

## #66 (DAVID WEISBURD)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

David Weisburd is one of the most famous criminologists in the world and an expert in the geography of crime, police innovation, and experimental criminology. We discussed the evolution of his career, hotspots policing, procedural justice, and his advice for new scholars.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hi, I am Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime.

This summer, I was honored by the Cambridge University Police Executive Program to be awarded the Sir Robert Peel medal for Outstanding Leadership in evidence-based policing. Recipients are usually distinguished police officers, but I was the second university professor to receive this distinction. But boy did I have big shoes to fill because the first professor to get the award was the inestimable David Weisburd. David is a distinguished professor at George Mason University and the executive director at the Center for Evidence-based Crime Policy. He's also the Walter E. Meyer Professor Emeritus of Law and Criminal Justice at the Hebrew University Faculty of Law in Jerusalem, and he's also the Chief Science Advisor to the National Policing Institute.

With over 35 edited or authored books and hundreds of peer-reviewed journal articles, to recount his list of awards and other significant achievements would take up the entire podcast. But look, here's a couple of highlights. He's an elected fellow of the American Society of Criminology and of the Academy of Experimental Criminology. He was the chair of the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Proactive Policing on which I served, and he was awarded the Stockholm Prize in criminology in 2010. He's also won the Jerry Lee Award for Lifetime Achievement in Experimental Criminology, the Sutherland Award from the American Society of Criminology for outstanding contributions to the discipline of criminology, and in 2015, was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize. Back in June, we hung out in David's balcony in the heart of Washington, D.C., which enabled us to watch the president's helicopter fly by. We discussed his career, hotspot, policing, procedural justice, his advice for new scholars, and you'll learn which British criminologist isn't warm and cuddly. And no, it's not me. Oh, and yeah, see if you can spot the Casablanca reference I slip into the episode. Ping me on Twitter if you get it.

# REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

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As we join the conversation, we're talking about the podcast, but soon talk about the aches and strains of life.

**David Weisburd:**

Do you know how many people are listening?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. By the time this comes out, I'll have had over 200,000 people.

**David Weisburd:**

Is this okay for your back, by the way?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, it's great. Thanks. But thank you. I appreciate it. Yeah, I shouldn't have fallen off a mountain, right?

**David Weisburd:**

Look, I have back problems, I didn't fall off the mountain. Today I woke up and I was like pain, you know?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, it creeps up on you regardless of whether you throw yourself down a mountain or not.

**David Weisburd:**

And I've been swimming and I've been doing my exercises and I've been, you know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You and Larry Sherman, you're both in stellar shape, aren't you? Look at you in good shape.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, thank you. That's appropriate towards age. If I was young... No.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, I'm not going to give that compliment to a 25-year-old. If you're a 25-year-old, you should be in good shape, but this is your retirement year.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, in Hebrew, we say "ke'ilu", which means...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm not going to retire, but you're just not going to pay me any more?

**David Weisburd:**

No, it's a old Israeli joke, "ke'ilu", as if, I guess, in English. So I have retired. In Israel, like in Europe, there are actually retirement ages, but it's because they have a pension. It's a really good pension. They don't give it anymore.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**David Weisburd:**

They've taken it away.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you were legitimately grandfathered into it.

**David Weisburd:**

I was the last generation in this. But I actually continue to work part-time, really, at Hebrew U, then I'm continuing at Mason, so I always say ke'ilu retiring.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There you go.

**David Weisburd:**

I'm doing the things that I want to do more. I've been very lucky in that regard in that institutions have been supportive of me doing the kinds of things I want to do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because you started off way back in New York, didn't you?

**David Weisburd:**

Yes, when I was at Yale, I was finishing my PhD and I...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What's your PhD in?

**David Weisburd:**

It was in sociology and I worked with Al Reiss and Stan Wheeler. Al Reiss, at the time, was incredibly famous person and it's interesting to me that you don't even know who he is, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, I know who he is. Come on. Yeah, I'm older than everybody thinks I am.

**David Weisburd:**

Okay. But my students today wouldn't have ever heard of him, really.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Famous mentors aren't necessarily good mentors. Was Al Reiss a good mentor?

**David Weisburd:**

Yeah, that's a good question. In some ways, he was really good, in some ways, he was not. He wasn't involved with you in the way that I would be involved with my students and giving them advice. Things were a little bit more distant, I think, in that period. However, I had an experience once. Al had three offices and he had an office in the Institute for Policy Studies I think it was called, or Social and Policy Studies. In each place, he had a secretary. I'd walk in, I'm sitting there waiting, there're like two people waiting and he calls me in and I say, "Well, Al, there are two people before me." And I didn't say Al, I said Mr. Reiss. He said, "I make a decision. The people that I'm working more with who I think are worth the investment *et cetera*", which is very complimentary, but I felt kind of bad for the people outside.

