

Practical Considerations for Implementing an Evidence-Based Policing Approach in Police Operations: A Case Study.

Introduction

There has been a significant drive over the past twenty years by UK police forces towards being more 'evidence-based' (Bullock and Tilley, 2009; Bowers, Tompson and Johnson, 2014; Keay and Kirby 2018). This has included the growing number of policing trials that utilise an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach, including randomised control trials (Bedford and Mazerolle, 2014), and the growing number of police officers undertaking further education degrees in policing and criminology departments, or engaging with universities overall (Heaton and Tong, 2015), leading to the overall development of "police science" (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011). In addition, many UK police forces have actively sought to be more evidence-based in light of heavy financial cuts over the past decade by attempting to utilise the best available research and analysis that could lead to working more efficiently with less resources (Veigas and Lum, 2013). This drive has seemingly been supported by UK government institutions, including the Home Office (Tilley and Laycock, 2002; Myhill and Quinton, 2010), although as Hope (2004) highlights, there remain obstacles to overcome for evidence-based evaluations to be independent from political agendas. Importantly, the very concept of evidence-based policing is a simple and rational one that expresses the need for policing strategies to be based on the best available knowledge and testing (Sherman, 1998; Goldstein, 2003).

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) is among those forces who have begun their own journey after receiving an Area for Improvement (AFI) in both 2015 and 2016 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), where they highlighted:

Following HMIC's 2015 effectiveness inspection, we assessed that Greater Manchester Police had an area for improvement. This was that "the force should use evidence of 'what works' drawn from other forces, academics and partners to continually improve its approach to the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour. There needs to be routine evaluation of tactics and sharing of effective practice." The force is unable to demonstrate sufficiently that it has achieved this requirement (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service, 2017)

As a result, this paper will detail one of the first major steps taken by GMP in light of these comments, namely the attempt to apply an EBP approach to a real-life operational setting to facilitate future operational learning, as well as take the first steps in providing exposure to their police officers and staff on how EBP may be applied to their work. In doing so, through the example of a large-scale operation at GMP, this paper will highlight key practical considerations that need to be taken into account by both policing academics and practitioners where an EBP and testing approach is desired, including instances where some scientific standards may need to be compromised if the operational context contains individuals or communities facing a serious threat, risk and harm.

Literature Review: How is EBP applied in operational policing?

While EBP has received more focus and attention within policing, there is little research on the practical implications and considerations in trying to deliver real-life policing operations utilising high levels of scientific rigour, where the threat, risk and harm to communities is immediate and great. Indeed, randomised control trials (RCT) have been seemingly viewed by public policy makers over the past two decades as the pinnacle for research standards that highlight findings that can be trusted and applied (Pearce and Raman, 2014). In contrast, Fleming and Rhodes (2018) highlight that any variation away from RCTs for their supporters are "unlikely to value a plurality of sources and forms of knowledge in UK public

policymaking”, such as the utilisation of professional experience as a source (Fleming and Rhodes, 2018, p.5). This limitation of sources may potentially also be extended to trials that do not reach the scientific standards of RCTs, which may then be dismissed despite numerous lessons and findings that could be utilised, of which this paper, through the implementation of Operation Guard, will highlight.

In addition, Fleming and Wingrove (2017) highlight that police officer enthusiasm for evidence-based policing can be a useful tool in crime prevention activity. They also note that the College of Policing initiative in 2014 to promote ‘What Works’ in policing (College of Policing, 2014), could be a useful tool for police officers to access and apply the findings at a local level. However, they also importantly underscore that the transfer from knowledge of EBP to implementing it in police operations remains dependent on available resources which may differ from police force to police force (Fleming and Wingrove, 2017). The importance of resources in implementing EBP into policing is further supported by Santos (2014) where he argues that a key element of implementing EBP is the use of crime analysis. However, while crime analysts may be present within a police force and perform daily analytical functions that is asked of them, the survey findings from 1,000 police agencies carried out by Smith, Santos and Santos (2017) reveal that: “what is lacking in the description and research of evidence-based practices is guidance for integrating crime analysis into the day-to-day crime reduction operations of a police department” (Smith, Santos and Santos, 2017, p. 303). This lack of description has led to the limitation of how crime analysts can be used to integrate EBP approaches into operational settings, where their role is seemingly directed towards providing an overview of data, but falling very short

of providing nuanced analysis to help reduce crime (Innes et al, 2005; Chainey, 2012; Belur and Johnson, 2016).

