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Reducing residential burglary: the British experience revisited

The British Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) was evaluated several times in its four year life. CRM No.31 presented the findings of one of these reviews (Kodz & Pease 2003). In a separate study of the RBI, Hope et al. (2004) used a time-series methodology to examine what proportion of the reduction in burglary was directly attributable to the RBI initiative, isolated from all other factors. This supplementary research found that while burglary rates generally declined, this could be attributed to the independent effect of the RBI in only six of the 20 targeted areas.

The research highlights that crime reduction initiatives are not the only factors likely to have an impact on crime rates. This makes it difficult to separate the independent effects of targeted crime prevention activities without first accounting for broader trends in crime. Communities do not exist in isolation, so the benefits of crime prevention initiatives are likely to be experienced beyond the area of implementation.

In terms of repeat victimisation, the analysis showed there was improvement in some areas, and that burglary rates increased in other areas. Factors which may account for this include: too few repeat victims in the areas; low take-up of suggested strategies; and referral/delivery issues interfering with their practical implementation.

Common features in the more successful areas implementing the RBI were:

- more money was spent on situational crime prevention measures than on specific targeting of offenders (e.g. target hardening versus interventions with potential offenders); and
- flexibility existed to change plans and solve problems during implementation.

The least successful programs:

- focused on on-going, labour-intensive and specific interventions and spent less time engaging the community;
- were predominantly police-led. This may be because the police tend to initiate enforcement-style measures that generally have less success than broader crime prevention measures. Police may also lack either the ability or impetus to revise plans when they encounter problems; and
- persisted with plans, regardless of unexpected consequences.

The findings from evaluations of the RBI highlight the need to examine the full range of available evidence on an initiative before forming a definite opinion on its effectiveness. When developing and reviewing crime prevention strategies policy makers and practitioners should consider potential benefits and risks, and the variable effects at the local level.

Further reading:

Hope T, Bryan J, Crawley E, Crawley P, Russell N & Trickett A 2004. Strategic development projects in the Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands and Eastern regions. *Home office online report* 41/04. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/rdsolr4104.pdf>

Hope T 2004. Pretend it works: evidence and governance in the evaluation of the Reducing Burglary Initiative, *Criminal Justice* vol.4, No.3, 287-308.

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>

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