So he was, on the one hand, a pretty good mentor, but it was a different age. I think it was a little bit more distant. Stan was a little bit warmer than Al, Stan Wheeler. Stan was one of the founders of the Law and Society Movement. I worked with Stan because he had a very large project on white collar crime, and that project led to seven books, of which I was the first author of one. He was a good guy, Stan. When I'm mentoring my own students, they didn't provide great mentoring in terms of professional development.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You could get your degree, but you couldn't necessarily understand how the field really worked.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, PowerPoints were just starting, but it wouldn't have been a course on PowerPoints, there wouldn't have been a course on publishing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. But if you've been to the American Society of Criminology, it doesn't look like anywhere does a course on PowerPoint. 2023 and I've still seen some god-awful PowerPoints most of the time.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, that's true, but even today, and we have courses of sort of professional development and how to do things like grants and stuff like that, whereas this, you were just expected to learn that through osmosis. Right. That was the thing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what inspired you to take your first job at [the] Vera [Institute]? Wouldn't a move into academia be the traditional thing?

**David Weisburd:**

So my career has not been very traditional. I left Yale at one point to do my PhD in Israel. I had an NIMH fellowship, that helped, I won a memorial fellowship and we were starving too. We went to live in Israel where Shelly's family was, and actually her brother had passed away and she wanted to be with her family. Shelly's is my wife, Shelly. We both had made a decision we wanted to live in Israel. So doing a PhD in Israel, even though I could have done my PhD on the white collar crime project, I published a book, Crimes in Middle Classes. I did that work before I finished my PhD.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, because everybody writes books before they finish their PhD, so yeah.

**David Weisburd:**

I don't know if that's true. Did you write a book before you finished...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, I'm joking.

**David Weisburd:**

No, the book didn't come out until after my PhD, but the research... Look, the white collar crime project was the largest sort of quantitative investigation of white collar offenders that we'd conducted up into that point. We had data from the federal government that he wouldn't have gotten, I don't think, Stan, if he wasn't at Yale at the time. At that time, there was more of a status differential in the US between places like Yale and other.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But you think it's gone away?

**David Weisburd:**

I don't think it really matters as much in terms of getting resources and research. I think the federal government these days is interested in spreading around resources. I think there's a little less cachet for research. I think that's a good thing, by the way. There's been a democratization.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it broadens the pool of people who can make a contribution to science.

**David Weisburd:**

Also, at that time, conflicts of interest were minimum, do you know what I'm saying? In other words, there were lots of conflicts of interest and they didn't matter.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And just because you're at a fancy university doesn't mean you have a monopoly on good ideas.

**David Weisburd:**

But there was an atmosphere. Stan used to say, he used to say, "I'd rather be at a high-status university than in a cutting edge department", so to speak.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But I can also look at it from the perspective of being, as we are policing scholars, is that policing has for a long time been frowned on as not being real research, being looked down on by sociologists. So you're not going to find a home, necessarily, easily doing policing scholarship, at least back in those days, back in the Ivy League, the Russell Group universities, because there's that kind of snobbery around, "Oh, we don't do policing."

**David Weisburd:**

That's true, but Al Reiss was a policing scholar, so obviously that wasn't fully true. Historically what happened in the US is that you had no criminology programs.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No.

**David Weisburd:**

Right? So criminology naturally fell in sociology pretty much most of the time. There are many scholars today still think that criminology ought to be part of sociology. But at that time it didn't exist when I went to grad school, it just started existing in the early 1960s.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So Vera became a viable opportunity for you then?

**David Weisburd:**

I had lived in Israel for a few years and done my PhD research...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

[Large truck goes by] As trucks go, that is a beast.

**David Weisburd:**

Big truck.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's serious.

**David Weisburd:**

But I came back to finish my PhD, but I wasn't making enough progress in my PhD, which was on violence by Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Because of the family illness, I needed to get a job even though I hadn't finished my PhD.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So it's a horrible time in one's life because you see it a lot with students. They're not young anymore, they're a few years into their PhD, they're trying to get their life started, they're not on a lot of money, finances are squeezed, they've still got to finish this PhD, it's an unknown future. It's a horrible time to be... It's not the easiest time at all.

**David Weisburd:**

But it was made worse in this case because we had, as I said, a family illness we were dealing with. And then Stan Wheeler, at the time, he had connections to the Vera Institute. He made a call and I went there for an interview and I loved it. It was so different from academia. They didn't care as much about the sort of status issues of having a cocktail when you graduate students.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Let's not diss the whole cocktail after work thing too much.

**David Weisburd:**

No cocktails may be nice.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I draw the line there, sir. I draw the line.

**David Weisburd:**

It was much more working class, I don't know what to call it, in a positive way. And so at Vera, they offered me \$30,000 and I was so happy that I was going to be able to provide for family with all these issues we've got to deal with. And then I found out later I was the lowest paid person at that level. I just said, "They said 30,000." I said yes. They were waiting for me to say, "Well, that's not enough."

