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Evidence-Based Policing:
Reducing Crime and Disorder with Informed Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Police leaders all over the world are charged with identifying and effectively addressing crime and disorder problems so that the quality of life for constituents is maximized. If leaders are to realize success, they should look to the latest scientific research to determine what activities produce the best outcomes and then implement effective strategies. These strategies include hot spots policing with a strong problem-oriented and community-oriented policing component. If implemented correctly, the leader will realize positive outcomes such as a reduction in crime and disorder, as well as an increase in perceived police legitimacy. Additionally, evidence-based strategies increase efficiency, and this is particularly important in an environment where resources are scarce. There are some potential impediments such as police organizational culture and the resistance to change, but with the right implementation strategy, success is attainable. Police leaders should also realize that the displacement of crime and disorder to other sections of the community is generally not backed by research and so this issue should not be considered when implementing hot spots policing strategies (Weisburd et al., 2010). Properly implemented evidence-based policing strategies will reduce crime, improve police legitimacy, and increase efficiency in the use of resources, all without displacing crime to other locations in the community.

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INTRODUCTION

In a foundational article about evidence-based policing, criminology professor Lawrence Sherman (1998) defined the concept as "the use of the best available research on the outcomes of police work to implement guidelines and evaluate agencies, units, and officers" (p. 3-4). Sherman (1998) analogized the field of medicine with police work by discussing how the medical profession had been studying and implementing successful procedures based on rigorous studies. In this seminal work, Sherman (1998) introduced the paradigm by stating that, "Of all the ideas in policing, one stands out as the most powerful for change: police practices should be based on scientific evidence of what works best" (p. 2).

Since that foundational article, many rigorous experiments of police interventions have been conducted to determine what works. As a result, police practitioners all across the nation, and the world for that matter, have access to evidence-based policing strategies that if adapted for local use, have a strong potential for positive outcomes. According to Weisburd and Lum (2005) and Hickman and Reeves (2006), many police practitioners are engaging in these activities already by identifying, through the use of crime mapping, highly concentrated areas of crime which are referred to as hot spots (as cited in Taylor, Koper, & Woods, 2010). In fact, the Police Executive Research Forum found that hot spots policing strategy has emerged as a preferred strategy in the reduction of crime (as cited in Taylor et al., 2010). If police leaders are to engage their personnel in activities that produce positive outcomes, while increasing the perception of police legitimacy and making the most efficient use of available resources, they

should implement evidence-based policing strategies that include hot spots policing with a problem-oriented and community-policing component.

POSITION

The first position of this paper is that police leaders should consistently look to research to form their policing strategies because with its use, significant gains in the objectives of lowering the crime rate and public disorder are probable. A strong example of successful evidence-based policing strategies is crime hot spots policing with a problem-oriented policing component. Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau (2014) stated their research demonstrated that "hot spots policing programs generate statistically significant crime prevention gains…." (p. 635). Pierce, Spaar, and Briggs (1988) and Sherman, Buerger and Gartin (1989) confirmed that a majority of crimes are committed in relatively few locations within the same city (as cited in Braga et al., 2014). Additionally, Skogan and Frydl asserted that providing a focused strategy at a crime hot spot provides the best evidence of police effectiveness (as cited in Braga et al., 2014).

As evidence to back up their assertion of hot spots policing success, Braga et al. (2014) evaluated 19 studies that met their stringent criteria and found, "Twenty of 25 tests (80.0%) of hot spots policing interventions…reported noteworthy crime control gains" (p. 643). Of particular importance regarding the Braga et al. (2014) study was the researchers' discovery that, "problem-oriented policing interventions generated larger crime reduction effects in crime hot spots relative to interventions comprised of increased levels of traditional policing tactics" (p. 635). By problem-oriented policing, researchers generally mean activities that place a greater emphasis on, "situational crime prevention measures, civil law, and the leveraging of other government and

community resources" (Taylor, Koper & Woods, 2010, p.155). These studies serve as strong evidence that police leaders should focus the efforts of their officers in crime hot spot locations but with a committed problem-oriented policing plan in place.

