



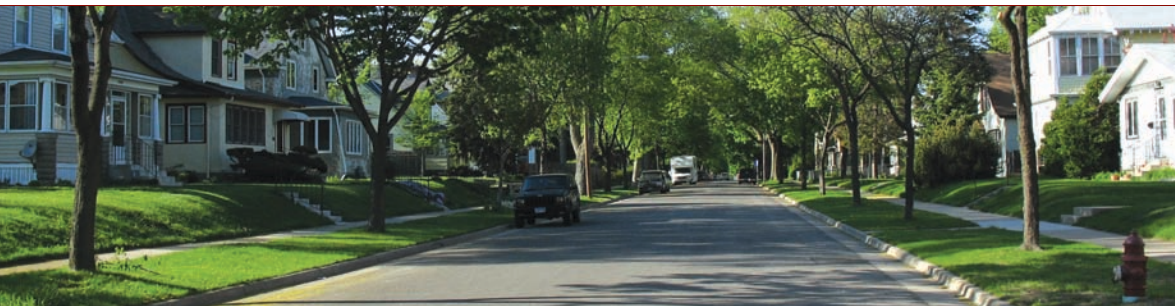
COPS

COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Crime Prevention Research Review

No. 3

Does Neighborhood Watch Reduce Crime?



Katy Holloway
Trevor Bennett
David P. Farrington



The Campbell Collaboration



The Campbell Collaboration
Crime and Justice Group

Suggested citation:

Holloway, Katy, Trevor Bennett, and David P. Farrington. *Crime Prevention Research Review No. 3: Does Neighborhood Watch Reduce Crime?* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2008.

The Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group (www.campbellcollaboration.org/ccjg) is an international network of researchers that prepares, updates, and rapidly disseminates systematic reviews of high-quality research conducted worldwide on effective methods to reduce crime and delinquency and improve the quality of justice.

Cover Photo: Doug Rau



The Campbell Collaboration



**The Campbell Collaboration
Crime and Justice Group**

Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Introduction	5
Previous Reviews of the Literature	7
What Is Neighborhood Watch?	9
How Is Neighborhood Watch Supposed to Work?	13
Systematic Review of Neighborhood Watch	17
Eligibility Criteria	18
Selected Publications	19
Summary of Results	19
Meta-Analysis	21
Individual Effect Sizes	22
Combined Effect Size	24
Moderator Analysis	24
Conclusions	27
Research Implications	28
Implications for Policy	29
Studies Included in the Review	33
References	37

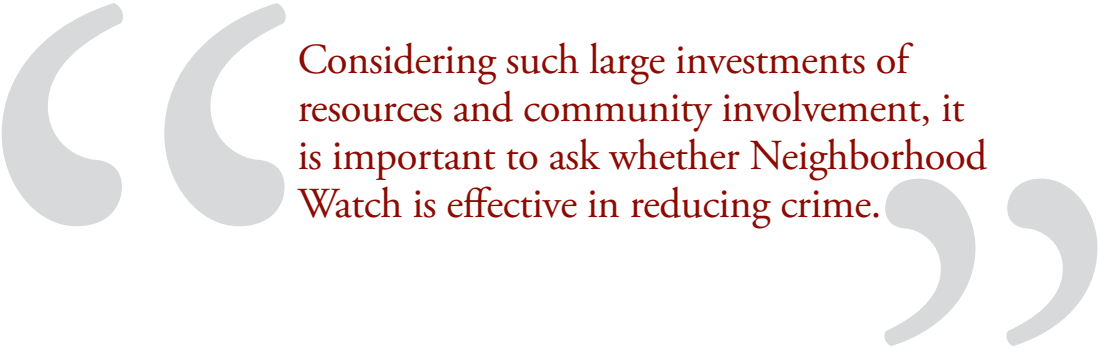
Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group for its support in conducting the systematic review on which this paper is based. In particular, we thank David B. Wilson and David Weisburd for their advice and assistance at earlier stages in the research. We also acknowledge the contributions of the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on draft versions of the Campbell Collaboration report. Thanks also are due to Tracy Pitman for her research assistance.

A note regarding the *Crime Prevention Research Review Series*

The research included in this Crime Prevention Research Review is limited to studies that use experimental or quasi-experimental designs and meet the criteria for rigor as laid out in The Campbell Collaboration Crime and Justice Group review criteria (see www.campbellcollaboration.org/guidelines.asp). It is important to note that other pieces of evidence regarding the effectiveness of various strategies were excluded from this research. The popular series of *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* (POP Guides) published by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office) differs significantly from this review because the standards for inclusion of evidence are less tied to the use of experimental designs and thus include a wider range of evidence.

“Does Neighborhood Watch Reduce Crime?” is the third in the Crime Prevention Research Review Series. The previous publications in the series (No. 1: Disrupting Street-Level Drug Markets; No. 2: Police Enforcement Strategies to Prevent Crime in Hot Spots Areas) are available from the COPS Office, www.cops.usdoj.gov.



Considering such large investments of resources and community involvement, it is important to ask whether Neighborhood Watch is effective in reducing crime.



