Problem-Oriented Policing

An overview for the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office

2013

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What is POP?

Problem-oriented policing is an approach to policing in which discrete pieces of police business (each consisting of a cluster of similar incidents, whether crime or acts of disorder, that the police are expected to handle) are subject to microscopic examination (drawing on the especially honed skills of crime analysts and the accumulated experience of operating field personnel) in hopes that what is freshly learned about each problem will lead to discovering a new and more effective strategy for dealing with it. Problem-oriented policing places a high value on new responses that are preventive in nature, that are not dependent on the use of the criminal justice system, and that engage other public agencies, the community and the private sector when their involvement has the potential for significantly contributing to the reduction of the problem. Problem-oriented policing carries a commitment to implementing the new strategy, rigorously evaluating its effectiveness, and, subsequently, reporting the results in ways that will benefit other police agencies and that will ultimately contribute to building a body of knowledge that supports the further professionalization of the police. **Herman Goldstein (2001)***

Herman Goldstein, early founder of POP approach

In other words, crime is not just a police problem; it's a community problem. POP is a way of looking at community problems through the lens of a police agency, figuring out what to do about that problem and bringing all resources/stakeholders to the table to work together on the problem. It doesn't mean that deputies will do all of the work, but it does require deputies to play a significant role in the Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment of problems and to be actively engaged in solutions.

*Some information contained within this document was created by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing. It was taken from the POP Center website and put in a format to be used for agency training.

History of Problem-Oriented Policing*

In the late 1970's, researchers, police professionals, and policymakers became interested in improving the effectiveness of policing. Research during this period pointed out the limitations of random patrol, rapid response, and follow-up criminal investigations–practices that had been the foundation of policing for many years. These findings laid the groundwork for the emergence of problem-oriented policing. The research yielded important insights:

- Police deal with a range of community problems, many of which are not strictly criminal in nature.

- Arrest and prosecution alone–the traditional functions of the criminal justice system–do not always effectively resolve problems.

- Giving the officers, who have great insight into community problems, the discretion to design solutions is extremely valuable to solving the problems.

- Police can use a variety of methods to redress recurrent problems.

- The community values police involvement in non-criminal problems and recognizes the contribution the police can make to solving these problems.

Early experiments in problem-oriented policing occurred in Madison, Wisconsin; London; and Baltimore County, Maryland in the early 1980's. The first evaluation of an agency-wide implementation of problem-oriented policing took place in the Newport News, Virginia Police Department by the Police Executive Research Forum in the mid-1980's. Since then, many police agencies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand have continued to experiment with problem-oriented policing, to apply it to a wide range of crime and disorder problems, and to change their organizations to better support problem-oriented policing.

As problem-oriented policing has evolved over the last two decades, researchers and practitioners have focused on the evaluation of problems, the importance of solid analysis, the development of pragmatic responses, and the need to strategically engage other resources–including community members, city departments and government agencies, and local business and service organizations.

The Key Elements of POP*

- A problem is the basic unit of police work rather than a crime, a case, calls, or incidents.

- A problem is something that concerns or causes harm to citizens, not just the police. Things that concern only police officers are important, but they are not problems in this sense of the term.

- Addressing problems means more than quick fixes: it means dealing with conditions that create problems.

- Police officers must routinely and systematically analyze problems before trying to solve them, just as they routinely and systematically investigate crimes before making an arrest. Individual officers and the department as a whole must develop routines and systems for analyzing problems.

- The analysis of problems must be thorough even though it may not need to be complicated. This principle is as true for problem analysis as it is for criminal investigation.

- Problems must be described precisely and accurately and broken down into specific aspects of the problem. Problems often aren't what they first appear to be.

- Problems must be understood in terms of the various interests at stake. Individuals and groups of people are affected in different ways by a problem and have different ideas about what should be done about the problem.

- The way the problem is currently being handled must be understood and the limits of effectiveness must be openly acknowledged in order to come up with a better response.

- Initially, any and all possible responses to a problem should be considered so as not to cut short potentially effective responses. Suggested responses should follow from what is learned during the analysis. They should not be limited to, nor rule out, the use of arrest.

- The police must pro-actively try to solve problems rather than just react to the harmful consequences of problems.

