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Evidence-Based Policing and the OSARA Model

Module: BMPL4021A

Assignment Title

Explore an Evidence Based Policing (EBP) model and its application in problem solving within a policing context.

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Introduction

Evidence based policing means police officers use facts, research, and information when they make decisions. This matters because police work affects safety, trust, and people's daily lives. If officers only rely on routine or guessing, they might choose a weak response. A model can help stop this. In this report, the model used is OSARA. OSARA stands for Objective, Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment. It is linked to problem solving in UK policing and helps officers move from finding a problem to making sure their response worked. This report looks at why evidence matters in policing. It also looks at the strengths and limits of OSARA. Real examples are used to show how the model works in the work. The report argues that OSARA is a useful model because it helps police focus on causes, not only on incidents, but it works best when

officers have good data, time, and support. (College of Policing, 2022, College of Policing, 2023, Hinkle et al, 2020).

Main Body

OSARA comes from problem-oriented policing. This approach asks officers to look for patterns behind crime and disorder, not only deal with one event at a time. The College of Policing explains that problem solving policing uses a clear process to see a problem, understand it, respond to it and then review the outcome of it. Research also supports this wider approach. Hinkle et al. found that problem-oriented policing reduces crime and disorder in many ways. This gives OSARA a strong base. It is not based on opinion alone. It is linked to a tested way of working in policing (College of Policing, 2020, College of Policing, 2022, Hinkle et al, 2020).

The first stage is Objective. This stage is simple but important. Police officers must decide what they want to achieve before they act. A weak aim such as “deal with anti-social behaviour” is too broad. A better aim is “reduce repeat anti-social behaviour calls in one shopping area over three months”. A clear objective gives direction. It also helps officers pick the right evidence and the right response. Blackstone’s Handbook for Policing Students explains that problem solving is a key part of modern policing. This supports the idea that police work should be with a clear purpose, not a rushed reaction (Wood et al, 2026).

The second stage is Scanning. This means officers define the problem. They ask what is happening and where it is happening, who is involved, and how often this problem happens. This stage matters because a problem often looks simple at first but later turns out to have different parts. HMICFRS found that police forces around the UK need to improve how they identify, record, and respond to anti-social behaviour. This shows why scanning is important. If a force records incidents badly, it might miss repeat victims and vulnerable people. Good scanning uses crime reports, call logs, local knowledge, and information from partners such as councils or housing staff (HMICFRS, 2024, College of Policing, 2021).

The third stage is Analysis. This is one of the most important parts of OSARA. Officers look at why the problem is happening. They study victims, offenders, places, and times. They also look at wider causes. Klose argues that evidence based policing should bring together research, professional judgement, and community values. This is useful because police officers need more than numbers. They need to understand the area and listen to local people as well. Analysis helps stop police from using a response just because it feels familiar. For example, if a town centre has multiple cases of disorder, analysis might show links to poor lighting, school leaving times, or a lack of youth

activities. If police skip this stage, they might only deal with the signs of the problem and not the cause (Klose, 2024, College of Policing, 2023).

A real example helps show this. Thames Valley Police used Operation Rasure to tackle serious violence. The College of Policing practice bank explains that the force used data and a serious violence dashboard to identify hotspots and guide activity. This is a good example of scanning and analysis working together. The force did not spread officers thinly across a whole area. It looked at where violence was most common and then focused effort there. This is a strong example of evidence based policing because the response followed the facts. It also shows that OSARA works well when forces use local data in a focused way (College of Policing, 2022, Piza and Welsh, 2022).

The fourth stage is Response. After officers understand the problem, they choose what to do. In evidence based policing, the response should match the analysis. This is important because police time and resources are limited. If a tactic has a weak record, officers should think before using it. The College of Policing says problem oriented policing works best when responses are suited to the local problem. This means officers should avoid a one size fits all approach. A response might include high visibility patrols, work with schools, changes to the environment, work with youth services (for example after school club), or action with housing providers. The right response depends on the cause of the problem, not only the type of incident (College of Policing, 2020, College of Policing, 2023).

Another real example is local priority targeting to reduce neighbourhood crime. The College of Policing practice bank says that this work used local data and community feedback to target police activity in areas. The aim was to reduce neighbourhood crime and anti social behaviour while improving contact with local people. This example is useful because it shows two key points. First, police responses work better when they focus on a clear area with a clear problem. Secondly, community feedback matters. If local people do not understand why officers are acting in a certain way, trust might fall. Evidence based policing is not only about statistics. It is also about using information from the community to shape action (College of Policing, 2024, Klose, 2024).

The last stage is Assessment. This means officers check if the response worked. This stage is a major strength of OSARA. It forces police to look at results, not only effort. A team might work hard on a problem, but if the problem stays the same, the response has not been effective. Assessment helps police learn. It also helps forces avoid repeating weak tactics. Good assessment should look at more than one measure. Officers should check crime levels, repeat calls, harm to victims, and whether the problem moved to another place. If anti social behaviour drops in one street but appears in the next street, the force has not solved the problem fully. Assessment is

important in evidence based policing because it turns action into learning (College of Policing, 2022, College of Policing, 2022, College of Policing, 2023).

OSARA has several strengths. First, it is easy to follow. The stages are clear and practical. This makes the model useful for officers, students, and partner agencies. Second, it supports accountability. Officers can explain what problem they found, what evidence they used, what response they chose, and what result followed. Third, it supports prevention. Instead of waiting for more calls and more victims, police try to reduce the cause of the harm. Finally, it works well with partnership working. Many police problems involve councils, schools and social services. OSARA gives these groups a shared process. This fits policing guidance well because problem solving and partnership work are important for neighbourhood policing (College of Policing, 2021, College of Policing, 2023, Wood et al 2026).

OSARA also has limits. One limit is time. Good scanning and analysis takes effort. In busy teams, officers are usually under pressure to respond quickly. This makes it hard to use the full model well. Another limit is data quality. If crime reports or call logs are poor, the whole process becomes weaker. A third limit is skill. Not every officer has strong support from analysts or training in problem solving. Bullock et al, says barriers in England and Wales linked to leadership, training, and organisation support. This means a force might say it values problem solving, but staff might still lack the time or tools to do it properly. There is also a cultural issue. Some officers still value fast enforcement more than careful problem solving. If the model is treated like paperwork, it loses its value (Bullock et al, 2022, College of Policing, 2023).

Evidence is important in police decision making because police choices have real effects on people. A poor decision wastes time and might fail to protect the public. A stronger decision use the best information available. Evidence also supports fairness. When police explain that they used local data, research, and community information, their actions are easier to understand and defend. This links to trust and legitimacy. People are more likely to support the police when decisions look fair and well judged. OSARA helps with this because it gives officers a logical route from problem to response to review. It does not remove judgement. It improves judgement by making officers stop, think, and learn from results (Klose, 2024, Piza and Welsh, 2022, College of Policing, 2025).

Conclusion

OSARA is a strong evidence based policing model for problem solving. It gives police officers a clear process to follow. The model helps them set a clear aim, define the problem, study the causes, choose a suitable response, and check the result. This makes policing more focused. Research on problem oriented policing shows that this

wider style of work reducing crime. Real practice examples also show how data and local knowledge help forces target serious violence and neighbourhood harm. Even so, OSARA is not perfect. It depends on time, good information, support from leaders, and a culture that values learning. If those things are missing, the model becomes harder to use well. Even with these limits, OSARA remains useful because it helps police move away from guessing and towards better decisions. In modern policing, this is a strong advantage (Hinkle et al, 2020, College of Policing, 2023, HMICFRS, 2024).

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