Introduction

Introduction

Neighborhood Watch grew out of a movement in the United States that promoted greater involvement of citizens in the prevention of crime (Titus, 1984). Variations include block watch, apartment watch, home watch, citizen alert, and community watch. The main method by which Neighborhood Watch is supposed to help reduce crime is when residents look for and report suspicious incidents to the police and thereby perhaps deter potential offenders from committing a crime (Bennett 1990). One of the first evaluations of Neighborhood Watch programs in the United States was of the Seattle (Washington) Community Crime Prevention Project launched in 1973 (Cirel, Evans, McGillis, and Whitcomb, 1977). One of the first evaluations of Neighborhood Watch programs¹ in the United Kingdom was of the Home Watch program implemented in 1982 in Cheshire (Anderton, 1985). Both evaluations identified a greater reduction in burglary in areas where Neighborhood Watch programs had been introduced, than in comparison areas.

Since the 1980s, the number of Neighborhood Watch programs in the UK has expanded considerably. The report of the 2000 *British Crime Survey* estimated that more than a quarter (27 percent) of all households (approximately six million households) in England and Wales were members of a Neighborhood Watch program (Sims, 2001). This amounted to more than 155,000 active programs. A similar expansion has occurred in the U.S. The report of *The 2000 National Crime Prevention Survey* (National Crime Prevention Council, 2001) estimated that 41 percent of the American population lived in communities covered by Neighborhood Watch. The report concluded, “This makes Neighborhood Watch the largest single organized crime-prevention activity in the nation” (p. 39).

Considering such large investments of resources and community involvement, it is important to ask whether Neighborhood Watch is effective in reducing crime. To investigate this, we reviewed all available studies evaluating the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch programs in reducing crime. In this publication we summarize the findings of this review and discuss policy implications.

¹In this publication, Neighborhood Watch is referred to as a program, however, in the UK and other countries they are commonly referred to as “schemes.”



Nearly all studies found that
Neighborhood Watch areas were
associated with lower levels of crime.




Previous Reviews
of the Literature

Previous Reviews of the Literature

There have been several previous literature reviews of the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch programs. One of the earliest conducted in the U.S. was by Titus (1984) who summarized the results of nearly 40 community crime-prevention programs. Most of these included elements of Neighborhood Watch. The majority of studies were conducted by police departments or included data from police departments. Nearly all studies found that Neighborhood Watch areas were associated with lower levels of crime; however, most of the evaluations were described as having “weak” research methods.

Another literature review looked mainly at community watch programs in the UK (Husain, 1990). The study reviewed the results of nine existing evaluations and conducted an original analysis of community watch in six additional locations using police-recorded crime data. The review of existing evaluations concluded that there was little evidence that Neighborhood Watch prevented crime.

One of the most recent literature reviews of the effectiveness of community watch programs selected only evaluations with the strongest research designs (Sherman, 1997). The author included only studies that used random assignment or studies that monitored both watch areas and similar comparison areas without community watch. The review found just four evaluations that matched these criteria. The results of these evaluations were largely negative, showing that neighborhood watch was not shown to reduce crime. The authors concluded, “The oldest and best-known community policing program, Neighborhood Watch, is ineffective at preventing crime” (pp. 8–25). Similar conclusions were drawn in the later update of this report (Sherman and Eck, 2002).



Neighborhood Watch programs can be initiated either by the public or the police.

What Is Neighborhood Watch?

What Is Neighborhood Watch?

Neighborhood Watch is often implemented as part of a comprehensive package sometimes referred to as the “big three” that includes Neighborhood Watch, property-marking, and home security surveys (Titus, 1984). Some programs include other elements such as a recruitment drive for special constables (nonsworn police officers), increased regular foot patrols, citizen patrols, educational programs for young people, auxiliary police units, and victim support services.

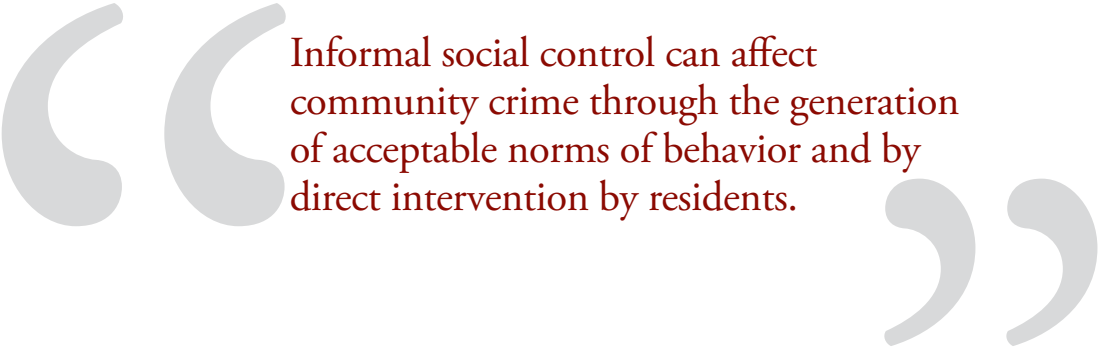
Neighborhood Watch programs vary in the size of the areas covered. Some of the earlier programs in the U.S. and the UK covered just a few households. More recent programs sometimes cover many thousand households (Knowles, Lesser, and McKewen, 1983). One of the smallest programs included in the review was the “cocoon” Neighborhood Watch program in Rochdale in England covering just one dwelling and its immediate neighbors (Forrester, Frenz, O’Connell, and Pease, 1990). One of the largest was the Manhattan Beach Neighborhood Watch program in Los Angeles covering a population of more than 30,000 residents (Knowles, Lesser, and McKewen, 1983).

