

Community and neighbourhood policing

How effective is the SARA model in today's policing?

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What is the SARA model? The SARA model is a policing technique and problem solving tool. According to *The Evidence-Based Policing App (no date)*, initially developed by Herman Goldstein who described his method as Problem-orientated policing, this was built on by two men named John Eck and William Spelman. The decision making model incorporates analysis and research as well as individual police officers decision making and has four steps. These are scanning which means to identify, address and select problems that need direct attention. Next is the analysis step which calls for a deeper examination for the causes of the problems including evaluation of the cause of frequent calls for service to areas as well as frequent crime reports in the same address. Response is the next step which determines the actions which individuals and groups of officers will take in response to a given incident, according to the theory officer responses should be “evidence based” or at least fitting to the current situation. Lastly is the Assessment which requires officers to evaluate the actions taken in the previous steps and see if any responses or actions may be ineffective or not helpful to the situation and improve on these steps. We know through organisations such as the college of policing as shown by *College of Policing (2022)* that the SARA model has universal use through all constabularies within England and Wales and it is taught to all new and serving constables. At its core the SARA model was a successful attempt by British policing to change policing policy away from “fire brigade” reactive practise, a phrase coined by Sir Robert Mark who after that statement became the commissioner of police for London. *UK Parliament (1977)* states that due to the state of Policing in the 1970’s police had to use all of their resources in a reactive measure that meant reacting to a crime that has already happened and therefore not reducing crime but rather after a crime they must investigate and go through the motions of attempting to catch the criminal. The parliament found this to be inefficient and reform was required. This was when POP or Problem-oriented policing and later SARA models were introduced to change British policing to a more preventative policy. This would prevent crime but also mean that the police would be witnessed fighting crime directly. less often. This essay will go into the effectiveness of the SARA model and see whether it has become outdated or if it still holds up with modern policing efforts.

As previously mentioned the SARA model is a decision making concept developed into a usable problem solving model, that is used by police to assist in situations as a tool to make problem solving more systematic and organised. The SARA model since its inception into British policing has been widely accepted and is taught across all constabularies in England and Wales. The model is highly influential within nationwide policing policy and is widely used with training. However some such as *Borrion et al (2019)* have brought up several claims against the SARA model and Problem-oriented policing claiming that the police are too focused on “the Problem” as they call it and do not look deeper into financial, ecological or ethical reasons for crime and are too oriented on solving the crime in front of them rather than the reason for the crime. The document also mentions how the Police are too focused on this one problem solving methodology despite others existing, this creates a single method which police can use which limits versatility and prevents officers from gathering a wider knowledge of useful problem solving techniques. This monocentric method of solving problems is a repeated issue within the document. However the document does also defend it, reasoning that it is a universal easy to apply and teach method for problem solving which is useful in a diverse and large police force like England and Wales. However on that note it is important to mention how ineffective the SARA model can be in brand new or random scenarios as mentioned in *Hinkle et al. (2020)*, Hinkle claims that POP and SARA are cost effective and generally effective at reducing crime. However Hinkle also mentioned how it is ineffective when faced with brand new scenarios or random and unusual situations, which due to the nature of policing is a rather common situation for a constable to find themselves in. An argument that both Borrion and Hinkle have brought up is the existence of other problem solving models such as the problem analysis triangle and OSARA which is a slight reform of the SARA model these are two common methods of problem solving but not as commonly taught as Problem-orientated policing and the SARA model. College of Policing (2022) shows us that In comparison the Problem analysis triangle is a simplistic tool for problem solving which relies on 3 sides of the triangle which include an offender, a place or location and a victim. This technique is used as a risk analysis as well as a problem solving technique as it can be used to ascertain whether a person or location is at risk of crime and then give recommendations to reduce the risk factor of a crime happening which is useful for crime prevention. The difference between the SARA model and the problem analysis triangle is the problem analysis triangle is more of a surface level simple quick to utilise analysis tool while the SARA model is more comprehensive with its evaluation and allows for deeper analysis. OSARA is a branch of SARA which brings in a new step to the problem solving tool that being Objective Surrey County Council (2024) explains that objective is a useful addition to the existing SARA problem solving method as it adds clarity in a goal. Objective gives the constable performing the problem solving technique a target that being “What do you hope to achieve”. This is useful for random and unusual scenarios as all situations have a goal whether that be the goal of the constable or the goal of the offender. The OSARA model however due to the additional step would naturally take longer to complete and adds