In a specific example, Taylor et al. (2010) conducted research with the Jacksonville, Florida sheriff's office in which they compared strategies in violent crime hot spots. Using a randomized design, which provides the highest level of validity, they studied the implementation of vigorous problem-oriented policing strategies in certain hot spots as compared to directed saturation patrol in other hot spots. They also maintained control areas for comparison and these areas only received "traditional patrol operations" (Taylor et al., 2010, p.157). The interventions were over a 90-day period with an evaluation of crime for 90 days following the intervention. The most significant result of this study showed "the use of the problem solving intervention was associated with a 33% reduction in the count of 'street violence' during the 90-day post period" (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 169).

In another example of evidence-based policing research, researchers Braga, Welsh, and Schnell (2015) identified and reviewed 30 randomized or quasi-experimental tests in various United States or United Kingdom locations to see how the different policing strategies of disorderly behavior and conditions affected crime rates. Braga et al. (2015) concluded that, "Aggressive order maintenance strategies that target individual disorderly behaviors do not generate significant crime reductions" (2015, p. 581). Instead, Braga et al. (2015) determined that crime reductions are successfully achieved through specific location based problem solving strategies that are aimed at social and physical environmental changes.

One of the studies that Braga et al. (2015) examined was the Lowell, Massachusetts problem-oriented policing experiment conducted by Braga and Bond (2008). In this study, Braga and Bond (2008), working with Lowell Police Department, determined 34 separate crime and disorder hot spots. Using a randomized control designed experiment, they divided the total hot spots into two groups, a control group and a treatment group. Each hot spot in the treatment group received a one-year long problem-oriented policing intervention designed by Lowell police officers, and based on Eck and Spelman's (1987) scanning, analysis, response, assessment (SARA) model of problem solving (as cited in Braga & Bond, 2008). Braga and Bond (2008) noted that the problem solving plans generally lacked the breadth as recommended by the early pioneers of problem-oriented policing, Robert V. Clark and Herman Goldstein. However, the research indicated successful interventions.

Braga and Bond (2008) examined the three strategies of misdemeanor arrests, situational crime prevention, and the provision of social services. They used the total calls for service for the six months preceding the treatment time-frame as compared to the six months following the treatment. Braga and Bond (2008) determined that the total citizen calls about crimes were reduced in treatment areas relative to the control areas with a statistical significance of 19.8% for all crimes. Additionally, "robbery and nondomestic assault calls were reduced by a statistically significant 41.8 percent….and a statistically significant 34.2 percent…respectively" (Braga & Bond, 2008, p. 592). Burglary calls decreased by 35.5% while disorderly behavior calls went down by 14% (Braga & Bond, 2008). Researchers postulated that the moderate decrease in disorderly conduct calls was due to the community relationships established whereby

citizens were encouraged to call the police more often during the post-test period as related to the pre-test period (Braga & Bond, 2008). These studies serve as evidence for police leaders that, "tremendous resources exist today that can help them craft smart policing strategies" (Bueermann, 2012, p. 14).

The second position of this paper is that the use of evidence-based policing strategies, if implemented with an emphasis on a community policing and problem solving, have the potential of increasing police legitimacy while also reducing crime. According to the National Research Council (2004), legitimacy means the "judgments that ordinary citizens make about the rightfulness of police conduct" (as cited by Weisburd, Hinkle, Famega, & Ready, 2011, p. 301). Criminologists Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) reported that "there is substantial empirical evidence to show the importance of legitimacy in achieving law abiding behavior and cooperation from citizens…especially through what has been described as procedural justice (that is, quality of decision making procedures and fairness)" (p.119). Bottoms and Tankebe discussed the foundational work of Tyler (1990) about criminal justice legitimacy by citing his assertion that "people comply with the law not so much because they fear punishment as because they feel that legal authorities are legitimate and that their actions are generally fair" (as cited by Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012, p. 120).