Neighborhood Watch programs can be initiated either by the public or the police. Early programs launched in the UK tended to be initiated by the police (e.g., the early Neighborhood Watch programs in London). More recently, Neighborhood Watch programs have been launched mainly at the request of the public. Some police departments continue initiating their own programs, even when the program is fully developed. A program implemented in Detroit, for example, developed a section of police-initiated programs to promote Neighborhood Watch in areas that were unlikely to generate public-initiated requests (Turner and Barker, 1983).

In the U.S., block watches are usually run by a block captain who is responsible to a block coordinator or block organizer (Baltimore Police Department, 1985). The block coordinator acts as the liaison to the local police department. Neighborhood Watch programs in the UK often include street coordinators (equivalent to block captains) and area coordinators (equivalent to the block organizer). There is little information in the literature on the number and type of Neighborhood Watch meetings, but the evidence that does exist

suggests that some programs have public meetings that involve all residents participating in the program, while others have meetings that involve only the organizers of the program (Bennett, 1990).

The funding of Neighborhood Watch programs is nearly always a joint venture between the local police department and the program members through their fund-raising activities. The relative contribution of the two sources varies considerably. Some programs in the United States are provided with no more than an information package from the local police. Others are provided with police facilities for the production of newsletters and the use of police premises for meetings (Turner and Barker, 1983). Apart from police funding, the majority of programs are encouraged to raise some funds from other sources such as voluntary contributions, local businesses, and the proceeds of fairs and raffles.



Informal social control can affect community crime through the generation of acceptable norms of behavior and by direct intervention by residents.



How Is Neighborhood Watch Supposed to Work?

How Is Neighborhood Watch Supposed to Work?

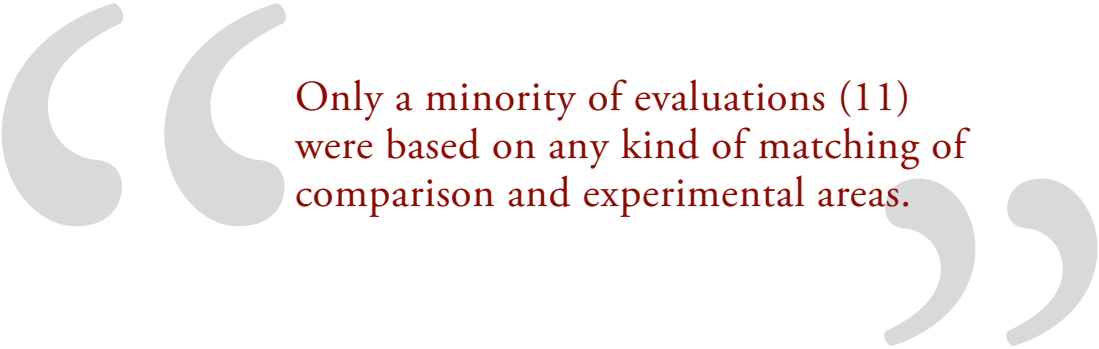
The most frequently suggested mechanism by which Neighborhood Watch is supposed to reduce crime is by residents looking out for and reporting suspicious activities to the police (Bennett, 1990). The link between reporting and crime reduction usually is not elaborated in the literature. It has been argued, however, that visible surveillance might reduce crime because of its deterrent effect on the perceptions and decision-making of potential offenders (Rosenbaum, 1987). Hence, watching and reporting might deter offenders if they are aware of the likelihood of local residents reporting suspicious behavior and if they perceive this as increasing their risks of being caught.

Neighborhood Watch might also lead to a reduction in crime by reducing the opportunities for crime. One method discussed in the literature is the creation of signs of occupancy, such as removing newspapers from outside neighbors' homes when they are away, mowing the lawn, and filling up trash cans. Some of the methods were discussed in the report of the Seattle program (Cirel et al., 1977). Such signs of occupancy might reduce crime through the effect this has on potential offenders' perceptions of the likelihood of their getting caught.

Neighborhood Watch might also lead to a reduction in crime through the various mechanisms of social control. Informal social control typically is not stated as one of the mechanisms for reducing crime in the publicity material of these programs. Nevertheless, they might indirectly serve to enhance community cohesion and increase the ability of communities to control crime (Greenberg, Rohe, and Williams, 1985). Informal social control can affect community crime through the generation of acceptable norms of behavior and by direct intervention by residents.

It is also possible that Neighborhood Watch programs might reduce crime by enhancing police detection through increased flow of useful information from the public to the police. An increase in information concerning crimes in progress and suspicious persons and events might lead to a greater number of arrests and convictions and, when a custodial sentence is passed, result in a reduction in crime through the jailing of local offenders (Bennett, 1990).

Neighborhood Watch also might reduce crime through other components of the program package, such as property marking and home security surveys. Property marking makes the disposal of property more difficult (Laycock, 1985), and potential offenders could view marked property as increasing the risk of detection. Home security surveys might lead to a reduction in crime by making it physically more difficult for an offender to enter the property (Bennett and Wright, 1984).



