Problem-Oriented Policing Survey Demonstration

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP; see http://www.popcenter.org/) involves a proactive, "upstream" approach to improving public safety. Rather than responding separately to isolated events, police work to identify clusters of incidents (aka problems) that have something in something in common (e.g., same offense, location, victim type, offender type, etc.). These problems are then subject to in-depth analysis to detail <u>who</u> is involved, <u>what</u> the problematic behaviors and harms are, <u>when</u> the incidents are happening, <u>where</u> they are occurring, and <u>why</u> – factors that are contributing to the problem. Armed with the information, police and collaborating partners are better equipped to generate effective strategies for preventing further incidents.

Provided below is a demonstration of the use of community surveys in POP. This includes the actual survey forms used, the datasets and analyses, and the final presentation of results from each phase. For the sake of this demonstration, we created an imaginary location (Sara City) with roughly 36,000 households and 80,000 residents. The local chief of police, Herman Gold, directed his staff to complete a POP project for a long-term, persistent problem over the coming year, including three community surveys conducted at different stages of the process.[1] Before we get to the surveys, we provide a brief summary of the SARA model and the use of community surveys in POP.

1. The SARA model

    The four key stages of a POP effort should be conducted via the SARA model. SARA stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment.

    - Scanning involves identifying public safety issues (crime, quality of life, fear) that are of concern to the community, cause some type of harm, and are within the scope of police responsibility. Problems can be identified by officers, crime analysts, or community members.
    - During the Analysis phase of a POP project, personnel (crime analyst, officer, etc.) work to detail the five W's noted above. The primary objectives of analysis are to narrow the scope of the problem, to identify contributing factors, to evaluate prior strategies for dealing with the problem, and to look for intervention opportunities.
    - In the Response phase, efforts are taken to form partnerships with key stakeholders, generate and weigh possible interventions, and then implement the selected strategy(ies).

---

[1] We administered the surveys to a national sample. Hence, the data are real, just not from Sara City.

- Lastly, the Assessment phase requires an ongoing effort to document the implementation of the chosen strategy (i.e., process evaluation) and assess whether the target problem is reduced (i.e., outcome evaluation).

2. Community Surveys in POP

Community surveys can play a key role in POP and implementation of the SARA model. At the Scanning phase, surveys can used to identify ongoing or emerging public safety problems that affect the local community. This often uncovers issues that are not fully documented in official police data systems. Community surveys can help to narrow the scope of a problem during the Analysis phase, including gathering data regarding temporal and geographic patterns as well as why the problem may be occurring. There are several benefits of community surveys when it comes to brainstorming and prioritizing intervention strategies during the Response phase. Community members may suggest novel or innovative approaches to a problem. Likewise, surveys are useful for gauging community support for intervention strategies proposed by the police. Practices that anger or alienate large sections of the community are unlikely to be productive in the end (see Engel & Eck, 2015). Asking people for input on a problem, usually increases their commitment to collaboration, and most efforts to prevent crime require some degree of community engagement. Finally, when it comes to Assessing the outcomes of a POP project, community surveys can be invaluable. You can ask community members about changes they observed in the target problem, their perceived safety, and their satisfaction with police efforts to address the issue.

3. Scanning Survey Demonstration

The primary goals for the Sara City Police Department's scanning survey were to identify problems that are of concern to community members and businesses to assess the impact of these problems. Secondary goals included learning more detail about the issues identified, determining where in the city these problems are worst, and learning what community members and business want the police to do about these issues.

The ultimate outcome of the scanning phase was to identify one overarching public safety topic that the city could focus on in the coming months. Clarke and Eck (2005) suggest that POP initiatives should prioritize problems that: a) impact the community, b) cause harm to people or institutions, c) are perceived to be within the scope of police authority, d) involve discreet events that share something in common, and e) are recurring. The results of the survey supported a POP initiative focusing on traffic safety.

