**What a surprise! Putting more police on the streets really DOES help cut crime**

* **Having extra manpower in the form of PCSOs found to cut prison costs**
* **Visible police presence reduced 999 calls by 20 per cent in Peterborough**
* **Traditional foot patrols discovered to be most effective method of policing**
* **PSCOs have power to issue fines but can't arrest a suspect on their own**

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Putting more bobbies on the beat really does cut crime – even if they are just police community support officers, research suggests.

It found targeting high-crime areas with PCSOs, who have fewer powers than police constables, saved £56 in prison costs for every £10 spent on extra manpower.

The officers spent just over ten minutes twice a day patrolling 34 ‘hot spots’ where crimes were statistically more likely to happen.



Having PCSOs patrol for an extra 21 minutes a day could save £280,000 a year in prison costs, according to new research from Cambridge University

Just having a visible police presence reduced 999 calls by 20 per cent and led to 39 per cent fewer reported crimes, the research found.

In all, the extra 21 minutes of patrols a day in the 34 areas cost £50,000 over the year of the study – equivalent to the salaries of two full-time PCSOs.

Researchers from the Institute of Criminology at Cambridge University said the study showed traditional foot patrols were more effective than a ‘reactive fire brigade’ approach to policing.

PCSOs were studied, the team said, because ‘given budgetary constraints in British policing, they are for the most part the only officers who conduct proactive and visible foot patrols’.

They added that because the officers have very limited powers, they wanted to test whether potential criminals would be discouraged by even the most minimal threat of arrest.

Basic PCSO powers include issuing fines, confiscating alcohol from minors and asking police to arrest a suspect.

The researchers equipped the officers with GPS tracking devices.

They then monitored patrols at 34 random crime hot spots in Peterborough – a city which experienced 6.85 crimes per 100 residents in 2013, slightly above the UK average of 6.57.



The study contradicts previous research by Kent Police Authority in 2008 which found apart from vehicle offences, the presence of PCSOs did little to reduce crime

The study compared offences in these areas – known for high rates of crimes such as burglary, assault and criminal damage – with control hot spots given no increased police presence.

It found that, on average, there were 39 per cent fewer crimes reported and 20 per cent fewer 999 calls to the police in areas with extra patrols.

**WI-FI DEVICES COULD HELP POLICE**

Information from Wi-Fi devices could place people at the scene of a crime.

Routers have access to vital information from smartphones, tablets and wearable technology which could place work out who was in the area when an incident took place.

Dan Blackman, a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University in Australia, and technical adviser to Western Australia Police, thinks that police are missing out on this key source of information.

Wi-Fi devices captures chatter from mobile devices, which includes successful and failed attempts to log onto a network, as well as the amount of times tried.

In addition, the gadgets capture a media access control (MAC) address from mobile devices, which are unique identifiers for each phone, laptop or tablet, which try to connect to the network.

The additional 21 minutes a day for each area amounted to 3,094 hours over a year, roughly equivalent to two full-time PCSOs.

Using a measure called The Cambridge Crime Harm Index, the authors said the extra patrols prevented crime amounting to 2,914 days – around eight years – of imprisonment, which would have cost the taxpayer £280,000.

The study, published in the Journal of Experimental Criminology, concluded that every £10 spent on foot patrols prevented a further £56 in prison costs.

The latest research contradicts some previous reports. A study by Kent Police Authority in 2008 said that apart from vehicle offences there was ‘little relationship between the presence of a PCSO and a reduction in crime’.

Numbers of PCSOs – who unlike PCs can be made redundant – have been slashed due to cutbacks.

Professor Lawrence Sherman, leader of the Cambridge study, said: ‘We could be preventing a lot more violent and property crimes... with a policy of deploying officers in this way, a way most UK police forces don’t follow.’

Co-author Dr Barak Ariel added: ‘The experiment suggests that the number of visits to each hot spot may matter more than the total minutes – as if each time the police arrive they renew their deterrent effect on crime.