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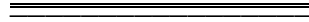
Hot Spot Policing: It Just Works

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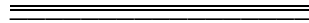
A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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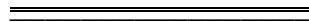
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ABSTRACT

Police are charged with crime prevention and control. One of the most effective strategies in accomplishing this mission is hot spots-based policing. Hot spots policing is putting more police in a geographically high crime area (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). It has empirically been proven as effective and results in diffusion benefits, rather than crime displacement consequences. All law enforcement agencies should adopt hot spots policing. They should also attempt to layer other ideas and strategies with it. Mental health of citizens is one recent way to show some effectiveness. Citizens approve of hot spots policing as a crime intervention strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies' primary goals are crime reduction and reducing fear of crime. Not all agencies agree on the strategies to reach these goals. There are many buzzwords in policing, such as servant leadership, community policing, procedural justice, and evidence-based policing. Much energy is spent by leaders to use these words and concepts initially but there is less energy used in practicing the methods by line level officers, and even less in follow-up or measuring results by mid-management. All police agencies should implement hot spot policing to reduce crime. Hot spot policing is a great way to get everyone in the department operating congruently. No single strategy will help all crime problems, but all crime strategies must be based in evidence and facts. Hot spots policing does such.

Hot spots policing entails a common focus of police responses where crime is concentrated geographically (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). There is no single tactic to address these high crime places, nor is there one specific way to implement hot spots policing. In Sherman and Weisburd's 1995 study (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) of the Minneapolis, Minnesota hot spots patrol experiment, they researched increasing officer time spent in the hot spots. This experiment showed place-based deterrence in crime when patrols were increased. Whether an experimental study or a quasi-experimental study both show evidence that hot spots policing is an effective policing approach (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). Putting cops in high crime areas worked and did not displace crime (Wellford & Lum, 2014). Weisburd (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018) showed a crime of concentration in "larger cities, about 1% of streets produced 25% of crime and 5% of streets about 50% of crime (p. 197). Avdija (2008) looked at

eight experimental studies and came to two conclusions about the studies that showed targeting policing is most effective if crime analysis is used to identify high crime areas and repeat offenders. The second conclusion dealt with clearly defining the intervention strategies which would focus on the specificity of offenses, offenders, and locations with times (Avdija, 2008). Avdija (2008) concluded that targeted policing is a successful proactive policing strategy. These are just a couple of examples of how effective hot spots policing has been and can be in the future.

POSITION

Police officers want to serve the community and help those in need. Not all police officers know how to do this in an efficient, directed manner. Policing is very haphazard with random patrols involving one patrol unit. The first position of this paper is hot spots policing is a game plan for the team on how to police. This is a good starting point to help improve policing and make it more efficient.

The very first hot-spots study mentioned earlier was the Minneapolis Hot Spots Patrol Experiment by Sherman and Weisburd (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014). Sherman and Weisburd's conclusion (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) was that an officer's mere visible presence in a hot spot led to decreases in crime. In Sherman and Weisburd's experiment, (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) officers were not directed to engage in any activity, only to spend increased time in the area. Koper's work (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) subsequently put an ideal time on this increased time at locations as 15 minutes. This is identified as the "Koper curve", which shows there is diminishing returns after that time and it graphs the duration spent until a plateau is reached, which is the 15-minute mark (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). This increased time

spent in hot spots were meant to be random and show offenders that police could be there at any moment (Weisburd & Telep, 2014).

Random 15-minute blocks of time spent in hot spot areas were used to design an experiment with the Sacramento, California, Police Department by Telep et al., (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014). Telep et al., (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) conducted a three-month randomized experiment, in 2011, with the preceding information as the direction. From 2011 looking back to the same three-month period in 2010 it showed the treatment groups had less calls for service and less Part I crimes than the control group (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014). This is a more recent example of how hot spot policing, utilizing a "Koper curve", works. It is such a simple strategy to get all the officers on the same page and it does not need much explanation.

