



National Crime Prevention Council

Research and Evaluation Department

Research Brief – July 10, 2008

Does Neighborhood Watch Reduce Crime?

Background: Neighborhood Watch is a community crime prevention program that was launched by the National Sheriffs' Association in 1972 to encourage citizens to look out for each other, work on neighborhood problems, and make themselves safer. Today, more than 40 percent of Americans live in areas covered by Neighborhood Watch groups.

Hypothesis

Neighborhood Watch is an effective strategy to reduce or prevent crime.

Method

Evaluations of Neighborhood Watch that met certain criteria were identified and subjected to systematic “narrative” review or meta-analysis, in which data from multiple studies are pooled and re-analyzed as if there were a single larger study. To be eligible

- Programs had to include Neighborhood Watch as a core component. Additional components, such as property marking and security surveys, were often present
- Studies had to include before and after measures of crime – whether determined by police reports or victimization surveys – in experimental and comparison areas

Findings

- Thirty-six studies met the criteria for narrative review. Of those, 18 qualified for the more stringent meta-analysis
- Overall, 19 (53 percent) of the 36 studies demonstrated positive effects of Neighborhood Watch, defined as a reduction in crime of nine percent or more
- Among the 18 studies included in the meta-analysis, 14 (78 percent) demonstrated positive effects of Neighborhood Watch
- The meta-analysis found that Neighborhood Watch was associated with a relative reduction in crime of about 16 percent, considered a “small favorable effect”

Caveats

- None of the studies employed a randomized experimental design—the “gold standard” of evaluation research
- None of the studies included sufficient detail to test theories about why Neighborhood Watch helps to reduce crime

Implications for Practice

- These findings, positive though modest, lend support to Neighborhood Watch as an effective crime prevention strategy

- Additional research is needed to understand factors that contribute to its effectiveness to guide implementation of new or existing Neighborhood Watch programs

Source

Trevor Bennett, Katy Holloway, and David P. Farrington, “Does Neighborhood Watch Reduce Crime: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Experimental Criminology* (2006), Vol. 2, pp. 437-458.

For more information about Neighborhood Watch, visit www.usaonwatch.org.