Files for the Scanning survey:
- Invitation to Online Survey ([PDF](PDF))

- Online version of the survey ([Link](#))
- Paper version of the survey ([PDF](#))
- Data file ([Excel](#))[2]
- Presentation of findings ([PDF](#))

4. Analysis and Response Survey Demonstration

The Sara City Police Department used a single online survey to cover the Analysis and Response phases of their POP project. Their first objective was to dig deeper into traffic safety and identify the specific behaviors that were of concern to residents. They used both open-ended and fixed-choice questions for this purpose. The second objective was to identify potential intervention sites. The survey presented respondents with a map that divided Sara City into 10 areas. People then 'clicked' with their mouse to identify the three most dangerous locations for driving, biking, and walking. A third goal was to solicit intervention ideas from the community. This involved a single open-ended question: "*What could the SCPD do to improve traffic safety in our community?*" Finally, the police department had already generated a list of possible interventions (e.g., improve road design, lower speed limits, increase traffic stops). They used the survey to assess whether residents supported or were opposed to these strategies.

The results of the survey suggested that areas 3 and 9 in Sara City were of greatest concern. There was also a high degree of agreement among residents regarding the primary traffic safety problems, including speeding, distracted driving, aggressive driving, and poor road design (e.g., no bike lanes, crosswalks, traffic control devices). With regard to possible intervention strategies, the majority of community members supported increased traffic patrols and citations for driving infractions. They also advocated for improved road design and maintenance, along with public safety messages to educate drivers.

Files for the Analysis & Response survey:
- Invitation to Online Survey ([PDF](#))
- Online version of the survey ([Link](#))
- Paper version of the survey ([PDF](#))
- Data file ([Excel](#))
- Presentation of findings ([PDF](#))

5. Assessment Survey Demonstration

---

[2] Your web browser may or may not open Excel files directly depending on the plug-ins and security you have in place. If you cannot access the file try a different browser.

Based on the findings of the second survey and other data sources, the police department developed and implemented a three-pronged intervention that lasted six months. First, they collaborated with community organizations and the news media on public service announcements, billboards, and presentations to local high schools addressing the dangers of distracted driving. Second, they increased traffic patrols and citations in areas 3 and 9, focusing on speeding and distracted driving. Third, in areas 3 and 9, they worked with the city's transportation department and city planners to add bike lanes, improve crosswalks, repair streets, and monitor construction sites that interfered with traffic.

To evaluate the impact of these efforts the police department conducted a pre-post analysis (see Eck, 2017) looking at motor vehicle crashes and serious injuries in the two target areas versus the city as a whole. In the target areas, they also measured the speed of vehicles in six discrete locations before and after the intervention. Finally, they administered a third online survey to a random sample of residents. The survey asked people how safe they felt driving, biking, and walking in the city as compared to 12 months earlier. Other survey questions asked about any changes observed in problematic driving behaviors. Finally, the survey asked residents about traffic safety improvements they may have seen over the past year, and where these changes happened. Analyses of these data, along with the findings from the pre-post comparisons, suggested that the police department's efforts to improve local traffic safety may have been successful.

Files for the Assessment survey:
- Invitation to Online Survey (PDF)
- Online version of the survey (Link)
- Paper version of the survey (PDF)
- Data file (Excel)
- Presentation of findings (PDF)

6. Additional Resources

- Boba, R. (2003). *Problem analysis in policing*. Police Foundation Washington, DC.

- Bynum, T. S. (2001). *Using analysis for problem-solving*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.

- Clarke, R. V., & Eck, J. E. (2005). *Crime analysis for problem solvers in 60 steps*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.

- Eck, J. (2017). *Assessing responses to problems: Did it work? An introduction for police problem-solvers, 2nd edition*. Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.

- Engel, R. S., & Eck, J. E. (2015). *Effectiveness vs equity in policing: Is a tradeoff inevitable*. Washington, DC: Police Foundation.

- Goldstein, H. (1979). *Improving policing: A problem-oriented approach*. Crime & Delinquency, 25(2), 236–258.

- Scott, M. (2015). *Identifying and defining policing problems*. Community Oriented Policing Services. U.S. Dept. of Justice.