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The effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder: What Works Briefing

Summary

Problem solving approaches have a positive impact on the problems they target. Problem-solving approaches, especially those based around the SARA model, are an effective way of dealing with crime and disorder problems.



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 in relation to the effects of problem-oriented policing, more frequently referred to in the UK as problem-solving, and to highlight its implications for police policy and practice.



This document briefly summarises a Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review

<http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/228/>, which is a longer and more technical report that focussed on evaluations problem-oriented policing (POP/ problem solving/ problem-oriented partnerships). The evaluations were then assessed against strict inclusion criteria. Only those with a design which attempted to rule out alternative explanations for changes in levels of criminal behaviour, and which had comparison or control sites were included. The review then draws general conclusions from this pool of evaluations about how well problem-solving approaches work in reducing crime and disorder, compared to areas with similar problems where these tactics were not employed.

Read the full review:
click on link

<http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/download/228/>



What is 'problem-oriented policing'?

Problem-oriented policing (POP, problem-solving, or problem-oriented partnerships) is a structured approach to addressing specific problems; it aims to apply rational and evidence-based analysis of problems and their solutions to a policing context. Problem solving approaches systematically **identify** and **analyse** crime and disorder problems, **develop specific responses** to individual problems and subsequently **assess** whether the response has been successful.

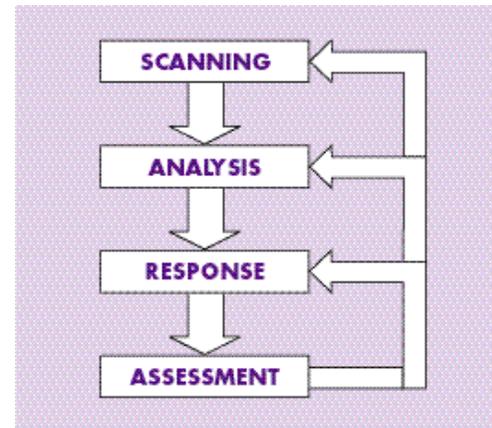
In the 1980s, Herman Goldstein developed POP as a critique of contemporary styles of policing. Goldstein argued traditional policing was too focused on process rather than outcome; that evidence showed routine patrols had little impact on crime and disorder and also failed to produce satisfaction amongst the public. POP therefore aims to transform the patrol officer into someone who proactively identifies problems in an area and seeks ways to remedy the underlying difficulties. Apart from benefiting the community, such an approach aims to increase job satisfaction amongst patrol officers. The approach has had a marked impact in police policymaking circles.



The sara model

A number of different problem solving models have developed. SARA is the most commonly used model and comprises four broad stages, **scanning**, **analysis**, **response** and **assessment**. The SARA model is a **cyclical process** - not a linear one. It requires assessment on an ongoing basis to determine whether or not the response is effective. This enables **responses** to be **modified**, if necessary, on a rolling basis.

The following gives a brief description of the four SARA steps. A more detailed explanation of each of the steps is available on the Centre for Problem Oriented Policing website <http://www.popcenter.org/about/?p=sara>.



The SARA model (source: Forrest, et al. 2005)

- **SCANNING:** identify and prioritise problems
Scanning should involve an early review of clusters of similar, related or recurring incidents. These are then prioritised and the priority crime and/or community safety problems are selected for further examination. The National Reassurance Policing Programme in the UK found that involving the community in identifying and defining problems can lead to better results.

- **ANALYSIS:** gather information and intelligence to identify underlying causes of the problem and to narrow the scope of the problem as much as possible.

This involves a detailed review of data to identify the underlying causes of the particular problem as well as researching what is known about the problem type and identify what data is available that relates to this problem. This also makes use of another simple tool, namely the Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT), which enables analysis of the problem from the three main perspectives of offender, victim and location. The better your analysis, the more relevant and tailored your response to the problem can be.

- **RESPONSE:** tailored activities designed to address the causes of the problem, as identified in the analysis phase.

This involves coming up with different options for interventions by brain storming for new ideas and researching what has worked in other areas. Once the most appropriate option has been selected a response plan including stated objectives and identifying responsible partners is created. There are more details on how to plan your response on the final page of this What Works guide.

- **ASSESSMENT:** measure if the response had the desired effect – make changes to the response if required.

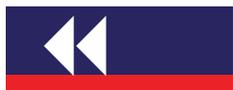
The purpose of this phase is to determine if the objectives set out in the response plan have been attained. This is done using a comparison of pre and post intervention data (qualitative and quantitative). On going assessment of the intervention is needed to ensure its continued effectiveness.

