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Reducing residential burglary – the British experience

Measures to reduce residential burglary are always a major feature of crime prevention programs across the world. One of the most important of these programs was the Reducing burglary initiative (RBI), which was part of Britain's innovative Crime reduction programme (CRP). The RBI was designed to reduce the incidence of burglary nationally in England and Wales through targeting local action to those areas with the highest burglary rates. Being part of the CRP, the RBI was also designed to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the strategies employed and to find out what works best where in burglary reduction. Around 250 projects were funded throughout three rounds of the initiative.

The Home Office has recently released two important reports on the RBI. The first (Kodz & Pease 2003) reports on the results of the evaluations of the first round implementation of the RBI. The second (Hamilton-Smith 2004) examines the practical challenges involved in the design, development and delivery of the overall RBI.

This bulletin concentrates on the findings from the evaluation of the first round of approximately 60 RBI projects. Independent evaluation teams conducted evaluations of the initiative in the three main geographical areas where the projects were implemented.

Was burglary reduced?

Throughout the initiative, burglary rates fell in 40 of the 55 areas (relative to the comparison areas). This means that the decrease in burglaries in these areas was greater than the decrease in the reference areas. Overall, in the areas where the initiative was implemented, the number of burglaries fell by 20 per cent, with a 13 per cent decrease in the reference areas. This resulted in a net decrease of seven per cent in the target areas.

What worked?

Each of the three evaluation teams identified area-wide situational crime prevention initiatives as being effective, provided they were well planned and implemented. Targeted situational measures, such as improved security for vulnerable properties, were also found to be effective, but can pose implementation problems. Two of the evaluation teams also noted the importance of police involvement and enforcement as an effective strategy. This included measures such as high visibility policing and CCTV. It was also noted that the most successful projects implemented a combination of short- and long-term measures.

Further reading:

Kodz J & Pease K 2003. Reducing burglary initiative: early findings on burglary reduction. Home Office findings no 204. London: Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r204.pdf>

Hamilton-Smith N 2004. The reducing burglary initiative: design, development and delivery. Home Office research study 287. London: Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs05/hors287.pdf>

See <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/burglary1.html> for copies of reports on the individual evaluations

Case studies of 10 of the projects are available on the Home Office web site at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/burglary1.html>.