



Title: The Effectiveness of Partnership Working in a Crime and Disorder Context: A Rapid Evidence Assessment (Research Report 52)

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SCS topic headings: Partnership Working; Evaluation and Monitoring

[This document is a RAPID EVIDENCE ASSESSMENT of partnership working approaches.](#)

Summary of the intervention's aim

This report is a systematic attempt to review the social research evidence base around partnership working, and synthesise the evidence base in a way which makes it easily available for practitioners and policy makers.

A rapid evidence assessment (REA) provides a robust method of synthesising evidence by adopting systematic review methods to search and critically appraise available research in a subject area. The approach is made more “rapid” than traditional systematic reviews by limiting the breadth or depth of the process whilst maintaining the same level of quality criteria in assessing the available evidence. (See the last section of this EIR to read more about the REA process and the Maryland assessment scale.)

This REA sought to address two questions:

i) *“Are partnerships more effective and efficient in achieving crime-related outcomes than alternatives?”*

ii) *“What factors have been identified as making partnerships work effectively and efficiently in delivering crime-related outcomes?”*

Outcomes

Much of the evidence comes from US based multi site studies which feature diverse patterns of local partnership working. This needs to be considered when reflecting on the applicability of the findings for England and Wales.

The catalyst for partnership working was either the identification of a known problem (often by those not directly responsible for delivering the intervention) and the provision of funding to address that problem, or, the identification of a problem by partner agencies in which mutual benefit in tackling this was identified.

The main focus of the studies identified through this review was violent crime. In most cases the partnership element of the interventions reviewed focused on joining up the provision of services to a target group in order to achieve specific crime related outcomes (e.g. reduction in gang crime). All had, as an integral part of the intervention, the use of a partnership approach to tackling crime.

The initiatives themselves comprised prevention or deterrence activities, enhanced service provision or, in many instances, a combination of approaches determined by the local problem which had been identified through targeted analysis.

Of the nine studies assessed, six were evaluations of initiatives designed to tackle serious violence and three were not crime type specific. All were published between 2001 and 2009.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

The findings of the studies included in the review are mixed. However, on balance, the evidence suggests that the principle of applying partnership working as a component of initiatives to tackle complex crime and disorder problems is effective.

Isolating the contribution that particular components of an initiative make to crime reduction can be complex. This is particularly the case for this review which sought to identify the effectiveness of an *approach* (partnership working) rather than a specific intervention (e.g. installing door locks to reduce burglary).

However, Table 4 (p.19) summarises the key factors or mechanisms highlighted across all studies included in the review which were identified as being important in relation to securing effective partnership working. Whilst it is not possible to establish categorically that these characteristics led to effective partnerships, broadly speaking, the factors which studies identified as being associated with and a contributing factor to more effective partnership can be grouped under five main headings:

- Leadership
- Data sharing and problem solving focus
- Communication and collocation
- Structures
- Experience.

Further findings included:

- In all of the studies reviewed, formal partnerships were created or otherwise enhanced in order to support the delivery of specific interventions (although the catalyst for partnership formation varied across the studies).
- Several of the studies stress the importance of strong leadership together with a clear structure, and defined roles and responsibilities within the partnership (including a core management group).
- One study (Cahill et al, 2008) found that flexibility of approach and avoiding over-burdening of partnerships with strict bureaucratic structures and processes was an important factor in securing effective delivery of outcomes
- The prior experience of those involved in partnership working was identified as an important factor in several studies.
- The co-location of partnership teams (e.g. of operational partners from different organisations), particularly at a delivery level was also identified in the reviewed studies.
- At a strategic level, several studies suggest that shared values/norms amongst each of the partner organisations are critical to the success of partnerships.
- There appears to be no clear relationship between the number of partners included in an intervention/programme and the impact that was achieved.
- Several studies highlighted the importance of adopting evidence led/data driven activity to support a problem solving approach. This was particularly the case in sites in which a research/data analyst function was integrated into partnerships and played an active role in decision making.

Since completing this review, several additional papers have been published on the US interventions included in this review. The findings from these papers provide further supporting evidence for the key findings from this REA.

A useful rule of thumb in assessing the effectiveness of interventions comes from Sherman & Eck's (2002) review of 'what works' in crime and policing. In this review the authors adopted the view that for an approach to be classified as something that "works" it had to have two or more studies with positive results, with a scientific methods (Maryland Scale) score of 3 or more, and had to report the statistical significance of the findings. Although this might be considered a slightly generous interpretation of a 'what works' threshold, it is useful starting point in assessing the evidence when undertaking an REA.

How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

This report's REA utilises the Maryland Scale of Scientific Method. This is a 5-point scale developed by Sherman *et al.* (1997) which attempts to classify the nature of research design. Sherman *et al.* argue that the more robust the design, the greater likelihood that the research will provide stronger evidence. It does not classify the strength of an intervention's effect but assesses the strength of the scientific evidence- level 5 represents the strongest research design, and level 1 the weakest.

Putting the REA into practice meant the search strategy involved searching abstracts, titles and key words of a number of electronic databases, plus hand searches of a number of print sources. The REA focused on published UK and international studies in the English language. To ensure the relevance and currency of results, all searches only considered studies dated 1980 or later.

Search terms were agreed by the researchers and an initial list was identified and tested against a small number of databases. This highlighted a number of key search terms and the list was refined on this basis.

Following that, twenty electronic databases were identified as being relevant to the research questions. As the initial searching progressed, the number of duplicate citations identified across the databases rose markedly. This suggested that the 'pool' of possible studies for inclusion in the REA was becoming exhausted. As a result, the searches were focused on twelve databases (these are also listed in Annex B). In addition, a general internet search was undertaken as was a search of the Home Office library catalogue.

Each 'possible' study was then considered against the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) The paper includes a comparison between an intervention which includes a formal partnership component with settings which do not include them.
- 2) The paper attempts to measure the impact of this intervention on outcomes, e.g. crime reduction or service provision.
- 3) The paper explores more generally the mechanisms by which partnership working helps to achieve crime-related outcomes.

All papers had to meet Criterion One and Two to be included in the study

The search strategy involved searching abstracts, titles and key words of twelve electronic databases, plus hand searches of a number of print sources. An initial database search identified 6,312 citations and from these, an "on-screen" review of the abstracts identified 217 papers which appeared relevant to the research questions. Studies were assessed independently through a "double-blind" scoring process.

Many of the 217 papers identified were conceptual or theoretical pieces, i.e. they discussed what an effective partnership *should* look like. The more detailed consideration of the 217 saved abstracts identified 66 'possibles', which were then tested against the inclusion criteria. Just 17 studies met the criteria and the full

papers were subsequently called. A total of 49 papers were rejected at the detailed assessment phase for a variety of reasons.

Each of the 17 papers called were then assessed for methodological quality, the inference being that the findings drawn from studies of a higher methodological quality will provide more reliable evidence. All of the papers received were quality assessed against two research quality scales: the Maryland Scale of Scientific Method and a Quality Assessment Tool (QAT). Following this exercise, only 9 papers met the required stringent quality criteria of Maryland Scale (MS) of Scientific Method Level 3 or 4; these formed the basis of the detailed review.

Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request. Please contact info@scsn.org.uk

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