Only a minority of evaluations (11) were based on any kind of matching of comparison and experimental areas.

Systematic Review of
Neighborhood Watch

Systematic Review of Neighborhood Watch

To investigate whether Neighborhood Watch does in fact reduce crime, we conducted a systematic review of the literature. Systematic reviews are rigorous, transparent, and replicable summaries of the research literature that involve careful documentation of each stage of the search process.

Eligibility Criteria

The criteria for including studies in the current review were based on the type of intervention, the type of outcome, and the type of evaluation design.

The main aim of the type of intervention criteria was to include studies that evaluated Neighborhood Watch programs. In practice, this is more difficult to determine than it might seem because Neighborhood Watch programs are often implemented alongside other program elements, such as property marking and security surveys. Neighborhood Watch is also sometimes implemented as part of broader area improvements and may exist alongside other unrelated crime-reduction initiatives. Evaluations were included in the review only if the Neighborhood Watch program included a “watch” component.

The main aim of the type of outcome criteria was to focus the evaluation of crime outcomes. We were not interested in determining the impact of Neighborhood Watch on fear of crime, residents’ satisfaction with their area, or police-community relations. Instead, we sought to determine whether Neighborhood Watch succeeded in meeting its primary objective of reducing residential burglary and related neighborhood crimes.

The aim of the type of evaluation design criteria was to include studies using the highest quality research methods. This review required that the evaluation comprise at least a comparison of one or more experimental units and one or more comparable control units over time. Hence, the minimum requirement for inclusion of evaluations in this review was that they were based on before-and-after measures of crime in experimental and comparison areas.

Selected Publications

Using our search methodology (see side box on page 40 for a description of the search method), we identified 1,595 publications. After carefully reviewing the titles and abstracts of the identified publications, we found 225 that were potentially relevant for inclusion. We were able to retrieve copies of 137 of these. Thirty were found to meet our eligibility criteria. These 30 publications presented the results of 19 unique research projects (the rest were duplicates). These 19 research projects presented the results of 43 evaluations of Neighborhood Watch programs.

All 43 evaluations were conducted from 1977 to 1994. About half were conducted in North America and about half in the UK, with one study from Canada and one from Australia. Most evaluations (31) concerned a Neighborhood Watch program with no other program elements, but 12 assessed a comprehensive package including property marking and/or security surveys. Only a minority of evaluations (11) were based on any kind of matching of comparison and experimental areas. The rest used either similar nearby areas or larger areas with no matching at all (e.g., the rest of the police force area). The majority of evaluations (25) used police-recorded crime data as the main outcome measure, while 18 used victimization survey data.

Summary of Results

Overall, the results of the review are mixed. Some evaluations showed that Neighborhood Watch was associated with a reduction in crime, others showed that it was associated with an increase in crime, while others provided uncertain results.

One of the earliest evaluations which showed that Neighborhood Watch was effective in reducing crime was conducted in Seattle, Washington, by Cirel et al. (1977). The evaluation was based on telephone and door-to-door surveys of residents both in the year before and the year after the program had been introduced, and conducted in five census tracts. The results showed that the rate of burglary decreased by a substantially greater amount in the experimental areas than in the control areas (-61 percent compared with -4 percent). The authors concluded that participating in community crime prevention “significantly reduces the risk of residential burglary victimization” (p. 79).

Latessa and Travis (1987) also found positive results when evaluating a block watch program in the College Hill area of Cincinnati, Ohio. College Hill is described by the authors as the fifth largest community in the city, with a population of more than 17,000 residents. Using police-recorded crime data, burglary rates in College Hill in the year before and after the program were compared with burglary rates in the city of Cincinnati as a whole. The figures showed that burglary in the experimental area decreased by 11 percent, while burglary in Cincinnati as a whole decreased by 2 percent. One of the studies that produced negative results was by Lewis, Grant, and Rosenbaum (1988) who evaluated the effectiveness of five block watch programs in Chicago, Illinois. Crime and public attitude surveys were conducted in the experimental and matched control areas before the launch of the programs and again 1 year after the launch. Only one of the five experimental areas experienced a reduction in victimizations (and this was only marginally significant). Two of the experimental areas, however, showed a statistically significant increase in victimizations per respondent. The authors concluded that the results “force us to seriously address the possibility of both theory failure and program failure in this field” (Rosenbaum, Lewis, and Grant, 1985, p. 170).

The negative effects of Neighborhood Watch on crime was also reported by Bennett and Lavrakas (1989). These authors evaluated the effectiveness of watch programs in 10 U.S. cities (Baltimore, Boston, The Bronx, Brooklyn, Cleveland, Miami, Minneapolis, Newark (New Jersey), Philadelphia, and Washington). A pretest-post-test research design with a nonequivalent control group was used in each evaluation. The comparison areas were selected by drawing a ring around the experimental area approximately two census tracts wide. Monthly crime statistics revealed no differences between the experimental and control areas in seven of the ten evaluations and a negative differential change (i.e., where crime decreased less in the experimental area than in the comparison area) in two of the cities. The experimental area experienced a larger decrease in crime than the control area in only one evaluation (Cleveland). The authors concluded that the programs “did not seem to achieve the ‘ultimate’ goal of crime reduction” (p. 361).