The previous two examples were shown in large cities within the United States. Weisburd's work (as cited in Gill et al., 2016) found concentrations in Redlands, California and Brooklyn Park, Minnesota that 50% of crime occurred at 2.1% of street segments. That figure also matched Hibdon's work (as cited in Gill et al., 2016) in Fairfax County, Virginia, which is half as much as the 4-5% found in urban areas. Hot spots policing can work in both city and suburban settings.

The second position of hot spots policing is the layering of other strategies to increase the yield of effectiveness. Weisburd and Telep (2014) state another promising approach is to incorporate principles from problem-oriented policing to combat crime. Braga et al. (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) found that when layering problem-oriented policing on top of hot spots, it doubled the effect produced if only using police presence in a hot spot. Jacksonville, Florida received the first randomized experimental

study comparing hot spot treatments by Taylor et al., (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014). Taylor et al., (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) assigned a treatment group which received a saturation patrol response and the other group had officer focus on specific treatments in hot spots for problems. Taylor et al., reported a decrease in saturation areas during the intervention period whereas the problem-oriented policing hot spots showed no significant decline. However, after the experiment, street violence showed a 33% decrease, which was statistically significant where problem-oriented policing was used shown by Taylor et al. (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014). This research showed that problem-oriented solutions to hot spots might be more effective and can take time to show results.

In Ratcliffe et al.'s work (as cited in Weisburd & Telep, 2014) it showed a crime prevention strategy of foot patrols in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to be effective. High dosage foot patrols in hot spots showed a 23% reduction in violent crime compared to those areas with normal police service by Ratcliffe et al. (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). As Weisburd and Telep (2014) noted existing studies show preventative patrols at hot spots are effective in 15-minute increments. Some situational prevention, such as foot patrols can also be effective as well as other problem-oriented policing solutions. Foot patrols are a good alternative in a hot spot for many reasons including face-to-face contact with citizens, officer exercise, and saving fuel for patrol vehicles.

Another great example of layering strategies is using mental health professionals as co-responders in crime hot spots to address mental health problems (White & Weisburd, 2018). Lamin and Teboh (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018) stated that police officers have a large role of responding to a wide range of calls for service and

there is overlap with social service responsibilities. Lamin and Teboh (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018) argue that social workers should be housed at police departments. Weisburd (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018) found crime hot spots also had high rates of self-reported mental health issues. Weisburd (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018) found that non hot spots for violent crime, drug crime and violent crime showed PTSD at 4.6% compared to hot spots at 9.4%. Also rates of depression were self-reported at 13.1% for non-hot spots compared to a staggering 23.9% in hot spots (as cited in White & Weisburd, 2018).

White and Weisburd (2018) developed a program based on three strategies, including a co-responder model, a crisis intervention training model, and hot spots policing with problem solving and community policing. The teams, pairing a police officer and a mental health professional, first arrived in the areas making presence known and assessing any risks with the chance to prevent mental health crises (White & Weisburd, 2018). They walked around and engaged people by talking about issues in the neighborhood (White & Weisburd, 2018).   Teams focused on ways to improve the lives of those living there by implementing solutions to the problems they identified (White & Weisburd, 2018). The best thing about this tactic was the follow-up. The teams returned to same streets approximately two times a week (White & Weisburd, 2018).

The two goals of the program were to provide a proactive approach in hot spots, addressing mental health problems and building trust between the community and police, thus, improving the police department's legitimacy (White & Weisburd, 2018). The findings of this study showed police and mental health workers can successfully

take a proactive approach to mental health problems in hot spots (White & Weisburd, 2018). Evidence showed the program met its goals (White & Weisburd, 2018). The teams dealt with many citizens whose situations could have led to crisis and they had an impact on mental health (White & Weisburd, 2018). The program also might influence building trust with residents who may share more about criminal activity. Evaluation of the proactive mental health police partnership focusing, on crime hot spots, can be implemented successfully and help provide services for those with mental health problems. Such efforts like this program can prevent mental health crises (White & Weisburd, 2018). Strategies such as this can be layered upon hot spot policing for great results for the community.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

