

Transformation of the Oakland Airport Motel

Ronald V. Clarke

Stockholm Criminology Symposium 2018

This presentation

- Based on the Oakland Police Department's (OPD) winning submission for the Goldstein Award in 2003
- The story of how the OPD's Beat Health Unit (BHU) transformed the Oakland Airport Motel, rife with crime and disorder, through its the extraordinary problem solving work
- The disappointing results of a longer follow-up
- Larger significance of the project

The Beat Health Unit

- Established by the OPD as a specialized entity to implement Problem-oriented Policing
- Run for many years by the same sergeant, Bob Crawford
- Focused largely on dilapidated residences, plagued by crime and disorder that were contributing to neighborhood blight
- The BHU had dealt with some 3000 premises before it took on the Oakland Airport Motel (OAM) – a much larger facility than the usual BHU targets

The Problems at OAM

- OPD officers were called there almost daily to deal with complaints about robberies, thefts, prostitution, and drug dealing.
- An illegal auto repair business operated in the motel's parking lot and junk cars were regularly dumped there.
- Rooms were rented to minors and some 25 guests had attained residency status at the property.
- The OAM had an average of 9 times as many reported crimes as five other nearby motels.
- Because it had recently been renovated, it had few building code violations that could be used to leverage change.
- Visits to the nearby motels led the officers to conclude that poor management practices at OAM had allowed crime and nuisance to flourish.

Oakland Airport Motel



The OAM's Parent Company

- The OAM was operated by an international parent company based in Europe with many hundreds of motels in the United States and elsewhere.
- This account honors the OPD's undertaking to not reveal the name of the parent company.
- Sgt. Crawford's inquiries convinced him that the parent company had co-opted many police agencies in the United States by employing their officers as part-time security guards.

At a meeting on February 2, 2001 with the City of Oakland, the OAM's parent company agreed to.....

- Make changes to the property and its management designed to reduce crime and disorder.
- Post a \$250,000 “performance” bond to be forfeited if the problems were not eliminated within a two-year period.
- Reimburse the City of Oakland \$35,000 for the cost of the investigation of the OAM.

Preventive measures at the Oakland Airport Motel

- Cleaned and painted the property and removed abandoned vehicles
- Raised room rates by 50%
- Upgraded lighting and fencing
- Replaced the managers and security guards and sacked problem employees
- Instituted pre-employment background checks on all new employees
- Established strict check-in procedures with a list of banned individuals
- Prohibited room rentals to anyone under 21
- Prohibited room rentals for more than 30 days

The effectiveness of the measures

	Calls for Police Service
1998	197
1999	212
2000	242
2001	38
2002	1
2003 (Jan-March)	3

Displacement

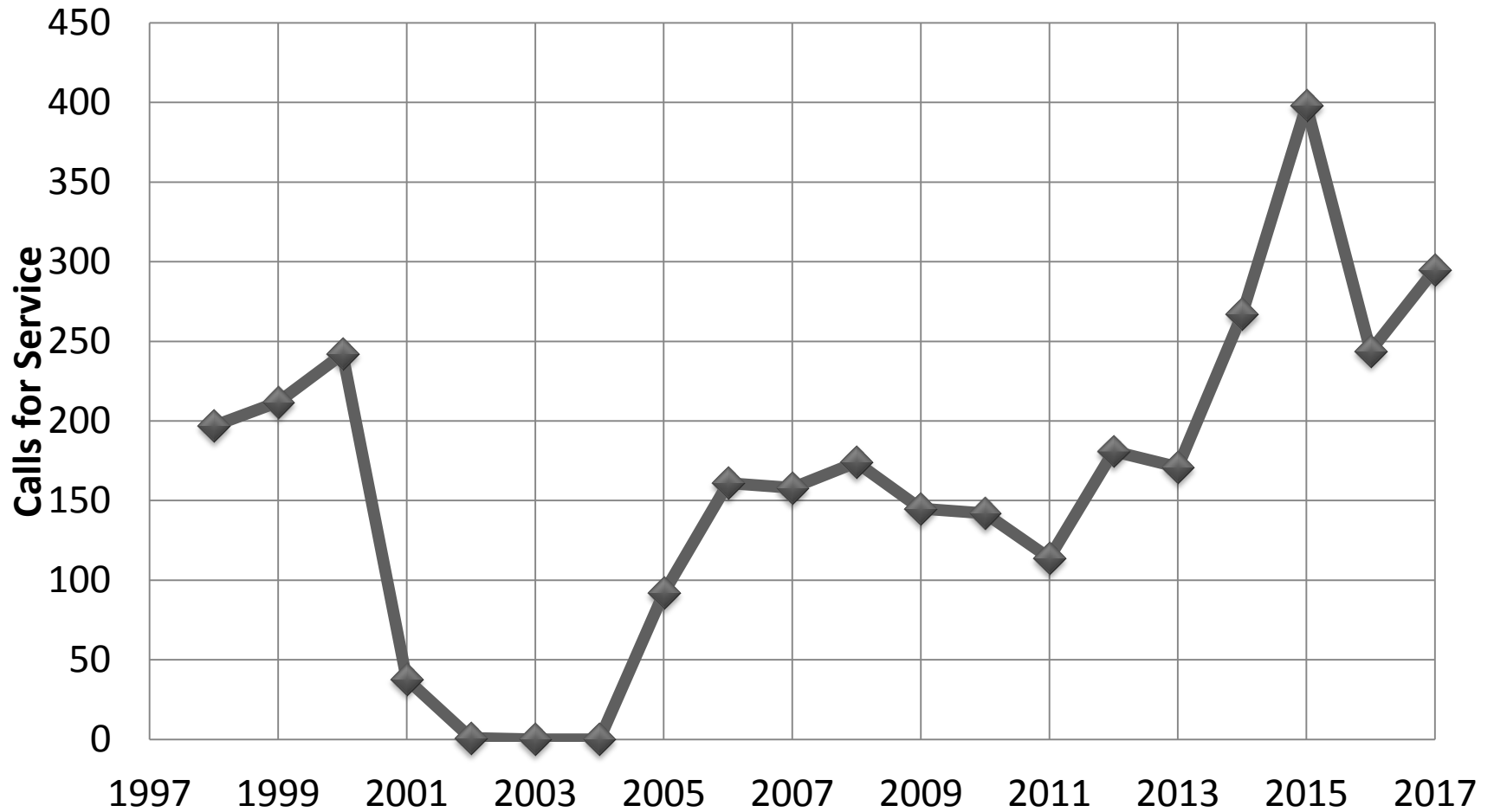
After the intervention, CFS for the OAM were little different from those for five nearby motels, which suggests that the OAM's crime and disorder problems did not displace to the nearby motels.

