

Targeted policing has knock-on benefits

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With the police service undergoing budget reductions, and calls for more officers on the streets, a new study offers some reassuring conclusions. Researchers at UCL's Department of Security and Crime Science found no evidence that successful police crime prevention activity, such as problem-oriented policing, results in problems being moved elsewhere (as sceptics argue). In fact, the study identified knock-on crime reduction benefits for nearby areas in some cases.

The new research, a systematic review* of 44 international studies commissioned on behalf of the Campbell Collaboration and supported by the National Policing Improvement Agency, addresses the common assumption that targeted policing to reduce [crime](#) in one area might just displace the problem to adjacent areas.

The study found no evidence that focusing on crime 'hot-spots' by undertaking high-profile foot patrol or problem-oriented policing (which involves careful examination of the crime problems and tailoring action to the specific context) resulted in the [displacement](#) of crime. Instead, targeted interventions sometimes led to reductions in crime and disorder not only in the areas targeted but also in those nearby – so-called 'diffusion of benefits'. Problem-oriented policing had the greatest positive effect on crime in nearby areas.

These findings are in line with theories that suggest offenders are not necessarily so determined to offend that they will simply 'move round the corner'. Interviews with offenders suggest not only that they prefer familiar environments, so if displaced are deterred from offending, but

also that they might be unclear as to the scope of targeted police activity and believe police to be operating in a wider area – hence the 'diffusion of benefits' effect.

Author Dr Kate Bowers of UCL's Department of Security and Crime Science says: "This research adds weight to the view that criminal behaviour may be more 'normal,' in the sense that it is driven by satisfaction of fundamental needs and wants which are guided by cognitive reasoning, rather than by sociological or psychologically entrenched deviant 'propensities'."

The police service is being asked to do more with less. Evidence that targeted policing works and can have widespread benefits is good news for both [police](#) and the public purse.

The project was supported by the National Policing Improvement Agency (UK) and The Center for Evidenced-based Crime Policy at George Mason University, on behalf of the Campbell Collaboration. The study will appear in print, in the *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, in December.

More information: The article will appear in print in the Journal of Experimental Criminology in December. The full reference is: Bowers, K.J., Johnson, S.D., Guerette, R., Summers, L., and Poynton, S. (2011). Do Geographically Focussed Police Initiatives Displace Crime or Diffuse Benefits? A Systematic Review, Journal of Experimental Criminology.

It is online at: bit.ly/pJgIjz

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