The examples above show that there is some variation in the results of evaluations of Neighborhood Watch programs. It is difficult, therefore, to determine by looking at individual studies whether Neighborhood Watch is effective or ineffective overall. To determine overall effectiveness, it is necessary to evaluate the body of work as a whole. One way of doing this is to conduct a meta-analysis of the evaluation findings.

In the majority of evaluations,
Neighborhood Watch was associated
with a reduction in crime and therefore
appeared to be effective.

Meta-Analysis

Meta-Analysis

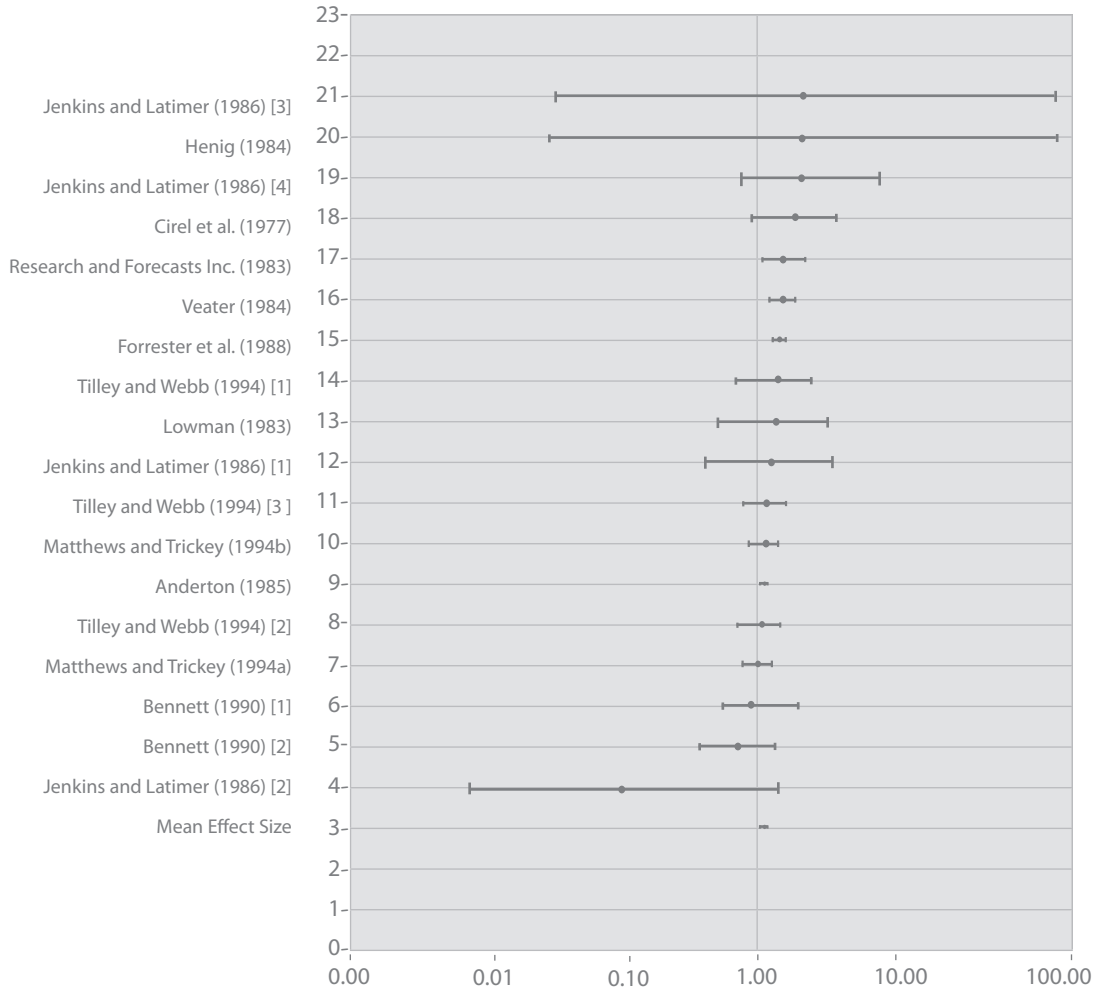
Meta-analysis is a statistical method of summarizing the results of a group of evaluations to determine the overall effectiveness of an intervention. To carry out a meta-analysis, a comparable measure (an individual effect size) is needed for each evaluation (Lipsey and Wilson 2001). The individual effect sizes can be combined to obtain an average effect size for all evaluations. An effect size of 1.0 means that there was no evidence that the intervention (i.e., Neighborhood Watch) was effective in reducing crime. An effect size above 1.0 indicates that the intervention worked and an effect size below 1.0 suggests that the intervention did not work.

Meta-analyses have a number of advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages are that they can standardize the results across studies to produce a uniform effect size for each individual study and a mean effect size for groups of studies. The main disadvantage of meta-analyses is that they are often based on a subset of all eligible studies that provide the necessary data for the calculations. Only 18 of the 43 evaluations in this review provided sufficient data to be included in the meta-analysis.