Finally, another consideration in the integration of EBP into policing and policing operations is the possible role that academics can play in providing expertise and additional resources. Current attempts to promote and disseminate the concepts of EBP within policing have been attempted in several ways, such as EBP Cafes (Clough et al, 2017), which GMP also carried out in 2017 and 2018 through their internal staff who had knowledge and/or academic qualifications related to EBP, for other members of staff to learn. This links with the concept of 'pracademics' (Braga, 2016, p.311), where police practitioners are able to provide an additional layer of scientific support to their police force through their academic backgrounds. The same can also be true for academics who are not police practitioners, with proponents of academics working collaboratively with police forces arguing that it "would improve evidence through co-production" (Crawford, 2017, p.10). Indeed, there have been significant steps over the past five years where police forces have been working more closely with academics. For example, the Centre for Policing Research and Learning based at the Open University was established in 2014 and works with 21 police forces on a collaborative basis, where they decide in partnership on research projects (Hartley, 2017). Furthermore, the N8 Research Partnership is a collaboration of eight universities in the north of England that provide research opportunities and funding with police forces (N8 Research Partnership, 2017).

One consideration however that is arguably not addressed in the relationship between police forces and academics is the role of academics where the operational mandate is immediate and includes elements of threat, risk and harm to communities. In this instance,

practicalities may limit or even remove the possibility of academic involvement, such as the time it would take to carry out vetting on an academic, which may require enhanced vetting depending on the operation, as well as signed agreements on data sharing between the police force and the academic institution. As a result, it may fall solely on the police force and the resources they already contain internally to implement an EBP approach in such operational circumstances, such as relying on their internal academics, with the alternative being to not make any attempts of an EBP approach. In these instances, as shall be explored through this paper, there may still be opportunities to deliver the operation with an EBP approach and garner crucial elements of learning, albeit it with scientific limitations due to the immediacy required and the presenting threat.

Methodology

The mandate came with GMP's command team wanting to enhance GMP's presence with the business community across the festive Christmas season. In particular, GMP crime data revealed that every December-February period in the previous five years (2011 – 2016) saw a significant increase in commercial burglary across the business sector compared with the remaining months, presenting a significant threat to communities and underpinning a need to prioritise activity in accordance with the threat. This led to the creation of Operation Guard, which held two primary aims: (1) reduce commercial burglary crime volume and (2) to deliver the tactics through an evidence-based practice methodology, including treatment and control areas, in order to understand the impact of each tactic in reducing commercial burglary crime volume. This represented GMP's first evidence-based policing trial at this large scale. The core team consisted of the Strategic Lead for Evidence-Based Policing also serving as the Gold Commander, a District Superintendent assigned the role of Silver

Commander, and a Bronze Command Team that included a staff member of GMP's Evidence-Based Policing Portfolio.

With the two primary aims needing to be fulfilled, Operation Guard needed to be designed with both an eye on current demand in order to address GMP's rise in recorded commercial burglaries and the associated threat, risk and harm with those crimes, and with one eye on the future and sustainability of the operation and potentially future operations.

From the offset, crucial decisions needed to be made on the design of the operation.

Specifically, the team sought to achieve the right balance between the operation being specifically targeted towards the threat, risk and harm of commercial burglaries and in the locations where this was most prevalent based off previous crime data, and in doing so seeking to fulfil the first aim of the operation, while concurrently also seeking to understand the success and failures of the operation despite this selection bias, and in doing so, achieve the second aim of the operation. In order to achieve this balance, two distinct tactical approaches were selected to be compared with another in their attempts to reduce commercial burglaries during the operational period, namely (1) traditional offender targeting, and (2) a targeted deterrence campaign. Existing literature (Leigh et al, 1998; Matassa and Newburn, 2003) note that police-led action is often favoured by police officers as a result of police officers lacking both confidence in the ability of local partners to implement interventions, as well as retaining confidence in conventional police responses and offender targeting such as police patrols and warnings, as well as warrants and arrests. However, fully aware that traditional policing methods such as offender targeting are heavily reliant on human resources and thus extremely costly with police officer resources severally cut since 2010 (Turnball and Wass, 2015), the second tactical approach of a

targeted deterrence campaign would essentially play two roles. First, it would still be targeted towards the crime reduction of commercial burglaries in that it sought to deter offenders, and second, by deploying this second tactical approach simultaneously but in separate locations from traditional offender targeting, it would serve as a comparative to the impact of offender targeting on reducing commercial burglaries, while also being a less expensive and more sustainable option should it show it had an impact. In addition, while previous research has shown there was a positive impact on crime reduction due to the publicity of burglary deterrence in a number of UK police forces (Stockdale and Gresham, 1995; Johnson and Bowers, 2003), Operation Guard sought to directly compare the impact of a targeted deterrence campaign against offender targeting, albeit it with scientific limitations.