Later in this guide we will see that SARA is not always applied properly and, is in fact often operated as SAR, with many not carrying out the Assessment phase. The consequences of this can be serious and they are discussed in greater detail later. One way to combat this problem is to build your assessment in at the analysis phase – what you identify as problems through analysis can usually be measured, and an effective response will reduce the problems you have identified.



The Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) –
Graphic sourced from
http://www.popcenter.org/learning/60steps/graphics/step_8.gif

The Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT, see 'Analysis' section above) helps highlight potential partners for the police, in terms of identifying the manager of the location, a handler for the offender and a guardian for the victim. Partners can be numerous and varied, the Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065544/http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/community-policing/safe-confident-neighbourhoods/strategy-document2835.pdf?view=Binary>, p32) lists at least 15 potential partners for the police in dealing with anti-social behaviour.



Does problem solving work?

Yes. The review found that problem solving approaches have a positive impact on the problems they target. Problem-solving approaches, especially those based around the SARA model, are an effective way of dealing with crime and disorder problems.

You can have confidence in problem-solving; the evidence shows it works, provided it is implemented properly. The studies included in the review showed how problem solving approaches can be used in a variety of contexts. In addition to the more “traditional” areas such as volume crime and anti-social behaviour, some of the projects included in the review used a problem solving approach against such issues as: youth homicide; youth firearms violence; sexual assault; missing persons. When you are facing any problem, you may want to consider whether a problem solving approach will help.



Problem solving in practice

Problem solving has obvious affinities with **community policing** and is built into the UK neighbourhood policing approach. It brings local police officers into **collaborative working relationships** with local people. Remedies often lie beyond the reach of the police alone, requiring them to **work with partners in other agencies and even in commercial enterprises**. Problem solving is often therefore a multiagency approach.

The ‘**Tackling Alcohol-related Street Crime**’ (TASC) project is a good example of a multi-agency project in practice. Following a rapid increase of licensed premises in the Cardiff city centre there was an increase in policing problems and night time disturbances, such as anti-social behaviour and violence. TASC was set up as a multi-agency response to growing levels of alcohol-related violence and disorder in Cardiff focussing on eight main areas:

- focused dialogue between the police and members of the licensed trade;
- measures aimed at improving the quality and behaviour of door staff;

- a training programme for bar staff (‘Servewise’);
- attempts to influence licensing policy and practice;
- measures aimed at publicising the problem of alcohol-related violent crime;
- targeted policing operations directed at crime and disorder ‘hot spots’;
- a cognitive behavioural programme for repeat offenders (‘COV-AID’);
- a programme of education about alcohol for school-age children; and
- support for victims of alcohol-related assaults attending hospital.

The local police not only increased their presence during the early hours and arrested drunken young people for offences, but they also reflected on the nature of the problem they faced, and identified partners who could help in reducing problems. Comparing the year prior to the commencement of TASC with the year afterwards, there was a four per cent reduction in alcohol-related assaults despite a ten per cent increase in licensed premise capacity. During the same period, incidents of violence against the person rose elsewhere in South Wales.



When does problem solving work best?

Successful problem solving requires a clear focus: problem solving is more effective when it is focused on particular types of crime rather than total crime. Projects that try to tackle too much at one time can face serious implementation issues. It doesn't matter what crime and disorder problem it is focused on, but it should not be expected to solve all crime. It is less effective as a blanket response to everything. Establishing a clear focus is consistent with the SARA approach, where scanning identifies the most problematic issues. If you are operating SARA properly, and making use of the problem analysis triangle, then a clear focus should be identified.

Good analysis and intelligence gathering is crucial

The table below shows two examples of using problem solving approaches to address juvenile nuisance taken from the Home Office evaluation of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP, Tuffin, 2006).



Police response has positive result

Problem - criminal damage, throwing of eggs and stones; most commonly occurring between 3pm and 10pm during the week and 4pm and 10pm at weekends.

Victim(s) - One main victim, known

Offender(s) - Hard core of 8 named persistent offenders, aged 15-22, with previous convictions for criminal damage, public order, theft, robbery, burglary and assault

Police response has no impact

Problem – youths gathering in groups, seen to be threatening, abusive and noisy; perceived lack of local facilities for young people.