Individual Effect Sizes

The forest plot in Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the individual effect sizes of the 18 evaluations. The figure shows that 15 evaluations had effect sizes that were higher than 1, which means that Neighborhood Watch was associated with a reduction in crime. Conversely, three evaluations had effect sizes lower than 1, which means that in these evaluations Neighborhood Watch was associated with an increase in crime. Hence, in the majority of evaluations, Neighborhood Watch was associated with a reduction in crime and therefore appeared to be effective.

Figure 1: Individual Effect Sizes of 18 Evaluations.



Combined Effect Size

One of the aims of the meta-analysis is to calculate a mean effect size to determine, overall, how well Neighborhood Watch works. Figure 1 (page 23) shows that the mean effect size for the 18 evaluations combined was 1.19. This means that crime increased by 19 per cent in the control area compared with the experimental area or that it decreased by 16 per cent in the experimental area compared with the control area.

Moderator Analyses

Overall, the meta-analysis has shown that Neighborhood Watch was associated with a significant reduction in crime. It is possible, however, that the results will vary by specific characteristics of the program being implemented or by the research design of the evaluation. The results of the moderator analyses which investigate this are presented in Table 1 (page 26).

Type of Data

It is possible that the effectiveness of evaluations varies with the type of data collected. The method of calculating effect sizes is slightly different when using the police data and when using the survey data. It also is possible that this difference might affect the findings in some way. The data are also different because survey data include offenses that have not been reported to the police. To test for this, the 15 evaluations that collected police data were compared with the three evaluations that collected data from self-report surveys. The results showed that the difference between the two effect sizes was not statistically significant. Hence, the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch programs did not vary by the type of data collected.

Type of Program

It might be expected that Neighborhood Watch programs based on limited versions of the program might be less likely to show an effect than programs based on more comprehensive versions. To test for this, the studies were split into two groups based on program type (i.e., whether it was Neighborhood Watch alone or Neighborhood Watch with one or more additional elements). The results showed that the mean difference between effect sizes was not significant; hence, the type of program did not independently affect outcome.

Publication Status

Another possible variation in results might relate to publication status. It has been hypothesized that publishers are more likely to publish evidence of success than evidence of failure. This is sometimes referred to as publication bias. To test for this, evaluations were identified as published or unpublished. Research was defined as published if it was reported in a book, journal, or official government report because these were likely to have been reviewed externally before distribution. Evaluations were defined as unpublished if they were police reports or reports from survey research companies because these were less likely to have been reviewed externally before distribution. The mean effect size was calculated for each group. The results showed that the difference between the mean effect sizes was statistically significant. In other words, the results support the publication bias thesis by showing that published evaluations tended to provide evidence of a stronger Neighborhood Watch effect than unpublished evaluations. Both published and unpublished evaluations, however, found that Neighborhood Watch programs were effective.

Country of Origin

Finally, it is possible that programs operating in different countries have different effects resulting from a variety of factors including the environmental context, the nature of the program implemented, or the methods of evaluation. The mean Odds Ratio (OR) for studies conducted in the United States and Canada was 1.87 (n=4) compared with 1.18 for the UK (n=14). The difference between the ORs was statistically significant: evaluations of Neighborhood Watch conducted in the U.S. and Canada were significantly more likely to show a reduction in crime than studies conducted in the UK. It is difficult to explain such variations because of the large number of factors that could potentially affect outcomes. The main measurable difference between the comparison countries was that there were proportionately more matched studies in the U.S. and Canada (3 of 4) than in the UK (5 of 14). It was shown earlier that matched studies more frequently showed a favorable outcome than nonmatched studies. There are many other plausible explanations for the difference.

Table 1: Variations in Mean Effect Sizes by Features of the Methods and the Program.

		No. of Studies	Effect Size	Confidence Interval	Significance of Difference in Effect Size
Type of data	Police data	15	1.19	1.13-1.24	ns
	Survey data	3	1.14	0.60-2.18	
Type of program	NW only	8	1.30	0.90-1.87	ns
	NW plus	10	1.19	1.13-1.24	
Published	Published	8	1.51	1.26-1.80	0.0063
	Not published	10	1.17	1.11-1.22	
Country	UK	14	1.18	1.12-1.23	0.0025
	USA/Canada	4	1.87	1.31-2.67	
All studies		18	1.19	1.13-1.24	

Notes: ns = not significant.

“ Across all eligible studies combined,
Neighborhood Watch was associated
with a reduction in crime. ”

Conclusions

Conclusions

The results of previous systematic reviews of Neighborhood Watch are divided according to the conclusions drawn. Titus (1984) concluded that Neighborhood Watch was effective, but noted that the research methods were weak. Husain (1990) concluded that there was little evidence that Neighborhood Watch worked. Based on the four studies meeting their selection criteria, Sherman and Eck (2002) concluded that Neighborhood Watch was ineffective in reducing crime.

The strongest finding of this review relates to the mean effect size estimate produced by the meta-analysis. This indicated that, across all eligible studies combined, Neighborhood Watch was associated with a reduction in crime. It is not immediately clear why Neighborhood Watch is associated with a reduction in crime; however, it is possible that the reductions were associated with some of the essential features of the Neighborhood Watch programs as discussed earlier. Neighborhood Watch might serve to increase surveillance, reduce opportunities, and enhance informal social control. Unfortunately, this kind of information is not provided in the majority of evaluations and the precise reasons for the reduction cannot be determined.