With the recent implementation of evidence-based policing practices in hot spot areas, Kochel (2011) warned of the potential implications to perceived police legitimacy if implemented with only an enforcement based approach. Kochel (2011) stated, "aggressive or intrusive policing tactics, while effective as short term crime fighting strategies, may have long term implications for police legitimacy" (p. 366). Kochel

(2011) further cautioned police that crime hot spots are more likely to contain persons who are starting out with a historical distrust of police. To better understand the impact that hot spots policing has on communities, Kochel (2011) recommended rigorous studies that evaluate the types of strategies used and the impact these strategies have on citizens.

Contemporaneous to Kochel's recommendations, Weisburd et al. (2011) found no negative impact on police legitimacy as it relates to hot spot policing with a more aggressive strategy. Weisburd et al. (2011) used a randomized design experiment in which aggressive order maintenance policing strategies were employed over a period of seven months on street level segments in three California cities. This type of policing strategy, as chronicled by Wilson and Kelling (1982), is commonly referred to as "broken windows" policing (as cited in Weisburd et al., 2011, p. 298).   Weisburd et al. (2011) conducted citizen phone surveys before and after the treatment periods and found statistically insignificant results regarding police legitimacy that showed "slightly higher average evaluations of legitimacy than the control subjects" (p. 312). Even though more aggressive strategies in this experiment showed no negative impact on legitimacy, police leaders are cautioned to consider what activities are being used in hot spot areas because stringent enforcement of all laws serves to delegitimize the police as a whole (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012).

Problem solving with an emphasis on community partnerships may be the answer to maximizing police legitimacy. The introduction of the community-oriented policing (COP) philosophy at this point is instructive because of its impact on the perception of police legitimacy. In a study about community-oriented policing, the Office

of Community Oriented Police Services (2012) and Skogan (2006a) defined the philosophy as a "law enforcement philosophy comprising three key components: community partnerships, organization transformation, and problem solving" (as cited in Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter, & Bennett, 2014, p. 400). Some have even combined the concept of community policing and problem solving by calling it community-oriented policing and problem solving (COPPS) (Peak & Glensor, 2012).

Gill et al. (2014) scanned thousands of abstracts and then systematically reviewed 25 previous studies that contained a total of 65 treatment and control comparisons. In their article, Gill et al. (2014) pointed out that there is a difference between community-oriented policing (COP) and problem-oriented policing (POP) in that community involvement is a necessary component with COP and not necessarily so with POP. However, Gill et al. (2014) reminded the policing scholar of previous research by Weisburd, Wyckoff, Ready, Eck, Hinkle, and Gajewski (2010) that showed problem-oriented policing as an effective crime control strategy whether or not community policing is involved. Although Gill et al. (2014) found that COP, as it has been implemented in various ways in the past, does not reduce crime, they concluded that COP "increases satisfaction with the police, elements of police legitimacy, and citizen's perception of disorder" (p. 423). Gill et al. (2014) further stated that "strategies like problem oriented policing may mediate the relationship between community engagement and crime control" (p. 423). They concluded the article with the following: "Ultimately, the adoption of a community oriented philosophy by police departments, combined with a highly-focused, place-and problem-specific crime prevention

strategies, could be the precursor to creating long-term improvements and healthy communities" (Gill et al., 2014, p. 423).

The third position of this paper is that evidence-based strategies are necessary if police leaders are to get the most efficient use of their resources as it relates to lowering crime and disorder. In fact, the time has come to re-evaluate through research what exactly police are doing with their resources and more specifically, what officers are doing with their uncommitted time (Peak & Glensor, 2012). The evidenced-based policing practices of hot spots policing was born out of the lack of police resources and the need to prevent crime as efficiently as possible by properly using limited resources (Avdija, 2008). Evidence-based policing seems to be the answer because it "leverages the country's investment in police and criminal justice research to help develop, implement and evaluate proactive crime fighting strategies" (Bueermann, 2012, p. 12).