Victim(s) – ‘young to elderly, both male and female and from a range of ethnic backgrounds’

Offender(s) – ‘male and female youth from a range of ethnic backgrounds’

Note in the above table that where the police response had a positive impact, there was also a clear focus for the project, and the data and intelligence gathered was detailed and specific. This process involved the community in defining the nature of the problem. The subsequent problem solving strategy was specifically targeted at securing evidence against key offenders with the aim of prosecution.

In contrast in the second example where the police response had no impact a general problem was met with a general response (of high visibility patrol and youth diversionary tactics) and there was no specific information about the offenders.



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But... beware of potential analytical problems including data recording issues, or a limited analytical capacity. Problem solving relies on good quality information, otherwise searching and analysing may prove misleading. Sherman et al (1989) found serious flaws in identifying properties from which repeated calls for service were received. The computer logs failed to distinguish between callers at different addresses complaining about problems with the same property. Properties with multiple entrances, sometimes from different streets, were often registered as different addresses, causing confusion. This illustrates the need for analysis to be backed up with the local knowledge of officers to ensure problems are put into context.

A major issue may be the lack of available resources to carry out analysis. Crime analysts in your force are a key group of practitioners who can provide support in this process, but they are often in great demand. Many partners, and increasingly community safety partnerships, will have analytical capacity, and it may be worth exploring these avenues for analytical support.

Problem solving can be effectively used in conjunction with a hot spots approach: Many of the projects in the review were place-based; taking a location or groups of locations that shared characteristics as their base. For example, one study looked at hotspots for violent crime; another looked at drugs and disorder problems in neighbourhoods or communities. The finding that problem solving is more effective when used with hot spots policing, reinforces the point that problem solving is more effective when focused. Good problem solving analysis, when looking at locations, should help to identify hot spots. The secret therefore, is to analyse fully and properly.

But... problem solving is not just about places: Problem solving seems to be particularly effective when used in relation to offenders and victims. The Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) encourages us to look at problems from three broad perspectives – the location, the victim and the offender. The following examples from the review show how problem solving can also be used in relation to people:



Offenders	Victims
<p>A scheme to reduce juvenile re-offending.</p> <p>A project targeted at crimes committed by the homeless/transient population in a town.</p> <p>A project targeting begging at a busy road junction.</p>	<p>A project to improve the safety of students on their way to and from the university campus.</p> <p>A scheme to reduce the level violent crime against tourists in the vicinity of an airport.</p> <p>A project targeting robberies against Hispanic residents.</p>



Don't forget to assess the impact your response.

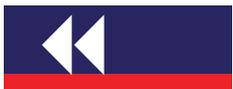
Use SARA, not SAR! The review provides clear evidence that the assessment phase of SARA is still not being completed as effectively as it should be. Proper assessment is often skated over or even missed altogether. In the face of pressures to deal with newly emerging problems, there is often a tendency to move to the next problem and response before earlier approaches have been properly evaluated or assessed. Throughout the problem solving process and all problem-solving models (not just SARA) assessment is critical. If you don't assess properly, the chances are that you will not be operating problem solving as effectively as you could be.

The more 'SARA' is adhered to, the better the outcome.

If the intervention does not have the desired effect the assessment phase will tell you this. One project examined by the review aimed to deal with the problem of school pupils being attacked on the way to and from school by creating "safe corridors" around school premises during the hours when pupils were on their way to and from school. In practice, this was particularly resource intensive and often resulted in officers not being able to patrol the corridors at the appropriate times; pupils were often leaving school in the afternoon around the time of a shift change, which further reduced the number of officers available to patrol the area. The result was that attacks (and fear of attack) actually increased, though other factors also contributed to this. Although the intervention backfired, the full application of SARA methodology meant that the police response was properly assessed and so when it failed the corridor was removed and alternative approaches tested.

Inform the public about police interventions.

One of the factors that caused the "safe corridors" project to fail was that many of the pupils at the schools did not know about it. It is critical, if you are developing a response that targets a particular group that they are made aware of the activity if it is appropriate. You must not expect people to hear about it - you need to be proactive in raising public awareness.



Problem solving appears to be most effective when police forces are fully committed to the concept and its approaches changes in key staff during projects; extensive non-problem solving work taking officers away from projects; and unrealistic workloads can get in the way of successful problem solving.

If problem solving is to work well, the organisation must understand its benefits and be committed to it. For force commanders and managers, this means creating the conditions that will allow problem solving to flourish, including:

- Encouraging creativity
- Working in partnership
- Ensuring effective assessment takes place
- Providing sufficient proper training at the right levels
- Giving officers time and support to problem solve properly.
- Providing suitable resources for collecting, compiling, analysing and disseminating data

While many of these are long-term aims, the review has clearly shown that problem solving is an effective way of operating. There is therefore no reason why forces and all officers should not commit to it as an effective way of working.



