



Understanding Problem-Oriented Policing

Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) is a method for improving police effectiveness through examining and acting on the underlying conditions that give rise to community problems. Responses emphasise prevention, go beyond the criminal justice system alone, and engage with other public agencies, the community and the private sector, where practical.

Incidents that come to the attention of police are rarely random: e.g. police often find that they return repeatedly to the same place or are dealing with the same individual or groups. Further, not all incidents are directly crime related or amenable to enforcement action (e.g. racial harassment or anti-social behaviour). Analysing these patterns is the key to POP.

Key elements of the Problem-Oriented Policing approach are:

- » Ensuring that the 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.
- » Addressing problems means more than quick fixes: it means dealing with conditions that create problems.
- » Individual police and their organisations must routinely and systematically analyse problems before trying to solve them. The analysis of problems must be thorough even though it may not need to be complicated.
- » Problems must be described precisely and accurately. Problems often aren't what they first appear to be.
- » Problems must be understood in context. Different participants are affected in different ways by a problem and have different ideas about what should be done.
- » 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.
- » The police must pro-actively try to solve problems rather than just react to the harmful consequences of problems.
- » Individual police require the freedom to make or participate in important decisions. At the same time, police must be accountable for their decision-making.
- » The effectiveness of new responses must be evaluated so these results can be shared with other police and so the entire organisation can systematically learn what does and does not work.

Contact Us

Australia's national research and knowledge centre on crime and justice

www.aic.gov.au



Australian Government
Australian Institute of Criminology

REFERENCES

- 1 Herman Goldstein and Michael Scott (2001) *What is Problem-Oriented Policing?* Centre for Problem Oriented Policing, COPS <http://www.popcenter.org/about-what-isPOP.htm>