But anyway, so Vera hired me to do a study of community policing. This is 1985. And I knew about policing because of AI, but I wasn't a police scholar per se. My job at the time was going to be walking the streets with these community

police officers. It was more qualitative research. Most of my background, I'd done a lot of quantitative work. When I was at Yale, I spent an awful lot of time at the computer center before you had portable ways of doing that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I remember those.

**David Weisburd:**

And in Israel, I'd done qualitative work in the settlement. So this community policing program, what they did was they had nine officers, a sergeant and the sergeant's assistants in the 72nd precinct.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

This is up in New York.

**David Weisburd:**

This is in Brooklyn at a time when Brooklyn was really crime ridden. It was really bad. You'd walk into an apartment house and there'd be refrigerators and junk in the hallway. I mean, it was at a level that I don't think probably exists any longer in New York. Cops at the time were not intervening in the streets. Then it was due to corruption issues. In 1985, a cop could not directly respond to a drug incident in the street. So what they would do is they'd go to a phone, they'd call it in as a civilian and then they'd go there. But it means that people would be in front of a cop, they would do lots of things. Things were a bit out of control, so this program was supposed to put it in control with a community perspective. And each of them were given an area of maybe 15 or 20 square blocks. It was the bad area for that area, right?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

15, 20 square blocks is huge.

**David Weisburd:**

It is huge. They were called beat areas. Some of them were smaller. And I walked the streets with them for a year, four days a week. That's how I became a policing scholar. A tremendous learning experience.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Did you like the guys you worked with?

**David Weisburd:**

Yeah, they were younger. They were an interesting group. They had a volunteer. I didn't do enough with this research, but I learned a hell of a lot. It was like a learning experience. They had different reasons for wanting to be involved. One woman wanted to be involved because she would have more control over her hours.



**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Understandable.

**David Weisburd:**

One guy had an experience where he'd responded to a call and his father was beating his children and he promised himself he'd go back and he didn't, and then he read about these kids being hanged by the father in the newspaper.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Jesus.

**David Weisburd:**

And he said, "When I heard in this program you could follow up, I was really keen on that." I began my career with cops who were young, really decent, positive, different ethnicities, black, Hispanic, white.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Pretty much how most cops are, I think.

**David Weisburd:**

It gave me this really positive attitude towards the police.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**David Weisburd:**

And they were really decent people. I saw them in the street caring about people in a real way. They wanted to do good. When I get interviewed now and people talk about the police is brutal or the present view is that if you bring police to a place, that leads to oppression. I should read you this review I just got of an NSF project that got funded, but in it were two comments in the review that they wanted me to respond to, which assumed the police are bad and brutal as if there was no discussion about that. We know that's true. But anyway, so this was the total opposite, I have to say.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And that's been my experience. I read Twitter, the hellhole site. I read some of that stuff or I read some of these newspaper editorials from people with a different perspective, often who don't live in Philadelphia, for example, and I'm thinking, this is not the police officers that I actually know and interact with.

**David Weisburd:**

And there are police officers that are like some of these things, but this experience was just heartwarming. But one of the problems is I only work in police departments that are more innovative, so I don't know what's going on in police departments that are really bad. Even, I have to say, the Stockholm Prize winner this year spoke about police violence,

and it was interesting how in South America, where there's a very major problem, that she worked with this group of really good people trying to deal with this problem. Anyway, so these guys each had a beat and I learned a lot about policing. Like we're walking down the street, a big dog's coming with this guy in a bad street, and I wanted to move to the side and the guy says, "No, no, no, no. We don't move to the side because that sets a bad atmosphere in the street."

But the most important thing I learned in terms of my later career, with each of these guys and women, they would spend all their time on one street or two streets. That is how Hotspots in Crime came, right? I was walking the streets with these guys. I'm expecting to go everywhere. We go everywhere because we're meeting people, it's community policing, but when it came to crime control and stuff like that, there was one block that had this drug marker, and another block near the school where kids were making trouble. There was this other block. It was single blocks. In other words, these neighborhoods that were defined by Vera as bad neighborhoods were not bad.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No.

**David Weisburd:**

Not from a crime perspective.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's bad corners with lots of decent people living on blocks in between.

**David Weisburd:**

Or on the next block or two blocks. I mean, in this case, there were a lot of streets... I mean, this is where the street segment idea came from. It was clear to me the street segment played a major role in it. The street segment, sometimes the intersection attached to that street segment. But the street segments here, there was a lot of activity coming out of the apartment houses. Another thing I learned here that was interesting, I also got this sense from the police that there's a difference in people who break the law and bad people, and there are some bad people out there. One time there was a block, lots of drug dealing, they did a sting, took 10 guys in and they say, "Oh man, it's 11 o'clock. These guys aren't going to get food." They said, "Let's go to McDonald's." And they bought them McDonald's.

