

Risk-Based Intervention Strategy for Policing

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Risk terrain modeling (RTM) has the potential to help police more effectively incorporate problem solving into their operations. While problem-oriented policing has become a common practice in contemporary times, leading criminologists have argued that many efforts can be classified as "shallow problem solving." The result tends to be the exclusive use of traditional law enforcement tactics (e.g. arrests, stop-and-frisks, knock-and-talks, serving warrants) rather than a more holistic approach that may more directly address the underlying problems. This may be at least partly related to the analytical products commonly used in the creation of police initiatives. Hotspot maps, for instance, show the concentration of crime but offer little in the sense of context. Reboussin, Warren, and Hazelwood (1995) describe a map that displays the spatial orientation of only a single phenomenon (e.g. crime) as a "mapless map." As explained by Rengert and Lockwood (2009), "A mapless map is a mere description since it describes how one variable is distributed in space; whether it clustered or uniformly distributed for example. In order to determine "why" it is distributed the way it is, the spatial distribution of at least one other variable needs to be considered" (109). By articulating the environmental context of crime incidents and hotspot areas, RTM could help police identify and prioritize specific features of the landscape to be addressed by an intervention.

Risk-based interventions should include at least three simultaneous activities—at least one that relates to each of the following categories:

- 1) Reducing the criminogenic spatial influence of one or more environmental crime risk factors.
- 2) Evidence-based practices, such as activities related to target-hardening, situational prevention, and/or community awareness.
- 3) Using policing activities/patrols to deter and incapacitate known/motivated offenders.

You can be creative when developing this 3-part intervention strategy. For instance, if one crime risk factor within your risk terrain model is "schools", you can especially focus patrols on high risk areas during hours immediately before and after school. Patrols could seek to deter crime (the suggested category 3); focusing on qualities of school risk factors in this way (i.e., timing) would satisfy category 1. Regarding category 2 (e.g., community awareness), you could post a message on the police department website that reminds homeowners to lock their garage doors, or you could ask the local TV news station to do a story about your agency's efforts (to inform the public), etc. The intervention can be unique to your jurisdiction and does not need to be complex, time consuming, or expensive. Design the intervention in a way that does not place an undue burden on police department resources or finances. This means that the intervention's activities should be considered to be "reasonably" sustainable/repeatable under "normal conditions" without external (i.e., grant) funding.

Implement intervention strategies at high-risk areas, as defined by the risk terrain model. If the intervention will be time-limited, the timeframe (i.e., implementation period) will likely vary by crime type and should be considerate of requirements for valid and reliable statistical tests to evaluate outcomes. For example, if a jurisdiction experiences 60 robberies annually (i.e., about 5 per month), then a one month intervention would not be long enough to expect sufficient numbers of crimes to occur (or be prevented) for purposes of empirical testing.

References

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