Evidence-Based Crime Policy Resources

By Cynthia Lum. Written for BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) September 2011 Newsletter. See http://bjatraining.org/newsletter/september-2011-evidence-based-practices/

Evidence-Based Crime Policy in Action

Evidence-based criminal justice policy and practice requires two basic steps - an awareness and comprehension of existing research evidence, and an understanding of how to judge the quality and scientific believability of that evidence. For example, we may ask, "what does the research say about the use and effectiveness of repeat offender targeting on violent crime in neighborhoods?" And, just as importantly, we may inquire, "was that body of research generated using strong scientific evaluation methods so that we can be assured of its findings?" The answers to these questions can help decision makers make more informed choices and thus, be more evidence-based.

A number of resources for criminal justice practitioners are available to assist with navigating these basic requirements of evidence-based crime policy. Many are generally described as "reviews of research". Systematic reviews of research help to organize a wide variety of information, pointing out differences and similarities across studies with regard to strength of methods used and generalizations of findings. The well-known examples of reviews of research listed below are resources that can help consumers of criminal justice evaluation knowledge to make more informed decisions.

Large, multi-area reviews

Most notably, the 1997 University of Maryland report to Congress, entitled ***Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, and What's Promising***,[1] (conducted by Lawrence Sherman and colleagues) was a comprehensive rating and review of evaluation studies across multiple areas of criminal justice practice (i.e., families, communities, policing, places, corrections, labor markets). This was later updated in a 2002 book, ***Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*** (Sherman et al. 2002). Within the major areas of criminal justice (courts, corrections, law enforcement, legal policy, treatment, early prevention, etc.), there have also been large reviews. The National Research Council's ***Fairness and Effectiveness in Policing***[2] is one example. However, the Maryland Report remains one of the more influential systematic reviews (in addition to the Martinson Report of 1974) that influenced the direction of evidence-based crime policy.

Reviews of research on a specific topic

The ***Campbell Collaboration***[3] and others have conducted numerous systematic reviews of research which focus more specifically on a particular type of crime prevention intervention or

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[1] The full report is located at https://www.ncjrs.gov/works/ .
[2] This report can be downloaded chapter by chapter at http://books.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10419 .
[3] See www.campbellcollaboration.org .

strategy. These reviews rate and summarize multiple studies on specific topics, and have included reviews of evaluations on juvenile boot camps, hot spots policing, or parent training programs, just to name a few. Since these systematic reviews take into account the scientific rigor of available evaluations of focused criminal justice issues, practitioners can rely on these reviews to provide a reliable snapshot of the field of evaluation research concerning a particular intervention. Both completed and in-progress reviews and protocols are freely available at the Campbell Collaboration Website, under its *Crime and Justice Coordinating Group*.[4] Their site also houses short summaries to assist in easy translation of lengthy reviews. There are other systematic reviews that have not been conducted through the Campbell system on a variety of topics.

Resources that present research in a user-friendly, translational way

Part of the evidence-based crime policy paradigm is a push towards translating research into more user-friendly forms that can be readily digested and institutionalized by consumers of research. Recently, the Office of Justice Programs launched *crimesolutions.gov*,[5] bringing together experts across the field of criminal justice to rate programs for evidence of effectiveness across numerous sectors of criminal justice. Similar to the Maryland Report, this effort is a step forward in the field, as it provides information through a web-based system that allows for easier access of the research. Additionally, Lum, Koper and Telep, of the *Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy* (CEBCP) at George Mason University,[6] developed and continuously update the *Evidence-Based Policing Matrix*.[7] This Matrix organizes the evaluation research on policing in a way in which police can not only generalize from large amounts of research but also develop deployment tactics and assessments using the tool. BJA in the upcoming two years will sponsor a multi-agency demonstration project of the Matrix, in an attempt to find ways in which to institutionalize the use of research into daily law enforcement practices.

Other Evidence-Based Policy Resources

In addition to reviews that rate the quality of research for use by practitioners, a number of other resources are available that facilitate evidence based crime policy. The CEBCP at George Mason has joined forces with the Bureau of Justice Assistance to create the *e-Consortium of University Researchers for Partnership with Justice Practitioners*[8] to help justice agencies connect with nearby scholars conducting research on a variety of topics. Within the e-Consortium, listed centers provide a variety of resources including evaluations of criminal justice practices, ideas on how to incorporate research into practice, and training and technical assistance.

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[4] See http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/reviews_crime_justice/index.php .
[5] See crimesolutions.gov .
[6] See www.cebcp.org .
[7] See http://gemini.gmu.edu/cebcp/matrix.html .
[8] See http://gmuconsortium.org/ .