Now, I thought that was really interesting because they didn't think of these guys really as bad guys, they thought of them as problems they wanted to solve. But they said, no, we don't want these guys starving all night. Let's go get some food for them. That's different than another block. They lived with like the biggest drug dealer. This is a guy, it's like you wonder why he's living in this street. He's obviously making a fortune. And he used teenage girls to carry the drugs, and it's coming back again in the US. Until age 16, there's basically nothing you can do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And it's a big thing in the UK with a thing called county lines where the drug dealers are using kids to move drugs around the country and in out of the cities.

**David Weisburd:**

This was like a machine, they're organized.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Exactly.

**David Weisburd:**

So they get these girls at age 13, 14, they start giving them money, they carry the drugs, they get caught, basically nothing would happen. They turned 16, they turned them into prostitutes. I mean, it was really ugly. This is the kind of thing you see in the movies. And they hated this guy. They hated him. This was a bad guy. They would do anything to get him. We walked down the street and he did like, I don't know what, threw a cigarette down. They'd turn around, handcuff him. They also hated him because child abuse was a big issue among these officers, I think. It was a big problem in this area.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Something they cared about.

**David Weisburd:**

They really cared about it. I could see it really stuck to them, like this story of this guy who killed his children. So this drug dealer, one of the kids had this big scar on his face and they said that the guy put the kid's face against a burner on the stove. That for them, that was pretty big.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Hotspots, you think, has been the thing that's had the most influence in your career?

**David Weisburd:**

I mean, I've done lots of things, but this hotspot idea... See, I don't think it would've had that kind of impact for you that it had for me. Look, I came from sociology. Frank Cullen said it to me. He said, "David, before I read your work, I thought of delinquency areas." In other words, there's certain areas that are delinquency areas. It's not a street, it's this whole area of town. That idea of a whole area of town was very pervasive in the way you learned about crime and sociology.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it's because it feeds into [the] sociological perspective that it's about character and upbringing, poverty and unemployment and education and demographics and all those broad things, it's not situational at all.

**David Weisburd:**

I actually think that those sociological ideas do play into the micro.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But they interact with the situation.

**David Weisburd:**

But it's not that they didn't understand their situational characteristics, we should know. Take a look at Sutherland's original textbook. He says that criminals are more likely to steal from a fruit stand when there's no one there. I mean, he gets the idea that that situational components are important, but he says that given the motivations of people to commit crime... I grew out of an intellectual tradition that cared about those social issues at a community level. So that's where I grew up. And then I walk the street with cops and I see, wait a minute, this neighborhood, there is not crime in most of these blocks, and then it's on this one block. And that intrigued me, and I called it Small Worlds of Crime. Given my interest in methods and statistics, I was particularly interested in the way in which that made it difficult to observe crime prevention effects.

In other words, if you measure crime prevention effects at the neighborhood level, the individual street will get wiped out.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It'd be lost.

**David Weisburd:**

It'll get lost in that, a needle in a haystack. This experience with Vera was making me criminology, criminal justice oriented. So I went to an interview at Rutgers and then was hired at Rutgers, but it's the...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

President flying over.

**David Weisburd:**

President going this way.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, it's a presidential flight.

**David Weisburd:**

Or the vice president. They run along the river. But anyway, the important thing about coming to Rutgers was, something like two years after I came as an assistant professor, Ron Clarke comes to be the dean at Rutgers.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And Ron, of course, being very situationally focused and occasionally scathing of criminology, generally.

**David Weisburd:**

Yes, he's not a great fan of traditional criminology.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And I've had him as a guest on the podcast.

**David Weisburd:**

You had him? He understandably has criticism for traditional criminology, but if we don't speak to that world, then what we do doesn't get noticed, which has been an issue for me. I mean, I always saw myself early on, I think Ron saw me this way, as a person to become a communicator of some of these ideas to criminology.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

To pitch those worlds, yeah.

**David Weisburd:**

But Ron also obviously fixed on me like Al Reiss had, and he said, "David, we're going to meet every Tuesday and have tea." So every Tuesday we'd sit and we'd talk, and this went on for years, really.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That does sound great.

**David Weisburd:**

And we developed some work out of those talks. Diffusion of crime control benefits came out of that. He's good about interacting and not just telling you about things. He was very British, not warm and cuddly, per se.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What are you saying here! [laughter]

**David Weisburd:**

Yeah, not warm and cuddly per se. Some British are warm and cuddly, but he wasn't. It's like all of a sudden, I began to make sense of what I'd learned two years earlier.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sometimes you need somebody just to help coalesce those ideas into something concrete for you.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, traditional criminology did not have a way for me to interpret that situation. And without a theory, you're kind of stuck. You need some way of organizing ideas.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's a lot of nonsense theory out there, so it's finding the right theories that are actually useful.