The deterrence material used in Operation Guard included a digital advertising van that displayed six deterrence messages that rotated every sixty seconds, such as “Thieves Beware”, with an accompany tag line at the bottom of each image stating, “Operation Guard: Targeting Commercial Burglary”. These digital advertising vans were driven in the ward areas receiving the tactic of deterrence, and frequently parked at busy high streets and hotspot locations identified by GMP’s Force Intelligence Bureau. In addition, approaching both Christmas and Valentine’s Day, new images centred on those seasonal occasions were produced in order to refresh the deterrence material in a bid to avoid the material being ignored or losing impact. These images were also produced in card form and posted to previous offenders of serious acquisitive crimes within the past two years, with a view to enhancing and amplifying the deterrence effect. Importantly, no media or social media outlets were used in order to avoid the deterrence material spreading to wards that

were to only receive the tactic of offender targeting.



Figure 1. Example of the Valentine's Day themed deterrence messaging using a digital advertising van.

*Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
Forensic marking,
Is our gift for you*



Tackling commercial burglary and robbery across Greater Manchester



Figure 2. Example of Valentine's Day cards posted to previous serious acquisitive crime offenders.

It was also decided that in order to enhance the deterrence campaign in the specific wards that would only receive the deterrence campaign, the purchase of a small number of forensic marking spray kits (a total of 21) would be purchased and placed at high repeat

victimisation commercial properties. Reference and images of forensic marking could then be used in the deterrence messaging.

Sourced by GMP’s Force Intelligence Bureau, a list of the top twenty highest volume hotspot areas in Greater Manchester for commercial burglaries at ward level between January – September 2017 were drawn up. In addition, in order to maintain as much integrity to the testing approach as possible and ensure that all the targeted areas were as comparable as possible before they received either of the tactical approaches, all district commanders were canvassed to ensure that no other police activity had taken place in 2017 centred on serious acquisitive crimes, including the

commercial sector, to interventions by the sole police targeted areas.

Ward	Division	Commercial Burglary
1.City Centre	City of Manchester	438
2.Great Lever	Bolton	138
3.Ancoats and Clayton	City of Manchester	125
4.Brinnington and Central	Stockport	120
5.Cheetham	City of Manchester	111
6.Wigan Central	Wigan	110
7.St. Peter’s	Tameside	107
8.East	Bury	105
9.Halliwel	Bolton	105
10.Coldhurst	Oldham	95
11.Leigh East	Wigan	93
Total		1547

ensure the Operation Guard were interventions in the

Table 1. Rank order of GMP ward hotspots for commercial burglaries between January-September 2017.

In accordance with addressing the immediate threat, risk and harm to the business communities of Greater Manchester, the eleven GMP wards were chosen because they

accounted for 23.2% of GMP's commercial burglary demand between January – September 2017, as well as being deemed the largest scale the operation could be run with the resources available. This is evidenced in that the eleven wards were a cross-section from seven of GMP's ten districts (City of Manchester, Bolton, Stockport, Wigan, Tameside, Bury, and Oldham), highlighting the lack of concentration of the criminality. While on the one hand this may have been a disadvantage in that resources would in turn have to be spread, often thinly, adversely, the multiple and geographical diversity of the locations lent well to the strategy of testing different tactical approaches across multiple and varied sites. It was also decided that the four-month operational period would only be compared with the same four month the previous year (December 2017-March 2018) and not any further back in time as a result of increased crime recording standards over the past two years through improved adherence to National Crime Recording Standards. In January 2017, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) graded GMP as 'Inadequate' in its 2016 Crime Data Integrity Inspection (HMICFRS, 2016), deeming that over 38,000 reports of crime a year are not recorded. As a result, previous levels of crime recording, including commercial burglaries, may have been greatly underreported, and therefore not provide a reliable baseline for which to measure the impact of Operation Guard in 2018, leaving the only viable comparative against December 2016 – March 2017 when improved adherence to crime recording began to occur.

