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Published

2018

Journal Title

Policing: An International Journal

Version

Accepted Manuscript (AM)

DOI

[10.1108/PIJPSM-06-2018-178](https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-06-2018-178)

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Place-based policing: New directions, new challenges

Editors' Introduction

Martin A. Andresen and David L. Weisburd

In recent years, place-based (or hot-spot) policing, has emerged as a new policing strategy, promising evidence-based reductions in crime (Weisburd, 2007; Weisburd and Wire, 2018). As a proactive approach, place-based policing refocuses often scant policing resources into areas that have the most crime, at times when crime occurs the most frequently. Such practices present the opportunities for far greater efficiencies in the use of police resources that aids in the legitimacy of said resources, particularly in an era of a crime decline (Farrell et al., 2011). With hot spots policing strategies being used by a majority of large police departments in the United States (Weisburd and Majmundar, 2018) and having academic support for the efficient reduction in crime and deviance problems (Braga & Weisburd, 2010; Braga et al., 2014; Weisburd, 2008) further research is needed to broaden the evidence base for this policing strategy.

This strategy of place-based (or hot-spot) policing is based on a rapidly expanding crime and place literature that finds crime tends to cluster in relatively few areas in a city. For 30 years, we have known of the empirical regularity that less than 5 percent of places (street segments or addresses, for example) are often able to account for 50 percent of criminal activity in an urban area and that this spatial concentration is relatively constant across time, often greater than 10 years (Andresen & Malleson, 2011; Andresen et al., 2017a, 2017b; Braga et al., 2010, 2011; Sherman et al., 1989; Weisburd, 2015; Weisburd et al., 2004, 2012). This empirical regularity led Weisburd (2015, 133) to suggest the law of crime concentration at places that states “for a defined measure of crime at a specific Micro-geographic unit, the concentration of crime will fall within a narrow bandwidth of percentages for a defined cumulative proportion of crime.” There is strong support for this law across crime types (aggregated and disaggregated), cities in different countries and continents, and across time. Clearly, crime is concentrated in space and time such that the police may be able to capitalize upon this concentration to better serve their respective communities.

Though policing has long considered geography in its operations, these geographies tend to be relatively large, consisting of policing beats, districts, and neighborhoods. Alternatively, place-based policing considers the importance of micro-geographic places where crime concentrates. Though place-based policing strategies are often implemented differently, research on these strategies continue to demonstrate significant reductions in crime (Braga et al., 2014). Nonetheless, more research is necessary regarding the effectiveness of different place-based policing strategies, as well as on its impacts on communities.

This special issue in *Policing: An International Journal* is devoted to advancing the theoretical and empirical understanding of place-based policing in a variety of contexts. We sought to attract papers that addressed a variety of topics in the context of place-based policing, specifically those that investigate both new directions and the new challenges that have emerged within place-based policing. The seven papers published in this peer-

reviewed volume focus specifically on the implications of place-based policing for our theoretical and empirical knowledge base, as well as police best practices.

In the first article, Andresen and Hodgkinson investigate the impact of a police foot patrol initiative considering micro-geographic units of analysis. Though some previous research has considered relatively small units of analysis, much of this literature has considered areas relatively large, when compared to the crime and place literature. Using six years of monthly crime counts for a variety of crime types (property and violent crime), they were able to show that the micro-place is important for identifying the impact of police foot patrol. Specifically, despite evidence for a crime reduction effect in the experimental and control areas, only 5 percent of the micro-places exhibited a statistically significant impact.

Gill, Weisburd, Vitter, Gross Shader, Nelson-Zagar, and Spain present a case study of a collaborative problem-solving approach to impact hot spots of juvenile and youth crime. Considering two matched pairs of crime hot spots, these authors compared non-enforcement problem solving to policing as usual finding that police enforcement may be necessary. These authors are cautious with their statements because they are only able to consider a small number of sites at this stage, but these results have important implications showing the importance of policing at youth-related crime hot spots.

Hutt, Bowers, Johnson, and Davies investigate issues that arose, relating to data quality standards, from an evaluation of a place-based hot spots policing initiative. These authors used officer-worn GPS data to investigate the impact of officer dosage (measured in time) at micro-place hot spots. They find that officer presence ranging between 10 and 20 minutes significantly reduces crime at the micro-place, similar to the results found by Koper (1995), but dosages outside of this range do not.

Norton, Ariel, Weinborn, and O'Dwyer investigate the spatial and temporal patterns of harm at the micro-place. In this research, the authors use the concepts of the harm spot, rather than the crime hot spot, to measure concentration. They find that hot spots and harm spots are highly correlated and that harm spots tend to be more concentrated in space than hot spots, and harm spots are temporally concentrated in a similar manner as hot spots. Though harm spots are not as spatially patterned as hot spots in all cases, the authors found most harm spots to be stable over time. Moreover, 80 percent of harm from crime is attributed to only four crime types: three violent and one property crime.

Bond and Nader describe the adoption of the Case of Place approach to case management that documents and analyzes place-based dynamics and characteristics to better inform policing strategies. These authors found that structural and cultural challenges were complications. Specifically, organizational structure, the redistribution of resources, emphasizing the priority of problem-solving, and the integration of civilian members proved to be important aspects of the implementation to consider.

Santos presents results from a process evaluation of an offender-focused intervention at crime hot spots. The author found that the police were pleasant and respectful, treating offenders and their family members with dignity and respect. This treatment, is discussed as important to offenders, influencing them not to commit subsequent criminal activity and follow the rules of their probation. This was supported with offenders having significantly fewer arrests post intervention. This study highlights the importance of not only treating places in the context of place-based policing, but the offenders who offend in those places.

In the final article, White and Goldberg investigate hot spots of health care crises addressed by the police. Specifically, these authors sought to examine the spatial concentration of mental health calls to the police at the street segment level, as well as the correlation of these calls for service with violent crime and drug calls, providing directions for place-based policing of this issue. The authors found that mental health related calls for police service are highly concentrated at the street segment level but those street segments are dispersed across the city; moreover, mental health related calls for police service are found to occur in spatially distinct places than violent crime and drug related calls for police service. This has implications for the police and any crisis intervention teams.

Overall, the articles in this special issue offer strong support for the idea of place-based policing. But they also present new insights into our understanding of hot spots policing.

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