Oakland's Exceptional Work Led by the BHU

- The BHU formed a partnership with the city attorneys who could bring significant legal pressure on the OAM's corporate owners.
- Because the BHU's lead officer had little success in working with the OAM's on-site manager and with the parent company's U.S. V-P for Security, the BHU delivered a letter of pending legal action to the parent company's U.S. chief executive at his home on Christmas Eve!
- The city attorneys prepared a Drug Nuisance Abatement lawsuit for the meeting on February 2, 2001 between city officials and the parent company's U.S. CEO, the V-P of Operations.
- A certified letter was also sent to the International CEO written in English and in the language of the country of his residence.
- The city's key requirement was the highly original "performance bond"

“Due Diligence” follow-up

Calls for Service Before and After Transformation of OAM in 2000



The Project's Larger Significance

1. The role of the BHU
 - Goldstein (1979) proposed that problem-oriented policing should replace incident-driven policing, but this has been achieved in only the smallest departments.
 - Larger departments have generally grafted on some dedicated "POP" capacity to selected patrol units, but the OPD set up a specialized unit, the BHU, to undertake problem-oriented work
 - Despite its considerable success, the availability of supplemental local funds led to its rebirth as a dispersed team of "Public Service Officers", with unknown results
2. Performance bonds – Not previously used, nor since, but of great potential in shifting and sharing responsibility
3. Risky facilities
4. Cliff edge effects
5. Super Controllers

Scott/Goldstein's increasingly forceful prescriptions for shifting and sharing responsibility for community problems

1. Educating others regarding their responsibility for the problem
2. Making a straightforward informal request of some entity to assume responsibility for the problem
3. Making a targeted confrontational request of some entity to assume responsibility for the problem
4. Engaging another existing organization that has the capacity to help address the problem
5. Pressing for the creation of a new organization to assume responsibility for the problem
6. Shaming the delinquent entity by calling public attention to its failure to assume responsibility for the problem
7. Withdrawing police services relating to certain aspects of the problem
8. Charging fees for police services related to the problem
9. Pressing for legislation mandating that entities take measures to prevent the problem
- 10. Bringing a civil action to compel entities to accept responsibility for the problem**

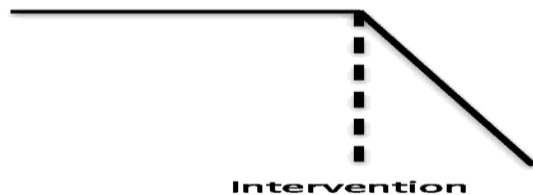
Risky Facilities

The BHU undertook a rudimentary form of what is now known as “risky facilities” analysis (Eck et al. 2007) when during the **scanning** phase of the project, it was discovered that the OAM had an average of 9 times as many reported crimes as five other nearby motels.

Eck, J., R.V. Clarke and R. Guerette (2007). Risky Facilities: Crime Concentrations in Homogeneous Sets of Establishments and Facilities. In Graham Farrell et al. (eds.), *Crime Prevention Studies*, Vol 21. (accessible at www.popcenter.org)

“Cliff-edge” effects

1. For a host of practical reasons , evaluations of SCP or Problem-oriented Policing rarely make use of RCTs. Consequently, they are greatly disadvantaged by the “Maryland criteria”
2. But they often show dramatic “cliff edge” declines (Nick Ross 2013) of two main kinds:



CRIME DROP



CRIME WAVE

3. A “crime drop” is when an high crime rate suddenly drops after an intervention as in the case of the OAM
4. Clarke (has argued that cliff-edge findings are as powerful as those of randomized controlled trials in indicating causality

Clarke (2018) “The theory and practice of situational crime prevention.” In H. Pontell (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Super Controllers

- The corporate owners failed to act as Super Controllers of the OAM's "place managers" (Sampson et al 2010).
- In fact, the concept of super controllers assumes these have a beneficent role. But what about:
 - slumlords who increase their profits by not compelling the managers of their apartment buildings to take appropriate (and sometimes costly) security measures,
 - the parent companies of crime-ridden hospitals and malls.
- Super controllers frequently global nature, jurisdictional legal issues and the impenetrability of corporate law all help to explain why these toxic super controllers have escaped the attention of the law.
- Studies needed of crime rates of motels, malls and hospitals, either owned or not by corporate bodies.

Sampson, R., Eck, J. and Dunham, J. (2010) Super controllers and crime prevention: A routine activity explanation of crime prevention success and failure. Security Journal 23: 37-51