

Community- and Problem-Oriented Policing

Police departments are under increasing pressure to produce positive results to make the streets safe to walk and free of crime. Meeting these demands has produced new strategic consequences for police departments. According to noted criminologist George Kelling, “the main consequence is that police strategy shifts from a reactive and inherently passive model to a preventive interventionist model” (Kelling 1999). This new mandate changes the way police go about their business. Two models that have developed in response to this pressure to change and that have gained popularity since the middle 1980s are community-oriented policing (COP) and problem-oriented policing (POP).

Community-Oriented Policing

COP started gaining acceptance as an alternative to traditional policing models beginning in the 1980s. The growing acceptance of COP helped set the stage for the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which articulated the goal of putting 100,000 additional community police on the street (Greene 2000). Where traditional policing prioritizes crime control and order maintenance, two of the three main functions of the police over the past 150 years, COP places a greater emphasis on the third core function, service provision or crime prevention activities (Greene 2000; Zhao, He, and Lovrich 2003).

At the heart of COP is a redefinition of the relationship between the police and the community, so that the two collaborate to identify and solve community problems. In this relationship, the community becomes a “co-producer” of public safety (Skolnick and Bayley 1988). COP is not a single coherent program; rather, it can encompass a variety of programs or strategies that rest on the assumption that policing must involve the community. Still, there are numerous elements frequently associated with COP programs, including at least these six:

1. The empowerment of the community
2. A belief in a broad police function
3. The reliance of police on citizens for authority, information, and collaboration
4. The application of general knowledge and skill
5. Specific tactics targeted at particular problems rather than general tactics such as preventive patrol and rapid response
6. Decentralized authority to better respond to neighborhood needs

Typical strategies used in COP include foot patrols, school resource officers, storefronts and ministations, the geographic assignment of officers, and neighborhood-based crime prevention activities (Zhao, He, and Lovrich 2003).

Suggested Reference: Development Services Group, Inc. 2010. “Community-and Problem-Oriented Policing.” Literature review. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Community_and_Problem_Oriented_Policing.pdf

Prepared by Development Services Group, Inc., under cooperative agreement number 2013–JF–FX–K002. Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

To some degree, the implementation of COP has changed indicators used to measure successful policing. For instance, there has been a growing acceptance of community-based outcomes (e.g., safety of community, perceptions of fear, calls for service) as a substitute for the outcomes prioritized under traditional policing [number of arrests made or crime reported] (Greene 2000).

Barriers to Implementing COP Strategies

Even though COP has now been around for decades, the pace of change within departments away from a traditional model of policing has been “glacial” (Greene 2000, 309). The research literature has identified numerous barriers that challenge the effective implementation of COP.

First, it is unclear how much the implementation of COP actually shifts policing away from the traditional or professional model of policing (see Zhao et al. 2003, on the three primary policing models). Greene (2000) describes what he sees as a cultural clash between street police and police administrations, with the street police concentrating on crime fighting (prioritized by the traditional model of policing) and administration concentrating on building partnerships and problem solving (emphasized by the COP model). Zhao and colleagues (2003) note that recent surveys of police departments show an increasing number of departments implementing COP strategies/programs, but the surveys also show the stability in the priority of core functions within departments, thus indicating a lack of impact of COP on the fundamental philosophy embraced by police departments. While many departments have adopted the symbolism of and use the language of COP, some researchers interpret such usage as “strategic buffering” (Somerville 2008, 267) to carry on with traditional policing activities as before. In other words, COP exists as an “add on” for public relations purposes, rather than representing a fundamental shift in policing philosophy (Greene 2000; see also Katz 2001).

Second, there appears to be inadequate training on COP principles and strategies, which affects how officers approach their work. Greene (2000) notes that COP training is usually an add-on to traditional training: COP was not even part of the picture when most training curricula were developed, and it appears that most programs offer less than 1 week’s time to prepare officers for this new way of policing. Since COP may require police to use skills not necessarily part of traditional training curricula—for example, building community relationships and fostering citizen involvement—the lack of training can impede effective implementation. This add-on approach to training may explain research findings such as those by Pelfrey (2004), who conducted a survey of COP and traditional officers in Philadelphia, Pa. Pelfrey found key similarities between the two groups of officers: the two groups were equally likely to endorse those traditional policing concepts. It appears that COP may be a layer added on top of, rather than replacing, traditional patrol concepts. Greene (2000) also notes that many of the interventions used in the name of COP are traditional methods of intervention (e.g., street sweeps, crackdowns). And even when officers embrace the philosophy of COP, they may lack the resources to implement COP in their daily work (Chappell 2009).