One of the main counter arguments when integrating hot spots policing is increased fear of crime from citizens, lower approval of police and finding the police procedurally unjust. Rosenbaum (as cited in Ratcliffe et al., 2015) states that simply being labeled a crime hot spot will cause the residents to feel their neighborhood is crime ridden and raise their fear of crime. This is very problematic as Weisburd et al. (as cited in Ratcliffe et al., 2015) showed that residents who feel less safe will withdraw, and, ultimately, more crime will rise.

Rinehart Kochel (2011) says there is a pre-occupation with what works, especially in the area of crime reduction, which obscures some of the policy implications. She states a possible policy implication is the police's legitimacy when new strategies are implemented on minority populations (Kochel, 2011). Hot-spots policing was integrated in response to contextual factors. She states the reform was

presented as a solution to a soaring crime problem, which was an effective crime fighting tool (Kochel 2011). It was presented with no negative consequences. Rinehart Kochel (2011) states hot spots policing was presented through a positive lens.

Rinehart Kochel (2011) states the public is increasingly willing to allow the utilization of crime control methods even when the consequences are unknown, such as legitimacy and possible civil liberty infringement. She states there is distrust of police and their use of discretion, which is one of the three items discussed by Goldstein (as cited in Kochel, 2011). The other two items by Goldstein (as cited in Kochel, 2011) were police often strayed from formal procedures and adopted informal arrangements to deal with problems, and the other was police used arrests too often for a variety of goals. All these things play into citizen's attitudes towards police. Rinehart Kochel (2011) says there are few studies that measure any outcomes beyond crime rates. She says the shift in focus from people to places relieves tension for police from explaining the failures of traditional police practices (Kochel, 2011).

Rinehart Kochel (2011) cites a positive lens the media portrays for the widespread support of hot spots policing. She said the media over-dramatizes high profile crime incidents and she points to more than half of a set of 25 articles that mentioned guns, shootings, or murders, which creates urgency in reducing these dangerous problems (Kochel, 2011). The media is blamed for showing the police as "knights in shining armor" (Kochel, 2011, p 360). The media portrays hot spots policing as a rational, cost-effective means in reducing crime in specific concentrated areas.

Social construction of hot spots policing shows a skewed image perpetuated by media, policymakers, scholars, and police (Kochel, 2011). She states if hot spots

policing was presented through a different lens, there would have been questions about legitimacy, discussions of bias, and lack of public support (Kochel, 2011). Legitimacy could be in danger by utilizing hot-spots policing (Kochel 2011). Rinehart Kochel does not provide any specific research in her argument that hot-spot policing could cause legitimacy issues for police.

Metcalfe and Pickett (2018) say there are two main reasons for measuring public opinion and those are policing strategies that are disfavored could lower police legitimacy and the other concern is public opinion can influence decisions of policy makers. Concerns are stated in Metcalfe and Pickett's (2018) work in that the public may perceive the targeting of specific areas as discriminatory and they could divide along lines of race. Kochel and Rosenbaum (as cited in Metcalfe & Pickett, 2018) state many hot spot targets are predominately lower income and minority. Metcalfe and Pickett (2018) further show there were four studies that explored whether residents became more afraid of crime or more distrustful or dissatisfied with police. Three of the previous studies (as cited in Metcalfe & Pickett 2018) included were Haberman et al. (2016), Ratcliffe et al. (2015) and Wesiburd et al. (2011). They found no change in citizen's fear nor their attitudes towards policing. Kochel and Weisburd (2017) found declines in citizen's perception of whether procedural justice was occurring and a reduction in the legitimacy of police. Some other studies including Bobo and Thompson (2010), Hagan et al. (2005), Peck (2015), and Weitzer and Tuch (2002, 2004, 2005) as cited in Metcalfe & Pickett (2018) show that blacks and Hispanics have more negative views of police and find them more unjust than whites do. Regarding influencing public policy, Cohen et al. (as cited in Metcalfe & Pickett ,2018) state the public is more willing

to spend money on policing than prisons, which contrasted with the opposite view several years before.