The City Centre (ranked 1st in commercial burglary), Ancoats and Clayton (3rd), and Cheetham (5th), were allocated to receive both tactical approaches, namely traditional offender targeting and the deterrence messaging campaign. These three wards would receive both tactics as they are clustered geographically next to one another, with the view

that should they receive separate tactics, it would be problematic to ensure each tactic remained enclosed within their geographic area. These three wards also represented three of the top five wards in commercial burglary, where the employment of both tactics would be used to ensure that Operation Guard was given every opportunity to produce a significant reduction in commercial burglaries in Greater Manchester and consequently fulfil the operation's first aim. During this selection process, it was also acknowledged that while these three wards represented the highest crime volume leading into the operation, there would potentially be a natural fall in their crime volume due to a regression to the mean, with or without both tactics being deployed. However, acutely aware of the physical, psychological and economic damage, among other things, that a commercial burglary may cause to individuals and communities, the decision to deploy additional resources, namely both offender targeting and a deterrence campaign in those three wards, was deemed necessary in order to provide as much opportunity as possible to protect those communities from harm. Crucially, although the two tactical approaches are different and were delivered in isolation at different wards except the three wards where both tactics were combined together, both tactics leverage the Hawthorne effect where the implication of increased observation by the police, through the 'brand name' of Operation Guard and its deterrence campaign, would potentially alter the behaviour of previous and potential offenders for a period of time (Martha et al, 2002; Johnson and Bowers, 2003). In addition, even offender targeting where the targeting did not lead to a prolonged duration in custody, the Hawthorne effect would still potentially be evoked, where offenders would be aware of the increased scrutiny upon them. For example, offenders brought into custody were scanned for traceable liquids by custody officers and were told this was being carried out under Operation Guard. In this way, where the two tactics were combined in three wards, the

tactics complimented each other in evoking the Hawthorne effect through the synergy of the name 'Operation Guard' which was ubiquitous in the delivery of both tactics.

St Peter's (7th), Bury East (8th) and Coldhurst, (10th), were allocated to receive the deterrence campaign only. These three wards were selected as they ranked in the bottom half of the top eleven wards, meaning that should the deterrence campaign have had little impact on commercial burglary crime volume, the risk would be mitigated by their original lower numbers. The team went beyond using raw crime data for each tactical site selection. For example, Brinnington and Central (4th) was also originally going to receive deterrence messaging only. However, there were intelligence opportunities to enable offender targeting to be expedited at Brinnington and Central, and so it was agreed it that it would receive the tactic of offender targeting.

Policing Division	Ward	Treatment
City of Manchester	City Centre	Offender Targeting & Deterrence
City of Manchester	Ancoats & Clayton	Offender Targeting & Deterrence
City of Manchester	Cheetham	Offender Targeting & Deterrence
Stockport	Brinnington & Central	Offender Targeting
Bolton	Halliwell	Offender Targeting
Bolton	Great Lever	Offender Targeting
Wigan	Wigan Central	Offender Targeting
Wigan	Leigh East	Offender Targeting
Tameside	St Peters	Deterrence
Bury	Bury East	Deterrence
Oldham	Coldhurst	Deterrence

Table 2. Summary of each test site and tactic.

