

# Evidence-based crime prevention

Evidence-based crime prevention is based on interventions with demonstrated effectiveness in preventing crime – using what works best. There are many considerations involved in selecting and implementing new crime prevention programs (as well as in expanding effective programs or putting an end to ineffective ones).

## What is evidence-based crime prevention?

When we start thinking about the development of a plan or project, one of the most basic questions that must be explored is not only ‘what are we trying to do?’ but also ‘why?’.

In the initial planning stages we consider the aims, objectives, target audience and expected outcomes of a strategy. Few projects however, actually consider the ‘why factor’. Why is this plan or project necessary? Is there a need for this?

The concept behind ‘evidence-based crime prevention’ is to encourage us to do exactly that. If the development of crime prevention projects aims to prevent, and subsequently decrease the prevalence of a crime category, then, ‘evidence-based crime prevention’ is simply identifying evidence that supports the need for this project, and after its conclusion, identifying evidence of its success or failure.



The implementation of 'evidence-based' crime prevention can be best understood in three stages:

### **1. Initial needs analysis**

Is there evidence that supports the crime need for this project? Identifying Police data, BOCSAR reports, information provided by local service providers, ABS data, etc.

### **2. Specific project analysis**

Is there evidence that supports the implementation of this specific project as a successful strategy to achieve the desired crime prevention outcomes? Is this the best way to respond to this crime problem? Look at previous successful projects and outcomes from research.

### **3. Post program evaluation**

If the development of projects is informed by a crime needs analysis, then evaluating their success or failure is easier to do. For evidence-based crime prevention to be successful the project's aims need to directly correlate to the evidence identified in the needs analysis. For example, in developing a robbery prevention program where Police data identified elderly residents as particular victims of robbery, the program should specifically target this group. Part of the development of the program should look at outcomes of similar projects in other areas. Once completed, if the program was successful, the post-program data should reflect some change in Police data compared to the data collected at the beginning of the program.

## **Measurement – what is 'evidence'?**

The concept of "evidence" refers to a range of tangible information that can be used to identify a problem and the need for a response. As previously mentioned, this can be later used for evaluation purposes.

Information can be broadly considered in two categories; quantitative (such as statistical information) and qualitative (such as anecdotal data provided during consultations).

When considering crime statistical information we highly recommend that you look at information provided by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and other data that can be provided on a needs basis by NSW Police local area commands.

When considering qualitative data, information provided by community members, stakeholders or other agencies could be useful. However, this must be presented in some consistent way so that it will facilitate and legitimise the evidence-based process. For example, if we are trying to measure, via focus groups, something that is not reflected in Police statistics, such as 'domestic violence', focus groups should be conducted in a consistent manner both before and after the project to produce data that can be compared.

A good needs analysis should be informed by both quantitative and qualitative data.

## **Social planning, community development and evidence-based crime prevention**

One of the main misconceptions is that the adoption of an evidence-based crime prevention model will reduce the likelihood of community development or capacity building type programs. These interpretations are based on the fact that most programs of this nature are not solely focused towards crime prevention, but rather, have it as a by-product of it.

Developing programs that have crime prevention, as a by-product can be as legitimate as long as they are based on a crime needs analysis and evidence. For example, there is both quantitative and qualitative data that identifies the causal relationship between lack of employment opportunities and involvement in some types of crime. Programs aiming to increase employment would therefore be easily linked to crime prevention as long as they are targeted at the offending group.

The key points to remember when developing plans and programs of this nature are the factors used to define the causal relationship and how the program will be evaluated. The identification and evaluation of causal links specific to a project is at times difficult and requires a longer follow up and evaluation period than other types of projects. For example, whilst the causal links in the above employment example are clear, to establish criteria in a specific community that link local youth criminal activity to a lack of employment would require Police data that identifies youth offenders as unemployed. Then, data that links a decrease in such behaviour to an increase in youth employment in that specific community would be needed.

## Statistical limitations

Criminologists and crime prevention practitioners often criticise programs solely based on Police or BOCSAR statistics as they reflect only recorded/

detected crime. They emphasise the fact that resource and funding allocations alongside police operational priorities will affect the detection of criminal behaviour in specific areas and give a false impression of trends. They refer to the pool of unrecorded data as 'the dark figure of crime'.

To address these limitations, a local crime profile includes information from official statistics and the identification of, and consultation with, stakeholders and target groups. We do not intend to solely judge the success or failure of programs on statistics, but a consideration of them is an important component in the development and implementation of holistic evidence-based crime prevention strategies.

It is also worth noting that there are various other agencies that do not have a crime prevention focus but collect important data relating to crime as a routine procedure. These include Local Government and service providers who collect information as part of their standard asset management procedures regarding vandalism on public property for example or hospitals who collect information regarding various categories of hospital admissions such as assaults.

## Further information

For more information on crime prevention theories and methodologies, please visit [www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au](http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au)