- The police department must increase police officers' freedom to make or participate in important decisions. At the same time, officers must be accountable for their decision-making.

- The effectiveness of new responses must be evaluated so these results can be shared with other police officers and so the department can systematically learn what does and does not work. (Michael Scott and Herman Goldstein 1988.)

The concept of problem-oriented policing can be illustrated by an example. Suppose police find themselves responding several times a day to calls about drug dealing and vandalism in a neighborhood park. The common approach of dispatching an officer to the scene and repeatedly arresting offenders may do little to resolve the long term crime and disorder problem. If, instead, police were to incorporate problem-oriented policing techniques into their approach, they would examine the conditions underlying the problem. This would likely include collecting additional information—perhaps by surveying neighborhood residents and park users, analyzing the time of day when incidents occur, determining who the offenders are and why they favor the park, and examining the particular areas of the park that are most conducive to the activity and evaluating their environmental design characteristics. The findings could form the basis of a response to the problem behaviors. While enforcement might be a component of the response, it would unlikely be the sole solution because, in this case, analysis would likely indicate the need to involve neighborhood residents, parks and recreation officials and others.

Problem-oriented policing can be applied at various levels of community problems and at various levels in the police organization. It can be applied to problems that affect an entire community, involving the highest level of police agency, government, and community resources. It can be applied at intermediate levels (for example, a neighborhood or a police district), involving an intermediate level of resources. Or it can be applied at a very localized level (for example, a single location or a small group of problem individuals), involving the resources of only a few police officers and other individuals.

The SARA Model[*]

A commonly used problem-solving method is the SARA model (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment). The SARA model contains the following elements:

Scanning
- Identifying recurring problems of concern to the public and the police.
- Identifying the consequences of the problem for the community and the police.
- Prioritizing those problems.
- Developing broad goals.
- Confirming that the problems exist.
- Determining how frequently the problem occurs and how long it has been taking place.
- Selecting problems for closer examination.

Analysis
- Identifying and understanding the events and conditions that precede and accompany the problem.
- Identifying relevant data to be collected.
- Researching what is known about the problem type.
- Taking inventory of how the problem is currently addressed and the strengths and limitations of the current response.
- Narrowing the scope of the problem as specifically as possible.
- Identifying a variety of resources that may be of assistance in developing a deeper understanding of the problem.
- Developing a working hypothesis about why the problem is occurring.

Response
- Brainstorming for new interventions.
- Searching for what other communities with similar problems have done.
- Choosing among the alternative interventions.
- Outlining a response plan and identifying responsible parties.
- Stating the specific objectives for the response plan.
- Carrying out the planned activities.

Assessment
- Determining whether the plan was implemented (a process evaluation).
- Collecting pre– and post–response qualitative and quantitative data.
- Determining whether broad goals and specific objectives were attained.
- Identifying any new strategies needed to augment the original plan.
- Conducting ongoing assessment to ensure continued effectiveness.

Problem Analysis Triangle[*]

While the SARA model is useful as a way of organizing the approach to recurring problems, it is often very difficult to figure out just exactly what the real problem is. The problem analysis triangle (sometimes referred to as the crime triangle) provides a way of thinking about recurring problems of crime and disorder. This idea assumes that crime or disorder results when (1) likely offenders and (2) suitable targets come together in (3) time and space, in the absence of capable guardians for that target. A simple version of a problem analysis triangle looks like this:

Offenders can sometimes be controlled by other people: those people are known as handlers. Targets and victims can sometimes be protected by other people as well: those people are known as guardians. And places are usually controlled by someone: those people are known as managers. Thus, effective problem-solving requires understanding how offenders and their targets/victims come together in places, and understanding how those offenders, targets/victims, and places are or are not effectively controlled. Understanding the weaknesses in the problem analysis triangle in the context of a particular problem will point the way to new interventions. A complete problem analysis triangle looks like this:

Problems can be understood and described in a variety of ways. No one way is definitive. They should be described in whichever way is most likely to lead to an improved understanding of the problem and effective interventions. Generally, incidents that the police handle cluster in four ways:

- *Behavior*. Certain behavior(s) is (are) common to the incidents. For example, making excessive noise, robbing people or businesses, driving under the influence, crashing vehicles, dealing drugs, stealing cars. There are many different behaviors that might constitute problems.