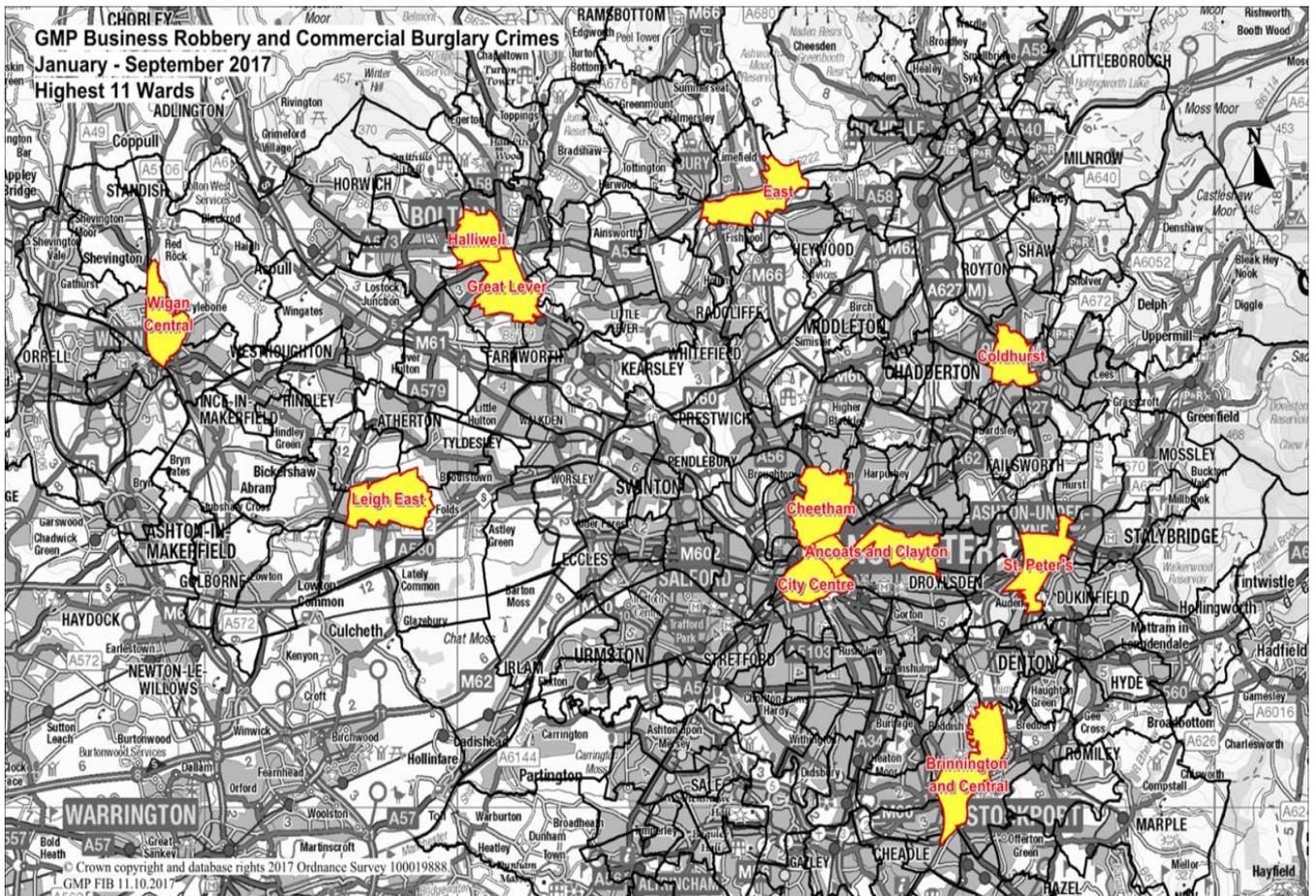


Figure 3. Map of Greater Manchester, with 11 wards highlighted indicating their distance from one another in order to assess any displacement of crime from targeted wards to non-targeted wards.

The Difficulty in Tracking

The day-to-day tracking of the operation was a crucial component in ensuring that the selected interventions in specific wards took place, as well as ensuring levels of consistency throughout the operation to effectively evaluate the impact of the tactics. This was an important nuance as any inconsistencies in deploying the tactics may have skewed the genuine impact the tactic may have had. To address this, activity logs were designed for each ward to fill in and send to the core team at Force Headquarters every Monday during the four-month operational period. The purpose of the activity logs were twofold: First, they were a method to track the consistency levels of deployment for Operation Guard at each

locality. While this was an additional measure for officers that was otherwise not requested for other operational activity, in briefing meetings, the purpose of the activity logs were clearly stated, with particular emphasis that they were not to serve as ‘checking’ mechanisms on officers, but as an important tool to evaluate the operation. In addition, there was explicit emphasis to officers to clearly state if they had not undertaken any activity for Operation Guard in any given week, and that such admissions were not going to be criticised but served the purpose of tracking when the operation was ‘live’ in any given week and when it was not. This was less important for wards carrying out deterrence messaging but crucial for wards carrying out offender targeting activity. The second important purpose of the activity logs were that they would serve as another tool to capture nuanced interactions between officers and members of the public and offenders that could inform future deployment decisions that would otherwise have not been attainable.