Research Implications

A number of implications can be drawn from the review for future research on the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch.

First, the review has drawn attention to the common problem of a relatively small number of good-quality studies based on good research design. Among the 27 studies that were excluded on grounds of methodological quality, 19 had no comparison group and 8 presented only post-test data on crime.

Second, none of the studies was based on random allocation of areas to treatment or control conditions. Instead, all studies were based on a version of a quasi-experimental design. This is almost certainly a result of the difficulties involved in implementing community-based programs in areas where communities have not requested them. It is very difficult to conduct a randomized experiment with areas as the unit of assignment. Quasi-experimental designs

are not ideal. Some writers have argued that they can over-estimate the positive effects of programs as a result of selection effects, whereby the subjects or programs most likely to change are included in the experimental group (Wilson, Mitchell, and MacKenzie, 2006).

Third, a particularly important problem for the current review was that less than half of the eligible studies reported data that were suitable for a meta-analysis. This was either because studies presented the results using an unusual statistical notation or left out the data entirely (e.g., when the results were presented in graphical form only). It would be helpful if published evaluations included, at a minimum, raw data, cell sizes, and other relevant information to facilitate future meta-analyses.

Finally, very few evaluations disaggregated the findings in a way that would show differential effects for subgroups and provide detailed information on the features of the program. It is important to include this information in a research report because there might be variations in outcome according to the type and intensity of program implemented or the type of area in which it is implemented.

Implications for Policy

Neighborhood Watch has often been described as one of the most widespread methods of reducing crime. It is supported by the UK and United States governments and is popular among the public and the police (Sims, 2001). The current review provides some evidence that Neighborhood Watch can be effective in reducing crime; however, the results of evaluations are mixed and show that some programs work well while others appear to work less well or not at all. There are several possible reasons for this. Rosenbaum (1987) groups these reasons under three broad headings: 1. Measurement failure, 2. Program failure, and 3. Theory failure.

Measurement failure means that the evaluation failed to measure the positive program effect because the research design used to evaluate it was inadequate. A research design might be weak if it is unable to demonstrate whether there is a connection between the program and the outcomes because of an absence of a suitable comparison area. Many studies were rejected from the current systematic review because they failed to include a comparison group. When comparison areas were used, they were often unsuitable because they were

not sufficiently well-matched to the Neighborhood Watch area. This occurred when they comprised the remainder of the police division or an unmatched area nearby that might have had different crime patterns. Many evaluations of Neighborhood Watch have been conducted by the police, therefore, it is important that they share the responsibility for ensuring that the research designs in their areas are suitable for the task.

Program failure means that the Neighborhood Watch program did not show a positive result because the program was not sufficiently strong to bring about the effects desired. Rosenbaum (1987) identified two ways in which this might occur and which he described as the wrong dosage of the right medicine or the right dosage of the wrong medicine. In the case of the former there is implementation failure, and in the case of the latter there is a failure in program design, that is, implementing a weak version of the right program or implementing the wrong type of program. The second challenge for policing is to ensure that Neighborhood Watch programs in their areas are of good quality and are strong versions of programs that have been shown to work in the past.

Theory failure means that the principles on which Neighborhood Watch is based are wrong—that the proposed mechanism by which neighborhood watch is supposed to prevent crime is incorrect. Neighborhood Watch is based on the principle that encouraging neighbors to look out for and report suspicious behavior to the police will bring about a reduction in crime. Potential offenders might be deterred from committing a crime if they believe that Neighborhood Watch areas are too risky; and improved police investigation and enforcement will incapacitate offenders. It remains unclear whether Neighborhood Watch deters offenders or enhances police investigation. A further task for the police is to investigate whether Neighborhood Watch programs in their areas bring about these effects and determine the conditions that strengthen or weaken these processes.

The challenge for policing is to learn more about which programs in their local areas work best under which conditions and to tailor more closely the types of programs to the types of areas. This will involve addressing the issue discussed above. The designs that have been shown to work in the past should be promoted. There is also a role for the police to play in conducting their own evaluations of Neighborhood Watch. This would involve choosing an evaluation design that would clearly demonstrate whether any changes in the Neighborhood Watch area were a product of the program.

The task of developing Neighborhood Watch and ensuring that it is effective is not a job for the police alone. More work needs to be done by researchers to help understand the mechanisms by which Neighborhood Watch influence crime and more also needs to be done by policymakers and government officials to disseminate information about good practice.