**David Weisburd:**

Yes, I think it was Tammy Moffitt who said that criminologists have more theory than they do facts. But the traditional theories in any event didn't do much for me, and I also found them burdensome to some degree. But Ron provided a framework for me in two ways. Number one, his attack on traditional criminology detached me a bit from that set of ideas. Ron was way out of the box for me, and I found that really interesting. I like out-of-the box ideas.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And refreshing.

**David Weisburd:**

And refreshing. And he was very excited about those ideas. He had a passion for them within the British way of having passion.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We can sometimes raise our heartbeat.

**David Weisburd:**

No, he had a passion for it, and he introduced me to Felson's work, right? Cohen and Felson, and to Brantingham and others. So Ron was really important. And something else happened there that sort of coalesces, I mean, by chance occurrence. I think I would've been a talented guy otherwise, but some of the major contributions I've made come from this set of circumstances. I went to Vera and that was sort of accidental. I didn't mean to go there. And then the year Ron Clarke came, we had a chaired visiting professorship open. And so I was on a committee with two other people that were among the older faculty. So I started interviewing people. I spoke to Larry Sherman. I didn't know Larry. And Larry and I start talking and he starts telling me about his work in Minneapolis where he'd found that a relatively small proportion of addresses produced a large proportion of calls to the police. And I said, "You know, wow, that's so similar to what I did at the Vera Institute."

And we spent hours on the phone, I remember. And Larry was a great mentor in that regard, I have to say. Larry's a great grant writer.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There isn't a lot he can't do. He's borderline annoying in that way.

**David Weisburd:**

Larry is very talented. He's really a great grant writer. We both felt at the time that the problem in criminology and deterrence was not enough focus, and then if they got focused on these hotspots, you would be able to observe an effect. And so that's where we went.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And of course, hotspot policing has now become one of the areas of criminology that's strongest body of evidence.

**David Weisburd:**

And Larry and I were convinced at the time that this was going to be important. We really felt like Young Turks. Today, people think I'm conventional, you win all these awards, et cetera, but we felt really that we were challenging the boundaries. And Ron helped a lot with that, by the way because he was totally for us challenging the boundaries, I'll tell you that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And this is your work in Minneapolis.

**David Weisburd:**

The Minneapolis Hotspots experiment comes out of this collaboration which comes out of Ron saying, "You choose the guy," Which comes out of Larry applying for the job.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What do people most frequently get wrong about hotspots policing?

**David Weisburd:**

What the media gets wrong is they think hotspots policing is a particular policing strategy. After Nichols was killed by some crime suppression team in Memphis, which seemed to be working in specific areas, I got a lot of calls, obviously from the media. What struck me was they kept thinking that hotspots was about a particular strategy. Hotspots policing is not about a particular strategy, it's about a particular insight. Most crime occurs in a relatively small proportion of the streets or intersections in the city. And the insight is that therefore, if you want to get a bang for your buck, you can focus on those places and you can be more efficient. But they seem to think it's about beating people's heads in, or in other words, it's about heavy-handed policing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, it says nothing about what strategies you do when you're in the hotspot.

**David Weisburd:**

The one strategy it talks about is increasing focus. In other words, increasing police presence. So if you want to say does hotspots policing increase police presence on certain streets? It does, and that's right. But what they do in those

streets is something different. And this is missed by the media. Hotspots policing is a made equivalent to stop, question, frisk. I could read you this review I got through this grant proposal I sent, and it is just this assumption that hotspot policing is about beating people's heads in that are pressing minorities. That's all about what the police are doing there, it would seem to me. The one caveat, I'd say, is hotspots policing is about focusing in on particular streets. But even there, and this is what law scholars, for example, get wrong all the time, they think the police sort of choose the places they go to for hotspots policing. For the most part, the data that generates what's a hotspot comes from...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Comes from the community.

**David Weisburd:**

Citizens.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, comes from the community.

**David Weisburd:**

So I'm actually working on an article about this now because in the law area, this is way off.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I'm shocked to hear that lawyers who spend no time on the streets and have no experience with data or analysis get this wrong. I'm shocked to find gambling going on in this way.

**David Weisburd:**

This is just something that's repeated over and over again as if it were truth.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. So I shouldn't have too much faith in articles in law journals that are peer reviewed by second year law students?

**David Weisburd:**

Well, I think this is coming true of, generally in academia, acceptable now to just assume the police are brutal, that hotspots policing causes racial animus and all these other sorts of things.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So the criminology field gets this wrong too?

**David Weisburd:**

Well, a lot of criminologists are coming out of fields where it is becoming more prominent. I think that at the moment, just read some of these news articles that quote criminologists and it's just an assumption. I just did a survey with the



National Policing Institute in Phoenix and we asked people at hotspots whether they want more police, less police or same level, and they...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I know what you're going to answer, they absolutely want more police.