NAME	ACTIVITY TYPE	DATE	START TIME	FINISH TIME	LOCATION	Positive/Negative	NOTES ON ACTIVITY
	Offender targeting	27/12/2017	14:30	14:31	Custody Central		said that it was great "you must catch loads with that"
	Burglary & Dangerous Driv	31/12/2017	15:25		NMD	Negative	No comments made
	Burglary & Dangerous Driv	31/12/2017	15:34		NMD	Negative	No comments made, outer jacket and gloves also scanned
	Burglary	01/01/2018	20:00	20:01	NMD	Negative	

Figure 4. Example of an activity log at a GMP Custody Suite, where custody officers captured comments made by offenders brought in under a serious acquisitive crime when ‘scanned’ for traceable liquids on their person.

As expected from the offset with a new process, the consistency of filling in the activity logs, and their quality, varied. This led to an intensive human resources effort to continuously seek out activity logs that had not been sent in, or requesting more information from activity logs that had been sent in. They did serve, however, in providing an account of when the operation was clearly live and when some wards had lost momentum due to other workload priorities or abstractions. Interviews with the Single Points of Contact (SPOC) for each ward revealed some of the difficulties in maintaining the activity logs, including finding

the time to complete the activity logs themselves, as well as reminding members of their team to complete the logs as they carried out activity related to Operation Guard. As one SPOC reflected: “They [the activity logs] were quite time consuming. When you started saying ‘I need it on Monday’, I put a reminder in my phone instead of leaving it until the end. I’d do it as I went along because it’s fresh in your mind then, that was better for me” (Interview 1.1 with the author, 18/04/2018). As a result, any future replication of this operation, or operational activity that seeks to test and understand the nature of the deployment, will have to give consideration as to how to monitor and track the operation regularly. In particular, if the operation is to run for a prolonged period of time such as Operation Guard, officers are likely to have abstractions to other pieces of work, which may undermine the deployment of certain tactics and therefore undermine the overall operation. In addition, while concerted efforts were made by the team to consistently canvass district commanders about operational activity in their ward areas that may impact the testing elements of Operation Guard, further consideration would be needed on how to track this. This would be particularly important for understanding what policing activity took place in the targeted wards prior to the operation, as in the case of Operation Guard, while no direct activity took place in the preceding year addressing serious acquisitive crimes, other policing activity may have had an impact.

Crime Recording Findings:

As already noted, the operation contained clear limitations from a scientific and research vantage point as it pertains to its selection bias in targeting locations that contained some of the highest number of recorded commercial burglaries, which in turn make these locations potentially susceptible to seeing a fall in their crime numbers after any intervention is put in

place. As a result, the following crime recording results are to be read with that in mind, where the section that follows these results will reflect on the wider implications and lessons of trying to achieve the highest levels of scientific and research rigour in real-life police operations. In total, Operation Guard produced a reduction of 292 less crimes recorded during its four-month operational period in the eleven targeted wards compared with the same four-month period in 2016/2017, equating to a reduction of 24.6% (N= 1186). Using a one-tailed related t-test, this was a statistically significant reduction ($p < 0.01$) where the calculated value of 't' was 4.9030, which was considerably greater than the critical table value of 't' at 2.764.

Tactic	Reduction (Commercial Burglaries)
Offender Targeting and Deterrence Messaging Combined	- 21.9%
Deterrence Messaging Only	-24.0%
Offender Targeting Only	-27.9%

Table 3. Individual crime reductions from each tactical approach in Operation Guard.

All three approaches (Offender Targeting, Deterrence, and combined) performed at similar levels in reducing commercial burglaries. In particular, comparisons in crime volume between the five wards that received offender targeting only and the three wards that received deterrence messaging only were very similar prior to and after Operation Guard. Within the limitations of this test, this suggests that offender targeting was only slightly more impactful than deterring offenders through the active and focused deterrence in

targeted areas. However, the cost implications of this are vast, where focused deterrence is considerably more cost effective and less human resource intensive than offender targeting.

The two tactics combined together produced less of an impact than each of the tactics in isolation. As noted earlier, the three wards that received both tactics represented three out of the top five crime volume areas for GMP for commercial burglaries. There could be several reasons as to why both tactics combined together did not outperform the tactics delivered in isolation in the other wards. One possibility is that the tactics themselves had little impact, but that those three wards also saw a natural regression to the mean, which may have occurred regardless of any tactical deployment. Another possibility is that the tactics did have an impact, but due to the high number of commercial businesses in those three wards and their existing high crime rate compared with the other wards, it would potentially be more difficult to deter offenders from those wards due to the number of targets available to them. As noted earlier, these three wards arguably presented the most significant ethical dilemma in the site selection process in finding the balance between scientific integrity and ensuring that all available resources were used in order to protect vulnerable communities.