- *Place*. Certain places can be common to incidents. Incidents involving one or more problem behaviors may occur at, for example, a street corner, a house, a business, a park, a neighborhood, or a school. Some incidents occur in abstract places such as cyberspace, on the telephone, or through other information networks.

- *Persons*. Certain individuals or groups of people can be common to incidents. These people could be either offenders or victims. Incidents involving one or more behaviors, occurring in one or more places may be attributed to, for example, a youth gang, a lone person, a group of prostitutes, a group of chronic inebriates, or a property owner. Or incidents may be causing harm to, for example, residents of a neighborhood, senior citizens, young children, or a lone individual.

- *Time*. Certain times can be common to incidents. Incidents involving one or more behaviors, in one or more places, caused by or affecting one or more people may happen at, for example, traffic rush hour, bar closing time, the holiday shopping season, or during an annual festival.

There is growing evidence that, in fact, crime and disorder does cluster in these ways. It is not evenly distributed across time, place, or people. Increasingly, police and researchers are recognizing some of these clusters as:

- Repeat offenders attacking different targets at different places.
- Repeat victims repeatedly attacked by different offenders at different places.
- Repeat places (or hot spots) involving different offenders and different targets interacting at the same place.

The Problem Analysis Triangle was derived from the routine activity approach to explaining how and why crime occurs. This theory argues that when a crime occurs, three things happen at the same time and in the same space:

- a suitable target is available.
- there is the lack of a suitable guardian to prevent the crime from happening.
- a motivated offender is present.

Situational Crime Prevention[*]

While the Problem Analysis Triangle helps to analyze problems, situational crime prevention provides a framework for intervention. By assessing the opportunities that specific situations offer for crime, situational crime prevention has identified five main ways in which situations can be modified. These are:

- Increasing the effort the offender must make to carry out the crime.
- Increasing the risks the offender must face in completing the crime.
- Reducing the rewards or benefits the offender expects to obtain from the crime.
- Removing excuses that offenders may use to "rationalize" or justify their actions.
- Reducing or avoiding provocations that may tempt or incite offenders into criminal acts.

These five approaches to reducing opportunity can be expanded to list 25 techniques of situational crime prevention. *(See pg. 9 for techniques.)*

These techniques have been constructed according to two important theoretical premises: that "opportunity makes the thief" (opportunity theory) and that the offender (or would-be offender) makes choices (rational choice theory) in order to make the best of those opportunities.

25 Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention*

TWENTY FIVE TECHNIQUES OF SITUATIONAL PREVENTION

Increase the Effort	Increase the Risks	Reduce the Rewards	Reduce Provocations	Remove Excuses
1. Target harden • Steering column locks and immobilisers • Anti-robbery screens • Tamper-proof packaging	6. Extend guardianship • Take routine precautions: go out in group at night, leave signs of occupancy, carry phone • "Cocoon" neighborhood watch	11. Conceal targets • Off-street parking • Gender-neutral phone directories • Unmarked bullion trucks	16. Reduce frustrations and stress • Efficient queues and polite service • Expanded seating • Soothing music/muted lights	21. Set rules • Rental agreements • Harassment codes • Hotel registration
2. Control access to facilities • Entry phones • Electronic card access • Baggage screening	7. Assist natural surveillance • Improved street lighting • Defensible space design • Support whistleblowers	12. Remove targets • Removable car radio • Women's refuges • Pre-paid cards for pay phones	17. Avoid disputes • Separate enclosures for rival soccer fans • Reduce crowding in pubs • Fixed cab fares	22. Post instructions • "No Parking" • "Private Property" • "Extinguish camp fires"
3. Screen exits • Ticket needed for exit • Export documents • Electronic merchandise tags	8. Reduce anonymity • Taxi driver IDs • "How's my driving?" decals • School uniforms	13. Identify property • Property marking • Vehicle licensing and parts marking • Cattle branding	18. Reduce emotional arousal • Controls on violent pornography • Enforce good behavior on soccer field • Prohibit racial slurs	23. Alert conscience • Roadside speed display boards • Signatures for customs declarations • "Shoplifting is stealing"
4. Deflect offenders • Street closures • Separate bathrooms for women • Disperse pubs	9. Utilize place managers • CCTV for double-deck buses • Two clerks for convenience stores • Reward vigilance	14. Disrupt markets • Monitor pawn shops • Controls on classified ads. • License street vendors	19. Neutralize peer pressure • "Idiots drink and drive" • "It's OK to say No" • Disperse troublemakers at school	24. Assist compliance • Easy library checkout • Public lavatories • Litter bins
5. Control tools/ weapons • "Smart" guns • Disabling stolen cell phones • Restrict spray paint sales to juveniles	10. Strengthen formal surveillance • Red light cameras • Burglar alarms • Security guards	15. Deny benefits • Ink merchandise tags • Graffiti cleaning • Speed humps	20. Discourage imitation • Rapid repair of vandalism • V-chips in TVs • Censor details of modus operandi	25. Control drugs and alcohol • Breathalyzers in pubs • Server intervention • Alcohol-free events

