

The Effects of Focused Deterrence Strategies on Crime: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Evidence

Objective. Focused deterrence strategies are increasingly being applied to prevent and control gang and group-involved violence, overt drug markets, and individual repeat offenders. Given the growing popularity of this approach, a systematic review and meta-analysis of the extant evaluation evidence is needed to determine the crime reduction benefits of the approach.

Methods. Our examination of the effects of focused deterrence strategies on crime followed the systematic review protocols and conventions of the Campbell Collaboration. As a preliminary examination of the effects of focused deterrence strategies on crime, we used a vote counting procedure. In our closer examination of program effects, meta-analyses were used to determine the size, direction, and statistical significance of the overall impact of focused deterrence strategies on crime.

Results. We identified ten quasi-experimental evaluations and one randomized controlled trial. Our meta-analysis suggests that focused deterrence strategies are associated with an overall statistically-significant, medium-sized crime reduction effect. However, the strongest program effect sizes were generated by evaluations that used the weakest research designs.

Conclusion. We conclude that this approach seems very promising in reducing crime but a more rigorous body of evaluation research needs to be developed. While the results of this review are very supportive of deterrence principles, we believe that other complementary crime control mechanisms are at work in the focused deterrence strategies described here that need to be highlighted and better understood.

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