Wards	Commercial Burglaries December 16 - March 17	Commercial Burglaries December 17 -March 18	Increase / Reduction
Operation Guard Wards x11	1186	894	-24.6%
Control Wards x 9	853	678	-20.5%
Remaining 194 GMP wards	5574	6066	+8.8%

Table 4. Crime Reduction totals and percentages for targeted wards and control wards.

During the same period, the remainder of GMP's 194 wards (N= 5574), saw an 8.8% increase in commercial burglaries. In addition, nine wards (ranked 12th-20th in commercial burglary volume between January -September 2017) served as control groups to measure any

displacement or diffusion of benefits as a result of operational activity carried out in the eleven targeted wards during Operation Guard, which were in near geographical proximity to the nine wards and part of the seven districts that covered the eleven targeted wards. Where the eleven targeted wards saw a total reduction of 24.6% in commercial burglaries, equating to 292 less crimes recorded and was statistically significant, the nine control wards saw a 20.5% reduction (N= 853), amounting to 175 less crimes recorded. However, this was not a statistically significant reduction at both $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$. Within the limitations of this study, it appears that no displacement took place as a result of the operational activity in the targeted areas in Operation Guard. In contrast, this allows for the possibility that a diffusion of benefits took place due to the geographical proximity between the nine control wards and the eleven targeted wards in Operation Guard, where “spillover benefits” have long been observed and tested during deterrence campaigns (Clarke, 1989). Importantly, minus the eleven targeted wards in Operation Guard and the nine control wards used to measure displacement and diffusion of benefits, the remaining 194 wards in Greater Manchester saw an 8.8% increase in commercial burglaries between Operational Guard’s operational period compared with the same four-month period in 2016/2017, rising from 5574 crimes recorded, to 6066 crimes recorded. However, it must also be noted that one of the tactics used in the deterrence campaign, namely the digital advertising van, would have likely crossed some of the control wards as it was driven to reach its destination in the targeted wards. While the digital advertising van was never parked in a control ward as it was in targeted wards in high footfall areas amidst commercial sector streets, it is nevertheless possible that in the course of being driven to the targeted wards, some of the control wards may have received a benefit of that specific deterrence tactic. With this limitation in mind, the crime reduction in the nine control wards used to measure

displacement and diffusion of benefits does align with previous research on the benefits non-targeted areas may receive due to the deterrence effect in the targeted areas (Braga et al, 2013).

Findings on implementing an EBP approach to operational policing

There are a number of considerations for the future to be reflected upon from the deployment of Operation Guard for both police forces and policing academics on the implications and practical considerations of trying to apply the highest levels of scientific rigour to policing operations. In particular, where selection bias and a number of variables cannot be controlled for where members of a community may face more threat, risk and harm than others. The first consideration is that an evidence-based policing approach that seeks to understand the successes and failures of long-term operations and policing initiatives is highly dependent on the cooperation of the police officers carrying out the work. 'Cooperation' here is not used to denote willingness to be a part of an evidence-based policing test, but rather whether police officers have been assigned enough time and training to be able to carry out the duties and deliver the information needed for the integrity of a test to be upheld. In other words, ensuring that any evaluation does not commend or condemn the tactics used in a policing initiative, where it may have been the *deployment* (or lack thereof) of the tactics that may misrepresent efficacy of the tactics. This issue was apparent during Operation Guard, where ensuring realistic time and resources were made available to officers to be able to implement any additional measures for an EBP initiative beyond their normal scope of work was not always possible due to emergencies and abstractions.

In addition to resources, another key learning point was that there remains a journey ahead in the ethos of evidence-based policing being embraced by all police officers. Most notably, an Inspector was tasked with acting as the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for the police officers leading their teams on their districts pertaining to the operation. As noted earlier, one key component behind ensuring that the activities underpinning Operation Guard were carried out consistently across the four-month period was the keeping of an activity log for each ward. At district briefing meetings prior to the beginning of the operation, the Inspector and the member of staff from GMP's Evidence-Based Policing portfolio presented the concept of evidence-based policing as the reasoning behind the parameters and expectations of the operation to the police officers from every targeted ward, where each ward was assigned a team leader. One key element of the briefings was displaying the activity logs, how to use them, and why they were so crucial in upholding the integrity of the operation and to provide a mechanism for evaluating the operation at its conclusion. However, as the Inspector noted:

The activity log was a fairly simple framework in which to capture the activity that was going on. But even looking at something with the example in it about how to do it, there was only probably two or three wards that were able to immediately grasp what was required to a basic standard, not to a strong standard, but to a basic standard (Interview 1.3 with the author, 11/04/2018).