10 Principles of crime opportunity*

1. Opportunities play a role in causing all crime, not just common property crime – For example, studies of bars and clubs show how their design and management play an important role in generating violence or preventing it.

2. Crime opportunities are highly specific – For example the theft of cars for joyriding has a different pattern of opportunity than theft for car parts. Crime opportunity theory helps sort out these differences so responses can be appropriately tailored.

3. Crime opportunities are concentrated in time and space – Dramatic differences are found from one address to another even in a high crime area. Crime shifts greatly by the hour and day of the week, reflecting the opportunities to carry it out.

4. Crime opportunities depend on everyday movements of activity – Offenders and targets shift according to routine activities (e.g. work, school, leisure). For example burglars visit houses in the day when the occupants are out at work or school.

5. One crime produces the opportunities for another – For example, a successful break-in may encourage the offender to return in the future or a youth who has his bike stolen may feel justified in taking someone else's as a replacement.

6. Some products offer more tempting crime opportunities – For example easily carried electrical items such as DVD players and mobile phones are attractive to burglars and robbers.

7. Social and technological changes produce new crime opportunities – Products are most vulnerable in their 'growth' and 'mass marketing' stages, as demand for them is at its highest. Most products will reach a 'saturation' stage where most people have them and they then are unlikely to be stolen.

8. Crime can be prevented by reducing opportunities – The opportunity reducing methods of situational crime prevention can be applied to all aspects of everyday life, but they must be tailored to specific situations.

9. Reducing opportunities does not usually displace crime – Wholesale displacement is very rare and many studies have found little if any crime displacement.

10. Focused opportunity reduction can produce wider declines in crime – Prevention measures in one area can lead to a reduction in another nearby, a 'diffusion of benefits'. This is because offenders might overestimate the reach of those measures.

Offending behavior involves decision-making and the making of choices, which are constrained by time, cognitive ability and information, resulting in a 'limited' rather than a 'normal' rationality for the offender.

Decisions and factors that affect offender decision-making vary greatly at both the different stages of the offense and among different offenses. Cornish and Clarke (1998) therefore stress the need to be crime-specific when analyzing offender decision-making and choice selection, and to treat separately decisions relating to the various stages of involvement in offenses. For example, treating decisions relating to the offenders' initial involvement in the offense separately from decisions relating to the event, such as choice of target. This, they claim, allows a more 'holistic' view of offender decision and choice making and a broader analysis from which to implement appropriate interventions.

POP in Washtenaw County

Current Projects

As the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office we have several active POP projects. Some began over three years ago and some are just in the planning stages. Some focus on a specific crime while others focus on a particular geographic area or neighborhood. A few of them are long-term projects that will take years before we see the fruits of our labor and some are projects that we have already started to see results. However, all of them were ideas that came from one of our deputies or sergeants from the road. Below are just a few of those projects.

E.A.S.Y.

Enforcement Against Streetworkers in Ypsilanti began as an idea to deal with the root causes of prostitution in the Michigan Ave. corridor. For years we had been doing a very good job of arresting prostitutes and Johns and locking them up, but the issue was that they often went back to the streets once released from custody and no one was dealing with the root causes of prostitution in our community, addiction.

The WCSO brought together a group of stakeholders (township officials, judges, YPD, and local organizations PORT and Home of New Vision) with the goal of building upon what we already had in place.