The recession over the last part of the previous decade and the first part of the current one has had a dramatic effect on law enforcement organizations (Bueermann, 2012). According to an Office of Community Oriented Policing Services report (2011), agencies had "reported changes in the delivery of law enforcement services, including not responding to motor vehicle thefts, burglar alarms and motor vehicle accidents that do not result in injuries" (as cited in Bueerman, 2012, p. 13). Retired police chief Jim Bueerman (2012) offered that evidence-based policing is a practical approach when it comes to balancing the needs of stakeholders, including the taxpayer. Bueerman (2012) further stated that evidence-based policing can be "implemented without adding law enforcement officers, disrupting police organizations, or offending community members" and can enhance police legitimacy (p. 13). Evidence-based policing

strategies, with their minimal fiscal impact, make the most efficient and effective use out of existing resources.

COUNTER POSITION

The first counter position to the implementation of evidence-based policing is that organizational culture poses a serious obstacle. Lum (2011) referenced this problem by stating that, "Unlike medicine and food, no governmental standards exist for the 'production' of policing services or public safety. As a result, policing practices are implemented based on organizational culture and political and community expectations rather than scientific findings" (as cited in Bueermann, 2012, p. 13).   The problem then lies with implementation, as evidenced by the findings of Gottsschalk and Gudmundsen (2009) who asserted that, "Despite the importance of the strategy execution process, much more attention is paid to strategy formulation than strategy implementation" (p. 171).   The starting point then for organizational strategy implementation is to recognize that culture is ingrained and it is built strongly on the ideology possessed by the organizational member (Gottschalk & Gudmundsen, 2009).

Atkinson (2006) identified several issues that contribute to the failure of strategy implementation: "top-down senior management style; unclear strategic intentions and conflicting priorities; an ineffective management team; poor vertical communication; weak coordination across functions, business or borders; and inadequate down-the-line leadership skills development" (as cited in Gottschalk & Gudmundsen, 2009, p. 174). Cockroft (2014) buttressed these contributions to failure by stating, "That those who do the 'dirty work' of policing and those who provide formal leadership might have conflicting agendas and aims and be subjected to different organizational pressures is

not a particularly new idea" (p. 6). Police departments will have to address these types

of organizational issues if there is to be any hope of successfully implementing

evidence-based policing strategies.

Researchers have recently taken a hard look at the receptivity of street officers

when it comes to employing evidence-based practices. Telep and Lum (2014)

researched three police departments, starting with the idea that, "one important step in

moving forward with evidence-based policing is to better understand the views of

practitioners and front-line officers and their receptivity to empirical research" (p. 360).

Telep and Lum (2014) developed a five section survey to gage officer receptivity and

overall understanding of evidence-based policing. The surveys were administered

between the years 2010 and 2012 and included large and medium sized agencies, both

urban and rural. Their results showed that only about one quarter to one half of

surveyed officers had even heard of the term evidence-based policing. Only one

quarter to approximately one third of officers had read any of the scholarly journals

related to evidence-based policing. An interesting result from the surveys was that

almost 90% of officers from one of the agencies thought that problem-oriented policing

was an effective strategy. The other two agencies rated between 65% and 70% when it

came to their view of the effectiveness of problem-oriented policing. However, results

for the favorability of hot spots policing was mixed between the three agencies. In the

largest agency surveyed, hot spots policing was generally looked at as ineffective and

there was a stronger favorability for traditional patrol methods. The other two agencies

showed a much higher favorability for hot spots policing. The results in this study tend

to indicate that understanding and receptivity rely on agency culture and the ability of leadership to effectively implement strategy.

Regarding culture and implementation, Sherman (2015) updated the state of evidence-based policing by asserting that although the practice is gaining momentum, many "encounter opposition from their colleagues" (p. 11). Sherman (2015) explained that there are still millions of police around the world who have never heard of evidence-based policing, let alone support it. However, in rebuttal to this counter position, Sherman (2015) provided optimism by advising that "several police agencies, in early 2015, were poised on the brink of a wide-ranging effort to use best evidence for changing the way police resources are used" (p. 12). This included agencies from Australia, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom (Sherman, 2015).