 In the study, Metcalfe and Pickett (2018) show 76 percent of their sample of 955 persons prefer police focused on patrolling the streets to prevent new crimes than investigating previous crimes. The most publicly supported hot spots policing strategy of situational intervention also has the most empirical evidence to back its use. Overall, in Metcalfe and Pickett's (2018) study they showed the public, the demographic, political, and regional groups supported focusing more resources on hot spots, regardless of whether less resources were available to other areas. A further finding was that Republicans, those of higher income, and blacks supported use of increased foot patrols in hot spots areas (Metcalfe & Pickett, 2018). Another item of interest they discovered was that arresting offenders for misdemeanor offenses frequently were viewed by the public as procedurally unjust (Metcalfe & Pickett, 2018). In every instance, they found hot spots policing to have strong public support for evidence-based police reforms. Overall, hot spots policing does not lower police legitimacy or perceived safety (Ratcliffe et al., 2015).

 Another argument against hot spots policing is crime displacement. Reppetto (as cited in Braga et al., 2019), a critic of place-based crime reduction, argues criminals will move to a different place where police are not as protective. The evidence, though, supports the opposite and shows a diffusion of crime control benefits rather than displacement, according to Clarke and Weisburd, Weisburd et al. and Bowers et al. (as cited in Braga et al., 2019).

Braga et al. (2019) looked at 65 studies that included 78 independent experimental and quasi-experimental tests of hot spot policing. Most of the evaluations, specifically 62 or 78, showed significant crime control benefits, and only 16 did not report significant crime control gains (Braga et al., 2019). Of the 78 tests, 40 of them could be assessed for crime displacement and diffusion of crime control benefits (Braga et al., 2019). Limited and unintended crime prevention benefits were associated with hot spots policing programs (Braga et al., 2019). The meta-analysis Braga et al. (2019) conducted showed a "small but statistically significant mean effect size favoring a diffusion of crime control benefits rather than a crime displacement effect" (p. 305-306). This shows that crime displacement is fiction when instituting hot spots-based policing with problem-oriented solutions for the community within the hot spot.

RECOMMENDATION

Police departments have utilized hot-spots policing since the mid 1990's. Hot spot policing has shown to be effective in crime reduction. For those that have not utilized it, now is the time to adopt this crime reduction technique and they should layer it with other strategies. All law enforcement agencies should adopt hot spots policing. Kochel and Weisburd (2019) state hot spot policing in high crime neighborhoods has the potential to show residents police are a capable resource willing to help produce social order with the residents' help. Citizen's fear does not rise with hot spot policing, especially if they are included in solutions when problem-oriented policing is involved.

Layering problem-oriented policing on top of hot spot policing shows to increase effectiveness even after the hot spot ceased to get direct attention. This shows the long-lasting impact of layering strategies. Another recent positive idea is layering

strategies of pairing a mental health professional with a police officer to stop mental health crises before they occur in hot spots. Hot spot policing does not lower police legitimacy or perceived safety by citizens (Ratcliffe et al., 2015). With hot spot policing there is a positive diffusion of benefits to areas surrounding the actual hot spot, not crime displacement, as some have suggested in the past.

With the advances in crime mapping and computers in every patrol car in 2020, now is the time to use the technology benefits to help prevent crime. One of the things that could be done with crime mapping is the elimination of traditional beats. Beat-based policing was to lower response times to calls for service, but if the high crime areas are targeted that will, in turn, lower response times. The majority of citizens support the police strategy of hot spot policing and it is the time to implement more solutions to further increase effectiveness.

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