- We first partnered with YPD to coordinate future stings. This way both agencies would be working together on the problem.
- Judges agreed to make a "no prostitution" zone. This made it so that any known prostitute could have a condition of their bond that would prevent them from being in the area known for prostitution.
- PORT agreed to come out for each sting. This means that whenever a prostitute is arrested PORT staff would be there to evaluate them. From that evaluation PORT makes a recommendation to the judge and that recommendation then becomes a part of the courts sentence.
- The jail now holds them instead of book and release. This sends a clear message that you will spend time in jail for prostitution and allows for PORT to establish a better relationship in the jail, continue to work with them, and ultimately begin addressing the root causes of why they are involved in prostitution.
- Home of New Vision (who deals with substance abuse) has several beds at a residential placement facility that the women are encouraged to participate in once they are released from jail.

The goal is to get them off the street for good and to deal with the real reasons why they became prostitutes in the first place.

Macarthur Blvd

For decades the Blvd. has seen high crime rates and a never-ending cycle of deputy time spent within the area with little to no change in the culture or crime rate within the area. The purpose of this project is to create real sustainable change within the neighborhood allowing for less crime and a better quality of life for residents. We began by pulling together a group of stakeholders (township officials, owners and managers of both properties, residents, the Office of Community Development and deputies) and from that meeting developed 20 tasks.

These tasks ranged from reorganizing parking, better lighting, adjusting lease agreements, improving communication between deputies and apartment managers, sharing police reports with apartment managers, build community amongst residents and work to address the issues with the party store. Since that first meeting we have seen a comprehensive strategy take shape and have evidence that significant crime reductions have taken place.

- We created a special enforcement team that focused on the Blvd. area. The goal was to send a clear message to the community that crime would not be tolerated.

- Deputies initiated random liquor control checks and began to focus on holding the party storeowners accountable for the conditions surrounding their business.
- Apartment management began to have illegally parked vehicles towed and restructured parking making it difficult for non-residents to park and hang out on the long-strip and beginning to change the culture of the community.
- Deputies and Apartment management began working together to share information and focus on problem tenants.
- As crime began to slow we transitioned from a full focus team to 2 Neighborhood Enforcement Team deputies who's job is to continue the crime reduction progress while continuing to build relationships with residents.
- Programs like Neighborhood Watch meetings, Ballin' On The Blvd. and Movie Night were implemented to begin building a sense of community amongst residents.

Although there is much more work to be done, there is clear evidence that deputies efforts have had a considerable impact on reducing crime and starting to change the culture within the community.

Additional Projects

These are additional projects and project ideas that are in varying stages. Some are up and running while others are ideas that may not have begun.

West Willow
Similar to the Macarthur Blvd project, with a few additional resident focused resources, the West Willow project has also seen a reduction in crime and a clear increase in perceptions of safety amongst residents as well as improved perception of the WCSO.

Rental Property Form
Created by Farst and Crain, the rental property form (Farkin Form) was put in place in order to deal with the issue of problem rental properties. The purpose is to make sure rental property owners are aware of any problem tenants they may have.

Graffiti
Proposed by Deputy Hankamp as a way to address illegal tagging by youth in the community, the high school graffiti project is a way to have young people rewarded for reporting illegal tagging.

Riley Ct.

Organized by Sgt. Mahalick with the assistance of Deputies Kittle and Adkins the purpose was to focus on cleaning up Riley Ct. They began by photographing the issues, pulling crime reports and working with township ordinance in order to help clean up the area.

Resources

POP Center

The POP center website (www.popcenter.org) offers a wide range of online resources. Download POP guides, visit the interactive "solve any problem" Problem Analysis Module, review numerous case study reports of successful POP projects from across the country.

POP Library

The Community Engagement Sergeant maintains our Problem Oriented Policing Library. There are hundreds of POP Guides available for you to review.

Crime Analyst

The WCSO has added the position of Crime Analyst to ensure deputies have the tools necessary to fully implement POP.

CrimeView Mobile Dashboard

A new tool developed by CLEMIS the CrimeView Mobile Dashboard will give deputies real-time digital information to manage and monitor crime trends.

POP Conference Annual Training

Each year the WCSO sends the largest contingent of any other agency attending the conference. The goal is to get the best possible training available to staff.