Third, some barriers arise from the critical role that communities play in effective COP. In theory, community representatives mobilize to interact with police, both identifying problems and potential solutions in public forums. In practice, though, those who participate in such activities may not be representative of the whole community (Forman 2008; Somerville 2008). Many individuals in communities remain unaware of COP activities, and those who are aware may choose not to participate (Adams, Rohe, and Arcury 2005; Eve et al. 2003). Communities differ in their abilities to reach consensus. Somerville thus sums up a paradox of COP—that is, that it works best where least needed (in relatively stable and homogeneous neighborhoods) and worst where most needed (in highly mobile

and heterogeneous neighborhoods) [2008, 267]. Additionally, communities may also work against the effective implementation of COP with their continuing demands for a police emphasis on crime fighting (Greene 2000), which draws resources away from crime prevention activities. Finally, Forman (2004) points out that juveniles are often not considered part of the “community” that police work with and that juveniles continue to be the frequent target, especially in high-crime and high-minority neighborhoods, of traditional interventions used by community police officers.

Theoretical Foundation

Herman Goldstein’s work, initially outlined in 1987, set the stage for the development of both community-oriented policing and problem-oriented policing. In his seminal article, Goldstein critiqued then-standard police practices as concentrated on the process of policing, rather than on end results, to the point where policing had become blind to the problems it was meant to solve (Weisburd et al. 2008). He argued that policing needed to shift away from the traditional model it had embraced, which was reactive rather than proactive. He laid out several requirements if police departments were to shift to a community-oriented policing, including the need for COP to become an organizing principle and fundamental philosophy for departments (Greene 2000). For Goldstein, COP meant that police needed to concentrate on solving the problems of crime and disorder in neighborhoods—in short, crime prevention—rather than simply responding to calls for service. This approach considerably expanded the scope of policing activities, since not only crime but also sources of physical and social disorder became targets of interest (Weisburd et al. 2008).

Another important context for COP was provided by Wilson and Kelling’s (1982) argument that disorder in the local community when it reaches a critical mass creates a potential for more serious crime and urban decay. Their “broken windows” theory predicts that small signs of disorder—such as a broken window—communicates the lack of social control and thus invites increasingly larger acts of disorder and crime. Untended property becomes fair game for people out for fun or plunder, and even for people who ordinarily would not dream of doing such things. Such an area is vulnerable to criminal invasion. In response, the police—to protect the community and establish control—must engage in order maintenance and make proactive arrests. Four elements of the broken window’s strategy explain its impact on crime reduction (Kelling and Coles 1996). First, dealing with disorder puts police in contact with those who commit more serious crimes. Second, the high visibility of police causes a deterrent effect for potential perpetrators of crime. Third, citizens assert control over neighborhoods, thereby preventing crime. And finally, as problems of disorder and crime become the responsibility of both the community and the police, crime is attacked in an integrated fashion.

Outcome Evidence

Evaluations of COP programs have produced mixed results. In fact, Somerville summarizes the evaluation evidence on COP as “far from encouraging” (2008, 267). For example, MacDonald (2002) notes that research does not support a causal connection between the adoption of a community policing plan and officer training and reductions in violent crime. He also discusses the mixed results on studies of particular strategies; for instance, some studies have not found a correlation between foot patrols and reductions in overall or violent crime, while other studies have found that violent crimes or victimizations declined in beats where officers made home visits or door-to-door contacts with citizens. Greene (2002) remarks that since many of the officers in COP programs either volunteer or are “creamed,” it is difficult to untangle what results can be attributed to the officers and what to the programs themselves. He also notes that the large variety of ways in which COP/POP is implemented leads to scant and variable results.

Perhaps the most ambitious community-policing program was developed in Chicago in 1993. The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) incorporates aspects of both community and problem-oriented policing (see “Problem-Oriented Policing,” below). The community-oriented approach is implemented by dividing patrol officers into beat teams and rapid response teams in each of the districts. Beat teams spend most of their time working their beats and with community organizations, while rapid response teams concentrate their efforts on excess or low-priority 911 calls. This structure enables officers to respond quickly and effectively to problems that they were not traditionally trained to handle. The problem-solving strategy is implemented by training officers and residents to use problem-solving techniques.

Skogan (1996) used a quasi-experimental design based on the differential changes in views and experiences of two groups over time to evaluate the prevention efforts of the CAPS program. Data was gathered from survey interviews with a random sample of residents. The first survey took place during April and May 1993. The respondents were again interviewed 18 months later, to measure changes in their perceptions of crime. The evaluation revealed evidence of improvement in every program area. The victimization component revealed a decrease in auto thefts in one district and street crime in another. Reports of drug and gang problems declined in two of the worst areas, as did the perceptions of physical decay. Graffiti went down significantly in the area where it was found to be the biggest problem.

Other evaluations have had less positive or no results. For instance, Weisburd, Morris, and Ready (2008) used a matched block randomized experimental design to evaluate the impact on youth of a community-oriented and problem-solving strategy in Redlands, Calif. The lack of effect is explained by the researchers as attributable to the unit of analysis: the census block unit was too large a geographical unit to reflect the targeted interventions that have proven in other “hot spot” policing efforts – which often concentrate on intersections or street segments – to lead to positive outcomes.

