

TACKLING STREET ROBBERY: A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF OPERATION EAGLE EYE

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Summary

Street robbery has been a source of growing concern over the past decade. In London and in other metropolitan areas, the incidence of street robbery has increased significantly, while clear-up rates have remained static.

This report looks at Operation Eagle Eye, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) strategy for tackling street robbery. Introduced in August 1995, Eagle Eye combines a proactive, intelligence-led approach with improved investigative practices and the concentration of resources in those divisions most affected by the problem. In February 1996, co-operation with the British Transport Police (BTP) was formally recognised when BTP adopted the Eagle Eye banner for their action against street robbery.

The MPS strategy is compared with the approaches adopted by the West Midlands Police and Strathclyde Police. During the research period, both latter forces relied on local, generally short-term operations to tackle various aspects of street crime, including robbery, but more recently both have implemented force-wide initiatives.

Main findings

Recorded offences, detections and stops/searches

The research suggests that in its initial stages Eagle Eye had some impact on both the incidence and detection of street robbery. In the Operation's first year, the number of recorded street robberies across the Metropolitan Police District remained static (- 0.1%) compared with a 26% rise in the previous year. Over the same period, the clear-up rate increased from 12 to 21% with increases in both primary and secondary detections. While the performance of designated Eagle Eye divisions was, on average, better than that of non-Eagle Eye divisions, there are some points to note:

- some non-Eagle Eye divisions saw large decreases in street robbery. These were often a result of action taken to deal with an anticipated displacement of robbery from neighbouring Eagle Eye divisions;
- the decrease in street robbery across the Eagle Eye divisions is related more to snatch theft than robbery of personal property;
- clear-ups for street robbery increased across both Eagle Eye and non-Eagle Eye divisions;

- following early improvements in performance associated with Eagle Eye, there were indications at the end of the research period that street robbery was again rising. More recent figures comparing calendar years 1996 and 1997, however, indicate a drop in recorded offences of street robbery (-5%) and a clear-up rate of 20% in both years.
- an increased emphasis on partnerships for crime reduction.

It also highlights areas with opportunities for improvement, including publicity/marketing, training, use of CCTV and community relations.

Points for action

The study highlights issues for consideration when setting up and developing an effective response to street robbery.

Focusing effort and resources – the extent and nature of street robbery locally should be examined to determine the appropriate structures (for example, dedicated robbery squads) and likely resource implications. Resources could include radios, fast response and covert vehicles, surveillance equipment and appropriate IT and software applications.

Training – it is important to identify training needs prior to implementation and to address them early in the resource allocation process. These are likely to include the use of IT and high-technology surveillance equipment, advanced driving skills, and intelligence gathering and dissemination.

Publicity and marketing – internal promotion of the strategy is needed to encourage a wide sense of ownership and involvement, especially among uniformed officers. Attention also needs to be given to the handling of external publicity.

Proactivity and intelligence – proactivity needs to be seen as the responsibility of all officers and must be allied to an effective reactive capacity. Proactive and reactive policing should be seen as complementary rather than as mutually exclusive options. Systems need to be in place for the efficient exchange of information both within and across structural boundaries.

Partnership – the problem of street robbery is not simply a matter for the police. Early consultation and co-operation with other agencies are key to developing a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to the problem.

Eagle Eye has not led to an increase in either the number or proportion of stop searches (covered by Section 1 of PACE) of males who are black.

BTP's performance against robbery and theft person, although variable across the London areas, has improved, especially with respect to detections. The substantial contribution BTP have made to the success of Eagle Eye is particularly noteworthy given BTP's very limited resources and the extent of the travel networks they have to cover in London.

The flexible problem-oriented approach to robbery and other aspects of street crime has worked well in Strathclyde. The response of West Midlands Police has been affected by the force reorganisation but more recently there is evidence that their force-wide initiative against street crime has had some success in controlling theft person offences.

Positive features of Eagle Eye

Eagle Eye has served to introduce or reinforce a range of good practices and although centrally led has encouraged innovation at the local level. The report identifies those elements of Operation Eagle Eye which appear to have contributed to the strategy's added value:

- the focusing of effort and provision of equipment and technical resources, within the framework of a branded strategy;
- a greater emphasis on proactivity, with increased use of intelligence and crime pattern analysis to guide resource deployment;

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