

The effectiveness of partnership working in a crime and disorder context

A rapid evidence assessment

Geoff Berry, Peter Briggs, Rosie Erol and Lauren van Staden

Background and method

- Partnership approaches are largely built on the premise that no single agency can deal with, or be responsible for dealing with, complex community safety and crime problems. There are a range of ways of describing what constitutes a partnership approach; however it can be described in simple terms as a cooperative relationship between two or more organisations to achieve a common goal.
- Partnership approaches to tackling crime are now strongly embedded in the way in which local areas in England and Wales approach community safety. The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) defines the core group of agencies involved in these partnerships as well as their functions and role at the local level. However, as yet, there have been no systematic attempts 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. This rapid evidence assessment (REA) represents an attempt to address this gap.
- An 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.
- This REA sought to address two questions; i) “Are partnerships more effective and efficient in achieving crime-related outcomes than alternatives?” and ii) “What factors have been identified as making partnerships work effectively and efficiently in delivering crime-related outcomes?”

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Keywords

Rapid Evidence Assessment
Partnership
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- The search strategy involved searching abstracts, titles and key words of twelve electronic databases, plus hand searches of a number of print sources. The REA focused on published UK and international studies in the English language.
 - The initial database searches 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. Of the 217 papers reviewed only nine 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. All had partnership working as an integral element of how they have tackled crime. All of the evaluations were undertaken in the US between 2001 and 2009. Three of the studies evaluated multi-site, multi-outcome initiatives across cities in the US.
- (e.g. reduction in gang 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.
- 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 table below summarises the findings of the studies included in this review. The nature and type of partnerships evaluated varied; in most cases the nature of the partnership was determined by local circumstances.
 - Of the five methodologically stronger studies (MS level 4), two recorded positive significant impacts as a result of the interventions undertaken: one focused on reducing serious violence across seven sites (McGarrell *et al.*, 2009) and the other on changing perceptions of fear of crime in a shopping centre (Jim *et al.*, 2006). Cahill *et al.* (2008) found mixed results in their study of an initiative implemented in four US cities to target

Main findings

- 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

Author	Date	Focus of initiative	Findings: positive significant impact demonstrated by evaluation
MS Level 4 Studies			
Cahill Multi-site	2008	Reduction in youth gang crime and violence	Mixed
Jim	2006	Reduction in crime problems and perceptions of fear in shopping centre	✓
McGarrell Multi-site	2009	Reduction in gun crime	✓
Turner <i>et al.</i>	2002	Reduction in offender recidivism	X (No demonstrable impact)
Winterfield <i>et al.</i>	2006	Provision of services to serious and violent offenders on release from prison	X (Positive, not significant impact)
MS Level 3 Studies			
Scott	2002	Reduction in recidivism of first time violent offenders	✓
Roehl Multi-site	2005	Reduction and prevention of violent crime	Mixed
Kostelac	2004	Reduction in violent crime in targeted areas of Phoenix	✓
Whetstone	2001	Pilot of coordinated domestic violence response team	✓

violent crime: one city demonstrated a positive significant impact; two cities demonstrated no significant impact; and one demonstrated a non-significant negative impact. Turner *et al.*, 2002 found no positive significant impact on the recidivism of offenders. Finally Winterfield *et al.* (2006) focused on service provision to violent offenders and did not record significant improvements for the treatment group.

- Of the four MS Level 3 studies, three recorded positive significant impacts on outcome measures. Whetstone's (2001) evaluation of a coordinated domestic violence team found a positive significant impact on arrests and callouts to victims as did Scott *et al.* (2002) on levels of violent recidivism. Roehl *et al.*'s (2005) multi-site evaluation of an intervention to reduce violent crime found positive significant impacts in seven of the ten sites evaluated. Finally, Kostelac *et al.* (2004) found a positive but not significant impact on levels of serious violence as a result of the adoption of a multi-agency approach.

Interpreting the evidence

- 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). The review identified studies in which interventions which had partnership working as a core component were compared to interventions where no formal partnership approach was in place. None of the studies could be described as solely testing the efficacy of partnership working.
- 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.

Mechanisms associated with better partnership working

Leadership	Shared vision, values and norms of partners involved to establish collaborative advantage
	Strong leadership and strategic direction (focused on proving a central coordination effort, getting buy-in from partners and managing the project)
	Full integration of project aims into partner organisations aims
	Clear project brief, roles and responsibilities
	Core groups to oversee problem solving approach
Data sharing and problem focus	Clarity regarding the problem(s) being tackled through focused analysis to ensure a properly problem focused intervention
	Regular exchange of relevant information
	Having focused interventions in each area
	Including researchers within partnership
	Continual evaluation to review and inform activity of group
Communication and co-location	Regular face to face contact and communication between partners
	Co-location of agencies, partners and staff
	Presence of partners at local level
Structures	Flexibility of structures and processes
	Having a research partner as an active member of the task force
	Clear monitoring, accountability and integrity mechanisms
	Having operational groups to implement strategies
	Involvement of most appropriate agencies
Experience	Prior experience in working together in partnership (i.e. established relationships)
	Secondment of skilled officers into joint team
	Careful selection of appropriate partners
	Joint training of team members

- 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. Nevertheless, the adoption of a multi-agency approach to tackling complex crime problems, and the challenges associated with working across organisational boundaries, cultures and established ways of working, have clear relevance to practitioners and policy makers in the UK context.
- The studies reviewed identified several mechanisms as being linked to effective partnership working. Whilst it is not possible to establish categorically that these characteristics led to effective partnerships they were found to be a contributing factor in areas in which effective partnership working was identified. The main mechanisms are summarised on the previous page.
- The findings of this review improve our understanding of the value of a multi-agency approach by providing clearer evidence on role partnership working in tackling crime as well as providing some indication of what mechanisms are associated with more effective partnership working.