additional complexity to an already complex subject. In today's modern world however, Police officers may not have the time to complete the long and complex problem analysis models as well as act as preventive officers in other roles. *Office for National Statistics (2025)* shows us that today's modern crime is more fast paced and more complex as computer related crimes such as fraud and computer misuse have increased in number. This brings in the question if all the bureaucracy and methodic problem solving techniques are still effective with today's modern crime.

How effective is SARA? According to *His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (2024)* SARA is a highly effective in preventing and combating anti social behaviour crimes especially when modified into the enhanced OSARA model as previously mentioned. The inspectorate found that the OSARA model was highly useful for analysing data and helped discover a 41%% increase in anti social behaviour which the data was then utilised to help reduce this crime in a preventive manner. The issue with large scale usage of OSARA and SARA is the different levels of experience and ability to use the problem solving model effectively. The SARA model is also very highly data dependent and data driven. So that means if ever there is a scenario with very limited or no data the SARA problem solving method is rather useless. Another issue is that the SARA model due to being data dependent means it is very expensive to use and maintain and very intensive on resource usage. As the Police budget continues to shrink resource intensive models may become liabilities if relied upon and then in future due to budget cuts SARA or OSARA has to be cut down on. Additionally SARA is complicated to perform and even more complicated to master and perform well consistently, this means that training for these problem solving models is intensive and long which adds to the resource intensity (*Youth Endowment Fund, 2026*). Additionally many sources claim that OSARA, SARA and Problem-orientated policing all have a moderate to low reduction of crime with the Youth endowment fund finding that it has a reduction rate of 20-24%, which is very good but considering the resource intensity have caused some to reconsider its usefulness. Police in England and Wales have had to keep up with the constant evolution of modern crime BBC Bitesize (no date) explains that crime since the 1960s have evolved much quicker then before then with the widespread use of electronics as well as technology in general rapidly increasing in both utility and availability this has made the job of policing modern neighbourhoods significantly more complicated with both the frequency, complexity and violence of crimes increasing dramatically. With SARA being such a universally applicable and well known technique many constabularies have begun rapidly increasing their training with the technique as well as increasing the collaboration between officers working on preventative policing as well as officers working on reactive policing and responding to calls. The police are required to constantly change and adapt to keep up. So much so they even have something called the change management and this shows the police's ability and want to keep up with the times and adapt to new crimes and maintain an effective policing institution. (*College of Policing 2024*).

To conclude, this essay has gone over the evolution of the SARA/OSARA model over time and seen how it has changed to adapt to the change of crime, most notably over the last 60 years since the 1960s. The SARA model has proven itself to be a consistent and somewhat effective problem analysis model as well as a decision model to help police evaluate crime. However it does have shortcomings as well as this essay has shown that SARA and OSARA are both difficult to implement and expensive to train and maintain, SARA is also heavily reliant on data based policing which means less police out in public showing that they are there. The SARA model has proven to reduce crime via crime analysis and crime prevention although at a high resource cost and increased training for constables. The complexity and bureaucracy however might be a hindrance for the continued use of SARA as the police need to respond more rapidly to crimes being committed. However the SARA model remains a relevant and effective framework for problem solving with the police. The principles of crime prevention are highly praised policies within British policing and the SARA model fits in well with the elements of neighbourhood engagement. The model itself is effective and has very few flaws. The issues with the model lay outside with resource constraint and lack of universal implementation despite what it was designed for which is a universal framework. However for the effectiveness of the SARA model and all Problem solving models to be at its full potential the Police in England and Wales need large scale reform based on a balance of analysis based policing like the SARA model as well as response and reaction based policing much like the fire brigade policing technique. With both of these combined British policing effectiveness would rise greatly.

Statement for use of AI

AI has only been used within this essay as a means of supporting the research as well as assisting in managing all data used within this work.

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