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WHEN PREVENTION BECOMES RESPONSE: AN EXPLORATORY TIME-AND-MOTION STUDY OF A CRIME PREVENTION INSPECTOR'S WORKLOAD IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This conference paper examines whether the daily workload of a local crime-prevention inspector leaves sufficient time for genuinely preventive work. It draws on an exploratory five-day time-and-motion observation conducted in an urban district of Uzbekistan as part of a broader institutional study. Activities were classified into reactive incident response, preventive work, administrative documentation, meetings/instructions, and breaks. The observed work pattern was dominated by reactive and administrative demands: 51.9% of recorded work time was spent on calls, complaints, and immediate response; direct preventive activity accounted for 21.4%; administrative documentation for 10.0%; and meetings or instructions for 8.1%. A complementary Pareto analysis showed that emergency calls, administrative documents, and citizen applications together absorbed approximately two-thirds of the observed time. The paper argues that this creates an institutional paradox: the officer formally responsible for early prevention may operate primarily as a first responder and universal administrative executor. The study proposes separating mandatory response functions from preventive functions, protecting minimum preventive time, and assessing inspectors through problem resolution and risk reduction rather than activity volume alone.



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Keywords: crime prevention; time-and-motion study; police workload; reactive policing; proactive prevention; performance management; Uzbekistan.

1. Introduction

Crime prevention requires time before an incident occurs: time to identify risk factors, work with individuals and families, analyse recurring local problems, coordinate social services, and design targeted interventions. Yet frontline prevention officers are often simultaneously expected to respond to calls, process administrative cases, handle citizen applications, execute court-related tasks, maintain public order, and produce extensive documentation. When these functions accumulate, the formal mandate of prevention may remain unchanged while the actual use of working time shifts toward response.

This distinction is not semantic. Reactive work begins after a complaint, incident, breach, or urgent request has already arisen. Preventive work aims to reduce the probability, frequency, or severity of future harm. Both are necessary, but an institution designated as a prevention service becomes structurally constrained if most of its working time is absorbed by tasks triggered after problems have already materialised.

International policing literature has long distinguished incident-driven policing from problem-oriented and evidence-based approaches. Goldstein argued that police effectiveness should be organised around solving recurring problems rather than merely processing incidents [1]. Sherman later framed evidence-based policing as the use of the best available research to decide what police practices should be deployed, for whom, and under what conditions [2]. Weisburd and Eck similarly showed that focused, problem-oriented strategies have stronger preventive logic than undifferentiated reactive patrol alone [3].



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The research question of this paper is therefore narrow: how much of a local prevention inspector's observed working time is actually available for preventive activity, and what does that distribution imply for the legal and institutional design of crime-prevention functions?

2. Method

The empirical component is an exploratory time-and-motion observation of a neighbourhood-level crime-prevention inspector in an urban district of Uzbekistan. The observation covered five consecutive working days. Activities were recorded and classified into five functional categories: (1) reactive calls, complaints, and immediate response; (2) direct preventive activity; (3) administrative documentation; (4) meetings and instructions; and (5) breaks.

The observation was complemented by a functional review of the inspector's legally and administratively assigned responsibilities and by a Pareto analysis identifying the task groups consuming the largest share of time. The aim was diagnostic rather than representative. The study does not claim that one officer or one district represents all prevention inspectors in Uzbekistan. Instead, it uses direct observation to test whether the formal preventive mandate can be crowded out by recurrent operational demands.

To preserve confidentiality and avoid overgeneralisation, no locality, officer, case, or individual-level information is disclosed. The figures below describe only aggregate time allocation during the observation period.



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3. Findings

Table 1. Observed distribution of working time

Activity category	Share of observed time	Functional character
Calls, complaints, and immediate response	51.9%	Reactive
Direct preventive activity	21.4%	Preventive
Administrative documentation	10.0%	Administrative / reactive support
Meetings and instructions	8.1%	Coordination / management
Breaks	8.6%	Non-work / rest

The most important finding is the imbalance between the institutional label of the position and the observed use of time. Direct preventive work occupied just over one-fifth of the observed working time, while incident-driven calls and complaints alone accounted for more than half. Administrative documentation created an additional layer of workload that was necessary for legal processing but did not itself constitute early prevention.

