

Problem-Oriented Policing in Violent Crime Areas— A Randomized Controlled Experiment

Several studies have found that over half of all crimes in a city are committed at a few criminogenic places within communities. You learned in Chapter 9 that these places have been called *hot spots* by some criminologists (Sherman, Gartin, & Buerger, 1989; Weisburd, Maher, & Sherman, 1992). Even within the most crime-ridden neighborhoods, it has been found that crime clusters at a few discrete locations while other areas remain relatively crime free. The clustering of violent crime at particular locations suggests that there are important features or dynamics at these locations that give rise to violent situations. As such, focused crime prevention efforts should be able to modify these criminogenic conditions and reduce violence.

Problem-oriented policing strategies are increasingly used by urban jurisdictions to reduce crime in these high-activity crime places. Problem-oriented policing challenges officers to identify and analyze the causes of problems behind a string of criminal incidents. Once the underlying conditions that give rise to crime problems are known, police officers can then develop and implement appropriate responses. One of the only true experiments to examine the efficacy of problem-oriented policing was conducted by Anthony Braga and his colleagues (1999), and it still remains a model evaluation study today. These researchers created a novel field experiment to determine the effectiveness of problem-oriented policing in decreasing the rate of violent street crime in Jersey City, New Jersey. Recall from Chapter 6 that a true experiment allows researchers to assume that the only systematic difference between a control and an experimental group is the presence of the intervention, in this case, the presence or absence of problem-oriented policing strategies.