum.org/library/problem-solving-community-policing/01Goldstein%5b1%5d.pdf

The Center for Problem–Oriented Policing also contains guides and other resources, including specific examples of POP implementation: http://popcenter.org

Hot spots
The Home Office maintain a useful on–line resource centre at http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/technology/technology07.htm

The ‘Koper Curve’ (see references) is a useful concept for anyone interested in hot spots policing, more detail can be found in the What Works Briefing on Hot Spots.
References


Full Review

You can access the full review online at:
www.campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/123/