Implications for good practice

Be realistic about what problem solving can deliver: While the review has shown that problem solving is an effective way of dealing with crime and disorder, we should not think that it can solve all of our problems all of the time. The review found one study where officers were overwhelmed by having to deal with over 200 addresses, which were the source of a very high number of calls, in a relatively short period of time. Workloads must be kept to manageable and realistic levels and officers and staff should not be expected to tackle major problems in a short period of time. It is important that we set realistic expectations about what problem solving can deliver. Be realistic about what we should expect officers and staff to do with the time and resources available.

Follow the SARA process carefully and plan your response: Once you have analysed your selected problem, your response needs to be planned carefully, taking account of what resources you (and partners) may have available, any cost implications and the time constraints within which you are working. Don't forget to assess the effects of your response when it is underway.

The response really needs to be planned and managed properly and there are many project management techniques that can help. It is not suggested that you need to prepare a full project plan for a relatively small and focused response, but even for these you need to ensure that you know:

- What you will be doing
- Who will be doing it
- How much it will cost (if appropriate)
- When you will be doing it
- When it needs to be done by
- How you will check your progress

For the larger initiatives, for example a force wide or even BCU wide programme, you may need to think about adopting a more formal project management approach.



Further advice and guidance

General problem-solving/ POP advice and guidance

Goldstein, H. 1990. *Problem-Oriented Policing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Read T & Tilley N., 2000. *Not Rocket Science? : Problem Solving and crime reduction*. London. Home Office: Available here:

<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/hocrimereduc/crrs06.pdf>

Bullock, K. & Tilley, N. Eds. (2003) *Crime reduction and problem oriented policing*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan

Bullock, K., Erol, R. & Tilley, N (2006) *Problem oriented policing and partnerships*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan

Evaluation and assessment

The Home Office 'Passport to Evaluation' is a useful guide to how you can undertake and effective assessment of your interventions: Available here:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100413151441/crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/passport_to_evaluation.htm

Berry, G. & Carter, M. (1992) *Assessing Crime Prevention Initiatives: The First Steps*. London. Home Office. Available here:

<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/hopolicers/fcpu31.pdf>

Tilley N ed. (2002) *Evaluation for Crime Prevention (Crime Prevention Series – Volume 14)*, Cullompton, Devon; Willan

Online resources

The Police Executive Research Forum (USA) offers an extensive POP library where you can download resources, including training materials:

<http://www.policeforum.org/library.asp>

The Center for Problem–Oriented Policing (USA) hosts guides and other resources, including specific examples of POP implementation: <http://popcenter.org>

Examples of problem solving/ POP in practice

The Center for Problem–Oriented Policing (USA) administers the annual **Herman Goldstein Award**, which recognises innovative and effective problem–solving efforts around the world. You can view winners and finalist dating back to 1993 here: <http://www.popcenter.org/library/awards/goldstein/>

The UK Home Office set up the annual **Tilley Awards** in 1999. The awards celebrate local initiatives that demonstrate (a) the use of a problem solving model, (b) partnership working and (c) a measurable impact on crime reduction or community safety issues. The awards have a focus on high quality application of the SARA approach. Previous winners can be found here:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100413151441/>

<http://crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/tilley/tilleypreviouswin.htm>



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References

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Forrest, S., Myhill, A. and Tilley, N., 2005. 'Practical lessons for involving the community in crime and disorder problem-solving', London, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/hodpr/dpr43.pdf>

Maguire, M. et al, 2003. 'Reducing alcohol-related violence and disorder: an evaluation of the 'TASC' project'. London, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/hors/hors265.pdf>

Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy: Next steps in neighbourhood policing, 2009, London, Home Office. <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/homeoffice/safe-confident-neighbourhoods-strategy-2010.pdf>

Sherman, L., Buerger, M. and Gartin, P. 1989. Repeat call address policing: The Minneapolis RECAP Experiment Washington, DC Crime Control Institute

Tuffin, R., Morris, J., and Poole, A., 2006. 'An evaluation of the impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme', London, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
<http://library.college.police.uk/docs/hors/hors296.pdf>

Full review

Weisburd D, Telep CW, Hinkle JC, Eck JE. The effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2008;14. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.14.

You can access the full review online at:
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