

FEATURE

The problems with POP

Nick Tilley, an academic who specialises in policing and crime prevention, warns that unless lessons of good practice are heeded, problem-oriented policing will flounder and fail

Problem-oriented policing has turned out to be more difficult than expected. It seemed such a straightforward idea - find out the problems the community are bringing to the police, get a grip of what is producing them, do something about it and make sure you learn the lessons. We would all be winners - the community would be better served, police officers would get more job satisfaction, and something positive would be done about the spiralling demand on resources.

Evidence shows that when problem-oriented policing (POP) is done properly, the prizes are there for the taking (see box, right). Yet both in this country and in the US, POP has proven remarkably difficult. Nevertheless, progress is being made. We understand better how to make POP work, and more help is at hand for those anxious to make a good fight of it.

Several prerequisites for making POP work beyond the isolated efforts of exceptional officers are now widely recognised. These include the active encouragement and involvement of senior officers, access to good quality data, a capacity to analyse data imaginatively and proficiently, the ability to work with external agencies, familiarity with crime-reduction literature, and lateral thought.

It is also becoming clear that although POP can include officers of all ranks, what they can and need to do varies. In a fully fledged POP culture, shift officers would attend scenes with a view to doing what they can to pre-empt future incidents. CID officers would attempt to disrupt the activities of prolific offenders, networks of offenders, markets for stolen goods, and those who recruit new offenders. Community safety officers and architectural liaison officers would focus on designing out crime and reducing

crime opportunities. Analysts would check out hunches from observations - or from discussions with officers - about the ways in which problems are patterned. Specialist squads would prevent specific crimes from reoccurring. The force structure would be organised to monitor progress and to allow problems to be passed up when they are beyond local solutions.

We once believed that the bulk of POP could safely be left to community patrol officers - it clearly can't. Too often patrol officers are expected to do the problem-oriented work, while the rest get on with traditional policing.

Although no force would claim yet to be fully problem-oriented, some are making good progress. Several have initiated training programmes to try to foster problem-oriented work, but will need to complement these with much else besides if POP is to take off.

In the past year a number of important new resources have emerged which should help to improve POP at the sharp end (see below).

Provided lessons learned are taken seriously and newly available resources are used intelligently there is every reason to hope that the common sense of POP will deliver the benefits we all hope to see. Otherwise it is likely to flounder and fail.

Nick Tilley is a professor of sociology at Nottingham Trent University and will be speaking today at a POP conference in Nottingham supported by *Police Review*

PROBLEM-ORIENTED POLICING INITIATIVES

A series of short, highly readable, evidence-based POP guides, is being published by the

US department of justice (www.cops.usdoj.gov). So far eight have been released and 11 more are imminent. Titles include Assaults in and Around Bars, Street Prostitution, and Disorderly Youth in Public Places, Robbery at Automated Teller Machines, Burglary in Retail Establishments, Burglary of Single-Family Houses and Theft of and from Cars in Parking Facilities. These guides highlight which interventions are found to work in what circumstances, how they work, and what needs to be considered in their implementation. They note also what has been tried and found not to work.

The Home Office recently published Working out what to do: Evidence-based crime reduction (www.homeoffice.gov.uk). This report lays out key principles for good problem-solving and crime prevention. It deals with ways of identifying and specifying the nature of problems, and with figuring out what to do about them.

Jane's Information Group produces CopCase (<http://copcase.janes.com/>), which gives details of POP initiatives around the world.

The Home Office toolkits are collecting together evidence in relation to some major problem areas.

Papers in the Home Office crime reduction research series are bringing together lessons relevant to POP, many from the crime reduction programme.

The Jill Dando Institute at University College London was set up in 2001. This will become an important source of teaching, research and consultancy relevant to POP in the future.