**David Weisburd:**

They want more police. And I think it's true that people who live in these streets that are very problematic want more police. Now, they want the police to treat them with dignity and respect, and that's not too much to ask, but they certainly want much more police. But there is this sense out there in academia, and to some degree in the media, that more police is bad. Let's defund the police. Most of the evidence is on the other direction. Research which I already seen published in the PNAS, which was a randomized trial in three cities in which we provided the equal number of police in the treatment and control group. I guess I should call this a crime suppression team. The difference in the treatment and control in this case was that the treatment group received five days of training in procedural justice, treating people with respect and these sorts of issues.

And that research has convinced me that it is true that if you're going to send cop to deal with hotspots of crime and unit, that it's a good idea to train them because they're going to have a lot of interaction with people. The results of that study suggest that's right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've been to a number of police academies and the training that people get at police academies varies greatly, but at least some of the ones, I can't speak for all of them, but some of the ones I've been to are still locked into this old school mentality, cops that were last on the street 20 years ago, and it was warrior mode, you've got to take charge, you've got own the streets and all this kind of stuff, and it sets up a very confrontational attitude. But what you're saying is the procedural justice can add a more personalized component to soften that edge while still being able to do hotspots policing?

**David Weisburd:**

Look, I think that today's police are trained a bit differently to some degree. These kinds of programs like procedural justice, being more respectful to citizens are emphasized. What I like about this study was I think there was a growing perception in the US that you either had to choose police reform, in other words getting police to behave better with more respect for citizens, et cetera, or you had to choose crime control. Those two things worked in opposition to each other. But that's not what we found. We found that you got crime control, you got improved citizen evaluations of the police, you got more respectful behavior all at the same time.

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

The media get the tactics wrong about hotspots policing, but what I've found is that many police officers fail to understand that displacement isn't a given. They assume that displacement is just going to happen. You focus in one area, we're going to move all the crime to somewhere else, but you haven't found that's the case either.

## David Weisburd:

Yeah, it's interesting because cops go both ways. On the one hand, it's not surprising to them that a specific street has problems. When you tell criminologists about this and the concentration of crime, they would say, "Yeah, well, they're in some community." The cops understand the micro geographic nature of policing because they're going there all the time. I keep coming back to that same block, right? But at the same time, both for academics and for the police, it's hard for people to lose that theory of crime. You have to be careful because on the one hand, police have experience with displacement they purposely cause. There's a prostitution site in a certain block, the cops say, look, we're going to rash you all the time here. Go two blocks over, we'll leave you alone. And golly gee, they often go two blocks over even though it's disadvantageous for them in terms of clients, et cetera. So they have some experience with that. And it's also the case, you can't turn around and say displacement never exists.

But the assumption that it's an inevitable result of prevention and policing is just wrong. It's all over the world. I was at a meeting in Israel with a deputy commissioner and some academics and someone said, "Well, don't you know that Weisburd found that crime doesn't just move around the corner." He said, "Well, my stomach tells me that crime displaces."

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

Ah, the old gut instinct.

## David Weisburd:

My instinct is from my experience in the street that happens, the problem is that it can happen. It certainly can. But the research we've done starting with the Jersey City Displacement Diffusion project, I think it's pretty much shown that displacement is not inevitable, and more likely in the displacement, it was Ron Clarke and I coined the term diffusion of crime control benefits. Look, after we did the Minneapolis Hotspots experiment, what loomed large was the issue of, well, didn't crime just move around the corner? I was in a police car visiting Minneapolis, called me, gets on the radio and says, "Hey guys, I got that crazy academic that's making us go to these places. Doesn't he know that crime just moves around the corner?"

## Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you were actually in the car at the time.

## David Weisburd:

They actually said more. They said, "I'm going to bring him down to so-and-so's gym. We can all talk to him there now." They were joking with me. But yeah, they thought it was ridiculous at the time. So it's disappointing if that kind of

attitude is still there. But in Minneapolis, I tried to measure a displacement. Often, these places were near places with a lot of crime, so needle in the haystack problems in terms of measurement. So I developed the Jersey City Displacement diffusion project, which was not a randomized trial, but a controlled experiment, where we had a target area and we had two displacement areas around. And in that study, using observational measurement for drug crime and prostitution, we found that the crime didn't just move around the corner, indeed, when you crack down on the target sites, that the areas around got better as well.

That's when the intervention itself was tightly focused on the target sites. Now that was, I think, a pretty important study that gave people some sense, not only empirically that displacement was not inevitable, but it was also important because it provided a logic model for why that was the case.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you and Ron coined the term.

### David Weisburd:

Ron and I coined the term diffusion of crime control benefits. So those meetings, those teas with Ron way back when have been around in my head for years and years and years. But in this case, the question becomes why. Yeah, we were doing a bunch of research that was giving us ideas about that. One was that quite often these hotspots were in places that offered situational opportunities, as Ron would say. That made them good places to carry out certain types of crimes. A good example is juvenile crime. We found juvenile crime highly concentrated in Seattle, but at the same time, the question becomes, around the corner you didn't have it because the juvenile crime was concentrated in obvious places where juveniles congregated, like stores that juveniles would use, malls. And in Minneapolis, around those malls would be like single family homes. They're not going there.

