

Hot spots policing is associated with reductions in crime



Policing crime hot spots does not inevitably produce crime displacement effects. Also, it is more likely that hot spots policing diffuses crime control benefits into surrounding areas.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review assesses the preventive effects of focusing police efforts on crime “hot spots” as compared to traditional police crime control strategies. The review summarizes evidence from 65 studies containing 78 tests of hot spots policing interventions, including 27 randomized controlled trials and 38 quasi-experimental evaluations.

Hot spots policing is associated with small but meaningful reductions in crime at locations where criminal activities are most concentrated. Focusing police efforts at high activity crime places is more likely to produce a diffusion of crime prevention benefits into areas adjacent to targeted hot spots than crime displacement.

What is this review about?

Crime is concentrated in small places, or “hot spots,” that generate half of all criminal events. Hot spots policing focuses police resources and attention on these high crime places. For the purpose of this review, hot spots programs must have consisted of police-led crime prevention efforts that targeted high-activity crime “places” rather than larger areas such as neighborhoods.

This review considers both randomized controlled experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of the effects of hot spots policing interventions on crime where the control group in each study received routine levels of traditional police enforcement tactics.

What studies are included?

A total of 65 studies containing 78 tests of hot spots policing interventions were identified. However, standardized effects sizes were only calculated for 73 main effects tests due to reporting deficiencies in three included studies.

All studies were published from 1989 to 2017: 51 studies were conducted in the USA, four in the UK, four in Sweden, and six in other countries.

What are the main findings of this review?

Does focusing crime prevention efforts on crime hot spots reduce crime?

Yes. Hot spots policing generates statistically-significant small reductions in overall crime and disorder in areas where the strategy is implemented.



How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies up to February 2017.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary is based on the Campbell systematic review 'Hot spots policing of small geographic areas effects on crime' by Anthony A. Braga, Brandon Turchan, Andrew V. Papachristos and David M. Hureau.

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These crime control gains were evident across specific categories of crime outcomes including drug offenses, disorder offenses, property crimes, and violent crimes.

Does policing crime hot spots inevitably produce crime displacement effects?

No. Overall, it is more likely that hot spots policing generates crime control benefits that diffuse into the areas immediately surrounding the targeted locations than displacing crime into nearby locations.

What do the findings of the review mean?

Findings from this review support hot spots policing as a proactive crime reduction strategy. Police departments should incorporate focusing resources at high-activity crime places as part of their broader approach to crime prevention.

The majority of studies included in the updated review have been published since the previous iteration of the review and utilized rigorous research designs.

Despite the drastic increase in eligible studies, only one study conducted a formal cost-benefit assessment of the hot spot policing intervention. The growth of hot spots policing warrants further empirical attention on the efficiency of hot spots policing for reducing crime.