A complementary Pareto analysis grouped emergency calls, administrative documents, and citizen applications together. These activities absorbed approximately 68% of observed working time. Emergency-call handling alone accounted for 30.8% of the five-day observation period. The practical implication is that the inspector's most scarce resource - time - was concentrated on already materialised problems rather than on early risk identification or targeted prevention.

The observation also indicated extended working days. The average recorded duration was approximately 12 hours and 25 minutes per day during the observation period. This should be interpreted cautiously because of the small



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sample, but it suggests that the system may respond to functional overload not by reallocating tasks but by extending working time.

The functional review reinforces this interpretation. The prevention inspector is expected to combine preventive analysis, work with at-risk persons, public-order responsibilities, administrative procedures, urgent responses, reporting, coordination, and tasks that require the participation of education, health, social-protection, probation, migration, and community institutions. The result can be a “universal executor” effect: the institution with the strongest local presence absorbs heterogeneous tasks even when their substantive solution lies elsewhere.

4. Discussion

The findings illustrate a broader institutional paradox. A prevention officer can formally retain a preventive mandate while operational incentives and mandatory workflows transform the job into reactive case processing. This is consistent with Goldstein’s distinction between handling incidents and addressing underlying problems [1]. If most time is committed to calls, paperwork, and immediate response, there is less capacity for risk analysis, repeat-offender work, family interventions, social-service coordination, and place-based prevention.

This does not mean reactive tasks are unnecessary. Emergency response, complaints, and legally required documentation are core public-service obligations. The problem is functional concentration. When one position is simultaneously designed as prevention specialist, first responder, administrator, coordinator, and executor, urgent tasks predictably displace important but non-urgent preventive work. Prevention becomes residual: it is performed with the time left after mandatory response tasks are completed.

Three institutional implications follow. First, prevention policy should protect a minimum share of working time for analysis, targeted individual work, and



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problem-solving. Such protected time should not be routinely consumed by general response duties except in genuine emergencies. Second, tasks should be allocated according to competence. Employment, health, education, social protection, and probation problems should be transferred through accountable referral mechanisms rather than remaining under indefinite police follow-up. Third, performance assessment should not reward activity volume alone. Counting visits, conversations, reports, or meetings may encourage visible productivity without measuring whether risk declined or a recurring problem was resolved.

A more prevention-oriented performance model would distinguish process indicators from outcome indicators. Process indicators can verify that legally required work was completed. Outcomes should capture whether repeated calls decreased, whether an at-risk person's situation stabilised, whether a referral resulted in an actual service, whether reoffending risk declined, and whether a recurring local problem was resolved. Sparrow similarly argues that modern police performance should be tied to harm reduction and problem control rather than simple activity counts [4].

The study also has clear limitations. It is exploratory, based on a short observation window and a single local case. Work patterns may vary by season, district, staffing, crime profile, and emergency demand. The results therefore cannot be generalised statistically to all prevention inspectors. Their value is diagnostic: they demonstrate a plausible mechanism by which formal prevention capacity can be crowded out by reactive workload and justify a larger multi-site time-use study.



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5. Conclusion

The central finding is simple: in the observed case, prevention was institutionally important but temporally marginal. Most recorded working time was absorbed by reactive, administrative, and immediate-response tasks, while direct preventive activity represented a much smaller share.

The policy implication is not to eliminate response duties, but to redesign the division of labour so that a prevention inspector has protected capacity to prevent. This requires clearer functional boundaries, accountable referral of non-police social problems, simplified documentation, and performance indicators that value risk reduction and problem resolution rather than activity volume.

A larger study should replicate the time-and-motion method across several districts, periods, and inspector profiles. If the same pattern is confirmed, the issue should be treated not as an individual productivity problem but as a structural mismatch between the legal objective of prevention and the operational allocation of working time.

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