So one reason for lack of displacement was the same opportunities did not exist around the corner. A second reason, however, and this was why that study was important, we did qualitative work as well. I think qualitative work is a great way to develop a sense of the mechanisms going on. We interviewed offenders, we had a qualitative researcher at the prostitution site doing ethnographic research, and what it turned out was, for them, moving what you're doing to another place can be dangerous, it can be uncomfortable. One prostitute told us someone had asked, "Well, why don't you move to another prostitution site?" She said, "I don't feel comfortable with those girls." And for me, that was one of the most important ideas, one of the most important theories, if you like. The truth is, just like we all don't go to some club or some bar or some restaurant we don't feel comfortable, we get our hair done, we don't like to change it, these people the same way. They have the same basic set of motivations we all do.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

I agree with you because the quantitative work is the important stuff in terms of the policy because it tells you whether something works or not, but the qualitative work tells you why it works or it tells you why it doesn't work.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, again, something is more powerful when it makes sense to people. One of the reasons why the cop think there's displacement, it makes sense to them. If you push down here, the balloon's going to go up there. That model is entrenched in people's heads.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So we have to explain to them that other option, which is, if you push down here, it won't go over there because over there is not like here.

**David Weisburd:**

Also because those people who are here for human reasons, they don't feel comfortable going over there.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

They don't want to go over there.

**David Weisburd:**

They might be afraid. They might feel uncomfortable. I was looking through your book you sent me on evidence-based policing. You try to do that throughout the book, to give them a sense of why this is occurring, of why this logic might make sense.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I didn't know you had such masochistic tendencies.

**David Weisburd:**

No, no. Actually I think it's written in a way that will... I can see a lot of courses with police and others taking advantage of the book. It's a good book.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Thank you. Looking back now, what advice would you give young scholars coming into the policing field?

**David Weisburd:**

What I would say for younger people is that they shouldn't be overly affected by what's immediately important. By that I mean that the atmosphere is changing all the time, and if you run after that atmosphere, you're not going to make really important contributions. You may be on the front page of the newspaper, you may write an op-ed, but you're not going to make the kind of contributions that last because those things are things that are developed over time, thinking it through, they're not directly responsive.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What do you mean by the stuff that's right now?

**David Weisburd:**

Well, for example, right now, I'd say that more people are concerned with how to control the police than how the police control crime. I think that you can get drawn away by the immediate concerns. This week we're at, "Defund the police," Now I'm reading all over the place, "We need more police. The crime's gone up." I mean, that type of instability is not good for science. For science, you have to have some idea of direction. Beware of being dragged along. And it's also what's simple. It's like, maybe this is not good advice, but in my career, I've sort of gone after what I was interested in next and not just benefiting from what I've already done. So I could have done a lot more, I suspect, traditional hotspot studies than I did, but I kept asking myself, "What is the question you want to ask?" And sometimes those questions are not of interest at that moment.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**David Weisburd:**

When Larry and I did the original hotspots study, I don't think it got very much played for a few years. As scientists, we're producing the basic science for it, I think, as well as the applied science.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a really good answer. Yeah.

**David Weisburd:**

You think so?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah.

**David Weisburd:**

Maybe not now, all these people will be not succeeding. So tell me what you think. What is your views?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think it's hard for young scholars because what were the influences when we were starting our scholarship? We didn't have Twitter, we didn't have any of that kind of stuff. So if you want to know what people are doing, you went to a conference once a year, and if you wanted to see what people are doing or what they were interested in. So in the intervening period, you just basically looked at what journal articles they published in the meantime, and that often had a time delay. So I think by the nature of the business, you could think about more long-term problems. And now I worry about young scholars getting sucked into, "Well, this is going on, this is going on. Let's do a hit and run paper that and hit and run paper that," And, "What if that person gets there first?" Because it's so quick and rapid, and I wonder if we're producing more and more scholars who don't have a specific specialty, but their area of research is publishing a lot.

**David Weisburd:**

I think a depressing part of this is, I would've thought that the funding for policing research would've expanded a lot more than it has. In other words, I think that this idea of a college of policing or a national institute of policing is a really important idea.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Absolutely. A hundred percent.

**David Weisburd:**

Because the funding mechanisms are not there, and also the way they're set up. I mean, I think that academics should be looking at lots of questions about policing that may not fit in the traditional academic framework, but are important, like in medicine, but important for the advancement of the work. And right now, there should be scores of studies, randomized trials looking at the problem of procedural justice. These are the kind of specific questions the police need to know about,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Generalized we know about this, but now... It's always the case when you go to a policing conference. If you have something successful, the first questions I'm always asked are, "How do I do it? What did you do?" And they don't want to spend weeks on training if they can get away with doing it for five days or three days.

