



Crime musings...

What works in crime reduction

Factsheet #1, February 2018

Back in 2005-2006, some amazing work was undertaken in Washington to identify evidence-based and cost-beneficial crime policy options.

Why did they do it?

The driver for this work was basically money. The government wanted to know what worked to reduce crime and how much it cost. This was because there had been a prediction that Washington would need two new prisons, each costing about \$250 million to build and \$45 million a year to operate.

What did they do?

The researchers were asked to focus on the cost-effectiveness of three types of programs:

- intervention programs (to reduce the likelihood of convicted offenders committing further offences),
- prevention programs (to reduce the need for prisons), and
- sentencing options (laws and sentencing that help reduce criminal justice costs).

How did they do it?

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) conducted a systematic, statistical review of more than 571 'rigorous' evaluations from around the world (published in English). In a systematic review, 'the results of all rigorous evaluation studies are analysed to determine if, on average, it can be stated scientifically that a program achieves an outcome' (p. 6).

To estimate the return on investment, the researchers considered not just the direct costs of an initiative but also the cost-savings (e.g. in terms of criminal justice system administration costs; costs to victims).

To determine if a particular program or approach was evidence-based, the researchers grouped evaluations of the same kinds of initiative together

(e.g. they had 57 evaluations of adult drug courts) and then undertook meta-analyses. Sometimes there were too few studies to allow for statistically significant or meaningful conclusions to be drawn.

What did they learn?

The programs with the best benefit-costs were those that targeted young offenders, such as therapeutic foster care and diversionary options.

The programs that had the biggest effect on crime rates similarly were early-intervention strategies that targeted children and young offenders. The effective adult-focused programs were those that were treatment-oriented, or focused on education and vocational skills.

e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

WSIPP looked at 25 CBT program reviews. They found, on average, these programs reduced adult recidivism by 6.3%. This means, based on the idea that 63% of untreated offenders will re-offend, if those same offenders received CBT, only 59% would likely re-offend (i.e. 93.7% of 63%). In 2006 dollars, a CBT program cost \$105 per participant and the net value was \$10,299 per participant in life-cycle benefits.

More information

To read about the original study have a look at:

Steve Aos, Marna Miller & Elizabeth Drake Evidence-based Public Policy Options to Reduce Future Prison Construction, Criminal Justice Costs and Crime Rates. At: <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/Reports/182>

WSIPP undertook an updated inventory of research - and evidence-based programs for adult offenders in 2013. It can be found here: http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1600/Wsipp_Inventory-of-Evidence-Based-and-Research-Based-Programs-for-Adult-Corrections_Inventory-flowchart.pdf