Evaluations of the Community-Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants have likewise been mixed. These studies have looked at the connection between Federal funding and crime rates, rather than looking at the impact of a particular program in a community. Zhao, Scheider, and Thurman (2002) found that COPS funding reduced property and violent crime in large U.S. cities. Likewise, Evans and Owens (2007) found that the police supported through COPS funding generated statistically significant reductions in auto thefts, burglaries, robberies, and aggravated assaults. By contrast, an analysis by Worrall and Kovandzic (2007) found that, when they took into account the preexisting effects of police spending on crime, COPS funding had little or no impact on crime.

Problem-Oriented Policing

Problem-oriented policing is a departmentwide strategy aimed at solving persistent community problems. MacDonald notes that it differs from COP “through its focus on specific crime problems and achieving crime reduction results rather than on the means of policing” (2002, 598). Police identify, analyze, and respond to the underlying circumstances that create incidents. The theory behind it is that underlying conditions create problems (Goldstein 1979). Thus officers use the information gathered in their responses to incidents, together with information obtained from other sources, to get a clearer picture of the problem (Eck and Spelman 1987). The traditional conceptual model of problem solving, known as SARA, follows these four steps:

- **Scan.** Identify problems and prioritize them incorporating community input.
- **Analyze.** Study information about offenders, victims, and crime locations.
- **Respond.** Implement strategies that address the chronic character of priority problems by

thinking “outside the box” of traditional police enforcement tactics and using new resources that were developed by the city to support problem-solving efforts.

- **Assess.** Evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy through self-assessments to determine how well the plan has been carried out and what good has been accomplished.

This process provides for a fresh uninhibited search for alternative responses. Some examples of alternative solutions include

1. Target hardening (i.e., reducing opportunities)
2. Changes in government services
3. Provision of reliable information to residents
4. Specialized training for police officers
5. Use of community resources
6. Increased regulation
7. Changes in city ordinances or zoning

In summary, the process represents a new way of looking at the police function. It is a way of thinking about policing that stresses the importance of the end product rather than the means. It overlaps with COP in that the community is often involved in defining the problems and identifying interventions (Greene 2000).

Outcome Evidence

The Problem-Oriented Policing Project conducted in Newport News, Va., provides evidence suggesting that problem-oriented policing is more effective than traditional policing. The Newport News Task Force designed a four-stage problem solving process: *scanning, analysis, response, and assessment*. An evaluation of the project revealed that officers and their supervisors identified problems, analyzed, and responded to these problems by applying the process. The number and diversity of the problems tackled showed that officers can solve problems routinely. The evaluation also showed that the problem-solving process is effective. In one case, burglaries in the New Briarfield Apartment complex were reduced by 35 percent. In another example of problem solving, robberies in the central business district were reduced by 40 percent (Eck and Spelman 1987). Other successful examples include using problem-oriented policing to reduce gun carrying in public (Kennedy, Piehl, and Braga 1996; Sherman, Shaw, and Rogan 1995), alcohol consumption (Putnam, Rockett, and Campbell 1993), and prostitution (Mathews 1993).

A more recent example of the problem-solving approach is Operation Ceasefire, which was designed to reduce illegal gun possession and gun violence in the community. Operation Ceasefire is one element of a collaborative, comprehensive strategy (which also includes the Boston Gun Project and Operation Night Light) implemented in Boston, Mass., to address escalating violent crime rates. It consists of a combination of aggressive law enforcement and prosecution efforts aimed at recovering illegal handguns, prosecuting dangerous felons, increasing public awareness, and promoting public safety and antiviolence campaigns. The goals of the program are to implement a comprehensive strategy to target, apprehend, and prosecute offenders who carry firearms, to put others on notice that offenders face certain and serious punishment for carrying illegal firearms, and to prevent youth from following the same criminal path. The program has two main elements: 1) a direct law enforcement attack on illicit firearms traffickers supplying youth with guns and 2) an attempt to generate a strong deterrent to gang violence (known as pulling levers).

Braga and his colleagues (2001) evaluated Operation Ceasefire using two separate methods: 1) a basic

one-group time series design and 2) a nonrandomized quasi-experiment to compare youth homicide trends in Boston with youth homicide trends in other large U.S. cities. The key outcome variable is the monthly number of homicides on victims 24 and younger. The data were collected from the Boston Police Department's Office of Research and Analysis. The youth homicide trends include data from 1991 to 1995 (pre-intervention) and 1995 to 1998 (post-intervention). The results provide evidence that Operation Ceasefire is a promising intervention for youth crime. The Ceasefire intervention was associated with a statistically significant decrease (63 percent) in the monthly number of youth homicides. Moreover, the trend comparison of other U.S. cities reveals that there is no national trend that explains the drop in youth homicide in Boston at the time of Operation Ceasefire.

A recent Campbell Collaboration meta-analysis on the effectiveness of POP (Weisburd et al. 2008) concluded that, while effect sizes are modest, POP is effective in reducing crime and disorder. Weisburd and colleagues identified 10 studies that met the inclusion criteria for the meta-analysis, a number they found surprisingly small given the widespread support for POP. They also identified an additional 45 studies with weaker methodological designs (pre/post designs with no comparison group) that indicate the positive effect of POP.

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