The difficulty in getting officers to embrace the activity logs was evident in one of the main tasks of the Inspector to regularly contact each ward to ask for their weekly activity log, without which, there would be no evidence that the tactics of the operation were consistently applied. This supports Lumsden's research (2016) into some police officer perceptions around evidence-based policing where it is often seen as a buzzword, but poorly understood and applied in reality. While institutions such as the College of Policing

have sought to promote the advantages of evidence-based policing, and indeed police forces such as GMP have taken pro-active steps to embed an evidence-based policing culture, it remains to be seen how this can be upscaled beyond a small number of individuals. A senior member of GMP's Force Intelligence Bureau reflected on this point and whether operations such as Operation Guard could serve as the building blocks for future operations at GMP that seek to apply some scientific rigour, and the difficulty in doing so. They reflected: "I don't think it is sustainable in the long term with every single operation [having the same working group]. We need to spread this across more people, I just don't know how we do that yet" (Interview 1.4 with the author, 01/05/2018). That puzzle remains to be solved. However, this is a crucial question that both police forces and policing academics must continue to address and experiment with possibilities, just as Operation Guard has attempted, to understand where and how an evidence-policing approach may add value, and where it may add value even if it is not operationally practical, or ethical, to apply it to the highest standards.

Positively, Operation Guard revealed how adopting an evidence-based policing approach can have a profoundly positive impact on police officers and staff who seek to understand the impact of their work on the communities they serve. For example, Operation Guard highlighted within its limitations that a focused deterrence messaging can be a useful tool in overt large-scale policing operations, and in times of less police officers per capita due to lingering austerity, the role of deterrence campaigns can be further emphasised as a time and cost-effective alternative for police officers (Brain and Owens, 2015). This is not a new concept, but is often largely underused or misunderstood, where media campaigns can often be generic or short-lived. This is further highlighted in the valuable insight and

learning that Operation Guard provided to GMP's Corporate Communications Branch. As one senior member of the branch noted after the operation:

It was discussed in the very first meeting how we wouldn't do media, for example the M.E.N (Manchester Evening News). The first thing when planning a campaign is you usually think about is media; they're such an important partner in getting messages out...[however] had we gone to the likes of the M.E.N, that story would have gone out across Greater Manchester so it would have almost scuppered what we were trying to do. [Not using media] is quite unusual in a campaign [for us]... the comms was very tailored in the areas we wanted to target...[and] we've done offender cards year in year out, but the fact that this time we were doing offender cards but with two different designs, that's different from anything we've ever done before and it's nice to think something you're creating is going to offenders with a very specific message for them. Something we're quite keen to look at is the evidence behind why we need to do something - this new way of working (Interview 1.2 with the author, 16/05/2018).

Conclusion

While Operation Guard had scientific limitations, it served the important purpose of drawing out some of the practical obstructions to delivering a policing operation to the highest scientific standards such as a randomised control trial. However, Operation Guard also highlighted that carrying out a long-term police operation is possible using an evidence-based approach which is an important step and improvement from delivering operations without such a design that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate any strengths or weaknesses of an operation. In addition, internally at GMP, Operation Guard has served as a benchmark for future operations that seek to utilise an evidence-based approach and developed the knowledge and understanding of EBP of the officers and staff involved in the operation. More widely, while both police forces and policing academics continue to work together, this case study highlights some of the limitations that may need to be accepted in instances where it would be unethical to place scientific standards above the real threat, risk and harm some communities may face if they do not receive priority for a policing

intervention. However, this may still result in a positive outcome and provide scientific value as seen in Operation Guard, where some valuable learning can still be attained and provide a platform to build off. Finally, the frequent and collaborative involvement in policing operations by academics may potentially provide more opportunities for research that carry less risk and higher research standards can then be applied. These interactions may then provide more opportunities for police officers and staff to gain exposure to evidence-based policing that can aid their understanding of different methodologies which may assist in growing the number of policing operations that place an evidence-based approach at their core.

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