**David Weisburd:**

And I think this is what I call second generation studies. We know that hotspots can work. Now, what can we do at specific types of hotspots? But I don't understand why there has not been greater support for research on training, on problems in policing, on strategies and all this sort of stuff.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it seems that there's almost more money from nonprofits and non-government money, and that's very much geared, these days, towards, how can we get policing out of policing?

**David Weisburd:**

Or interested in inequality and these sorts of questions which are really important. I don't want to give the impression that I don't think they are, make sure you include that, but there's the other issues that are also important, very important for the everyday practices. Look, I'll tell you a surprising thing in this part of my career. So I did this large NIH basic research study, an RO one study, on hotspots of crime. It's convinced me of the importance of issues like Collective FC at the micro geographic level. So when this defund the police movement came up, and even before, I started thinking, well, the natural next result is to build these social conditions like Collective FC, that would be social workers and others, where they would work to increase Collective FC. I thought people would like this, all this defund the police, and I got very little traction, and I'm not an unknown guy.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Why'd you think that was?

**David Weisburd:**

I think people like to talk about other options besides the police, but when it comes down to it... Why do you think this hasn't gained traction? It's not anti-police, but it's an alternative to investing in the police.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I think there's a piece of it where as crime went up post George Floyd, post Covid, there was a lot of talk in the sort of intellectual elite sphere, but as you found in your hotspots area, people still want the police to turn up. And the reality is that cities, I think they're looking at it going, "Well, that's great, but it's going to cost us a bucket load more money." And the brutal reality is the reason the police got given all these jobs in the first place is because you could just add more and more to their workload without actually drastically increasing the amount of money you give to them, whereas to set up a separate unit, that's great, but when that unit's not doing that thing, they're not doing anything else. Whereas if you give the job to the cops, when they're not doing a mental health call, they're doing crime prevention or they're dealing with a dog or they're dealing with whatever else it is, and that's the problem, is cities want to talk about this stuff, but they don't want to pay for it.

**David Weisburd:**

So a community activists in New York told me the reason why they go to the police also is because they're good at doing what they do. I don't know if this is true every year or whatever, but they have a sense it's going to get done well, whereas other city agencies are less confident, which is interesting for a community activist to say this.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've had deputy commissions in Philadelphia just turn around and say, "Well, we had this plan and it was us and probation and parole and these three or four other city agencies and we did our bit and we spent all of our own money and we turned up, and what did everybody else do? They didn't show up." I'm sorry probation and parole. I'm picking on you because I mentioned you, but there were other agencies. But it's that bottom line of, there's questions about accountability and policing, but there's certainly lack of accountability in other city agencies.

**David Weisburd:**

Wilson and Kelling raised this. I've criticized some other aspects of broken windows, but in one way, I think they were right, which is, the police can't do all the work.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No.

**David Weisburd:**

The community has to be engaged in doing some of this work. And then the police can sort of work on the, let's call it, the margins of what's going on.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But I run into cops frustrated about doing problem-oriented policing projects where it's, "Let's do something about the street lighting, let's do something about this, that and the other," And they just run into these barriers or other city agencies that just don't have the buy-in, they don't have the accountability and they just turn around and say no. And then they say, "What are you going to do?"

**David Weisburd:**

My view at this point is, the idea that hotspots of crime are sort of hopeless and that the police have to take control and the city has to take control, there are people who live in these streets and they can be partners in this effort, the original community policing idea. But that means you have to work on increasing that Collective FC on those streets, you have to work on increasing their strength as partners, and I think that would help the whole crime control equation and would also take burdens off the police.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So it doesn't sound like you are retiring really anytime soon.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, anytime soon, I'm not sure. Look, at this point, there are two things that determine retirement in that regard, one is to what extent you enjoy what you're doing. So the things I'm doing, I like. The work at the university I'm doing, I like. There's always things you don't like, but overall, I'm happy doing it. And I've been very lucky in that these institutions have been very supportive of me. The other thing, of course, as you get older is health. As long as you're healthy, that's okay. And then if you're not healthy, then life changes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, thanks so much for spending a bit of time with me. It's nice to see you.

**David Weisburd:**

Well, thanks for coming over and spending time with me and talking. It's been interesting.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

My recent book that David kindly mentioned at the end there is called *Evidence-Based Policing: The Basics*, and is published by Routledge. Details of the book and instructor support materials including videos and PowerPoints can be found at [evidencebasedpolicing.net](http://evidencebasedpolicing.net) and evidence-based policing there is all one word.



## Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 66 of Reducing Crime recorded in Washington D.C. in June of 2023. New episodes are announced on Twitter, Blue Sky, Threads or LinkedIn, but if you subscribe, they'll be delivered straight to your preferred device without you doing a thing. And the Reducing Crime website has transcripts of every episode. If you teach, message me for multiple choice questions.

Be safe and best of luck.