Sherman (2015) provided a pathway towards successful implementation by hypothesizing that in order to reach the tipping point of evidence-based policing, the profession needs an approach that meets the following conditions: "(1) Have a highly respected and powerful advocate for the evidence. (2) Using an evolutionary, not revolutionary approach (cited Innes, 2013) to overturn what I call 'a smothering paradigm' that rejects evidence contrary to the paradigm; and (3) responding to urgent external demand" (p. 15). Sherman (2015) offered up some ideas at the organizational level that could get the tipping point of evidence-based policing (EBP) going in the right way. They include the following ideas: "creating an EBP" unit within the agency, "offering a comprehensive EBP training program", and "sending a selected "power few" leaders and analysts to complete a master's level program each year" (p. 21). Sherman

(2015) further advocated "creating a permanent Central Registry of EBP Projects", "announcing an open invitation for projects", and establishing a peer review process (p. 21). To bolster success both internally and externally, Sherman (2015) recommended "retaining "embedded" PhD-level criminologists to review protocols, maintaining a public EBP website, creating "evidence cops in the EBP" unit, and "offering annual prizes" for the best projects (p. 21).

Another common counterpoint to evidence-based hot spots policing strategies is that it only serves to displace crime to other locations. Weisburd et al. (2010) attempted to address this issue by conceding first that, "if crime will simply move around the corner in response to targeted police interventions at hot spots, there is little reason for carrying out hot spots policing programs" (p. 1). However, in previous studies, Braga (2008) and Clarke and Weisburd (1994) found that much of the concern of displacement has proven unwarranted due to more of a diffusion of positive benefits around the targeted areas than the negative outcome of crime displacement (as cited in Weisburd et al., 2010).

Weisburd et al. (2010) made the issue of crime displacement the specific outcome to be studied instead of as a secondary outcome. The researchers conducted a randomized experimental design at two high crime locations in Jersey City, New Jersey. They designed the experiment so that each crime hot spot would have two high crime catchment areas near the hot spot where specific intervention strategies were purposely not employed. The interventions at the hot spot locations contained rigorous problem-oriented policing strategies that included the participation of crime prevention experts and external agencies. The researchers concluded from the data that there

was "a strong crime reduction effect in the target and catchment areas of both sites" (Weisburd et al., 2010, p. 11). In other words, researchers found no evidence of crime displacement but instead found evidence of the benefits of the treatment in the form of diffusion to the catchment areas. Weisburd et al. (2010) advised that this study, "adds strong support to a policy approach that focuses police resources at crime hot spots" (p. 12).

RECOMMENDATION

The most important facet of any profession, whether motivated by profit, external pressure, or moral obligation, is the determination of which activities produce successful outcomes so that those activities can be reproduced. To that end, police leaders should implement evidence-based policing strategies that include hot spots policing with a problem-oriented and community-oriented policing component. Evidence-based policing strategies not only serve to reduce crime and disorder but are an economically efficient use of resources. Additionally, evidence-based policing improves how the community views the police in the form of legitimacy. As demonstrated in the research cited here, evidence-based policing strategies work to produce the positive outcomes that stakeholders want. Strategies that are implemented in specific criminogenic places, and that contain both a problem-oriented and community-oriented policing element, hold the most promise in accomplishing positive outcomes.

The implementation of an evidence-based policing paradigm does not come without obstacles. The culture of the policing profession and the individual organizational cultures in agencies all across the world will need to evolve if there will be any successful implementation of evidence-based policing. Agency executives must

first start by making sure that prospective leaders are being properly selected and developed, and then they must commit to the evidence-based policing paradigm. As Sherman (2015) pointed out, the profession will need a well-respected person who will advocate for evidence-based policing, a gradual move away from the current paradigm, and some external pressure that will push for change. Additionally, leaders and practitioners of police craft must recognize from salient research that hot spots policing does not lead to crime displacement but instead to a positive diffusion of crime reduction benefits. Finally, police leaders must recognize the lessons from other professions that have employed evidence-based practices, most importantly the medical field. People, in general, have high expectations that medical professionals will employ the most effective evidence-based treatment methods when it comes to individual health decisions, and these expectations are typically met. The time has come for policing professionals to provide the same level of care for a deserving public in the form of evidence-based policing.

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