Studies Included
in the Review

Studies Included in the Review

- Anderton, K.J. *The Effectiveness of Home Watch Schemes in Cheshire*. Chester, UK: Cheshire Constabulary, 1985.
- Bennett, T.H., "Evaluating Neighborhood Watch," *Cambridge Studies in Criminology LXI*. Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1990.
- Bennett, S.F. and P.J. Lavrakas, "Community-Based Crime Prevention: An Assessment of the Eisenhower Foundation's Neighborhood Program," *Crime and Delinquency* 35 (1989) 345–364.
- Cirel, P., P. Evans, D. McGillis, and D. Whitcomb. *Community Crime Prevention Program, Seattle: An Exemplary Project*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- Forrester, D., S. Frenz, M. O'Connell, and K. Pease, "The Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project: Phase II," *Crime Prevention Unit Paper 23*. London: Home Office, 1990.
- Henig, J.R., "Citizens Against Crime: An Assessment of the Neighborhood Watch Program in Washington, D.C.," *Occasional Paper, Center for Washington Area Studies*. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 1984.
- Hulin, J.O., "Community-Based Crime Prevention Project," *Crime Prevention Review*, 6 (1979), 26–34.
- Husain, S. *Neighborhood Watch and Crime: An Assessment of Impact*. London: Police Foundation, 1990.
- Jenkins, A.D. and I. Latimer. *Evaluation of Merseyside Homewatch Scheme*. Management Development and Force Planning Unit, Liverpool, UK: Merseyside Police, 1986.
- Knowles, L., C. Lesser, and F. McKewen, "Burglary Prevention: A Citizen Initiated and Operated Neighborhood Watch Program," *The Police Chief*, 50 (1983), 36–38.

- Latessa, E.J. and L.F. Travis, L.F. *Evaluation of the College Hill Crime Prevention Program*. Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 1986.
- Lewis, D.A., J.A. Grant, and D.P. Rosenbaum. *Social Construction of Reform: Crime Prevention and Community Organizations*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1988.
- Lowman, J., “Target Hardening Burglary Prevention and the Problem of Displacement Phenomena,” in *Deviant Designations: Crime, Law and Deviance in Canada*, ed. T. Fleming, Toronto: Butterworths, 1983: 277–304.
- Matthews, R. and J. Trickey. *Eyres Monsell Crime Reduction Project*. Leicester, UK: University of Leicester, Centre for the Study of Public Order, 1994.
- Matthews, R. and J. Trickey. *The New Parks Crime Reduction Project*. Leicester, UK: Centre for the Study of Public Order, University of Leicester, 1994.
- Mukherjee, S. and P. Wilson, “Neighborhood Watch: Issues and Policy Implication,” *Trends and Issues No. 8*. Canberra, Australia: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1988.
- Research & Forecasts Inc. *The Figgie Report, Part IV: Reducing Crime in America – Successful Community Efforts*. Willoughby, Ohio: Figgie International, 1983.
- Tilley, N. and J. Webb, “Burglary Reduction: Findings from the Safer Cities Scheme,” *Crime Prevention Unit Paper 51*. London: Home Office, 1994.
- Veater, P. *Evaluation of Kingsdown Neighborhood Watch Project, Bristol*. Bristol, UK: Avon and Somerset Constabulary, 1984.

References

References

- Baltimore Police Department. *Neighborhood Watch*. Baltimore: Baltimore Police Department, 1985.
- Bennett, T.H. and R. Wright. *Burglars on Burglary: Prevention and the Offender*. Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1984.
- Greenberg, S.W., W.M. Rohe, and J.R. Williams. *Informal Citizen Action and Crime Prevention at the Neighborhood Level*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985.
- Laycock, G., "Property Marking: A Deterrent to Domestic Burglary?" *Crime Prevention Unit Paper 3*. London: Home Office, 1985.
- Lipsey, M.W. and D.B. Wilson. *Practical Meta-Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2001.
- National Crime Prevention Council. *The 2000 National Crime Prevention Survey: Are We Safe?* Washington, D.C.: National Crime Prevention Council, 2001.
- Rosenbaum, D.P., "The Theory and Research Behind Neighborhood Watch: Is It a Sound Fear and Crime Reduction Strategy?" *Crime and Delinquency* 33 (1987), 103–134.
- Rosenbaum, D.P., D.A. Lewis, and J.A. Grant. *The Impact of Community Crime Prevention Programs in Chicago: Can Neighborhood Organizations Make a Difference. Final Report: Volume One*. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1987, 1985.
- Sherman, L.W., "Policing for Crime Prevention," in *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, eds. L.W. Sherman, D.C. Gottfredson, D.L. MacKenzie, J. Eck, P. Reuter, and S. Bushway, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Justice Programs, 1997: 8-1 to 8-58.
- Sherman, L.W. and J. Eck, "Policing for Crime Prevention," in *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, ed. L.W. Sherman, D.P. Farrington, B.C. Welsh, and D.L. MacKenzie, London: Routledge, 2002: 295–329.

- Sims, L. "Neighborhood Watch: Findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey," *Research Findings 150*. London: Home Office, 2001.
- Titus, R., "Residential Burglary and the Community Response," in *Coping with Burglary*, ed. R.V.G. Clarke and T. Hope, Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1984: 97–130.
- Turner, B.W.M. and P.J. Barker. Study Tour of the United States of America: 7th March 1983 to 21st March 1983. London: Metropolitan Police, 1983.
- Wilson, D. B., O. Mitchell, and D.L. MacKenzie, "A Systematic Review of Drug Court Effects on Recidivism," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 2 (4) (2006): 459–487.

Our review includes studies that evaluated the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch programs in reducing crime. The main goal of the search strategy was to be as exhaustive as possible in obtaining relevant evaluations. This meant that we were willing to include published and unpublished studies, with no restriction on country of origin or source sector (e.g., academic, government, policy, or voluntary). We could include only studies written in English because we had no research funds for translation. We conducted searches of online databases, online library catalogs, and previous reviews of the literature on the effectiveness of Neighborhood Watch in preventing crime, and bibliographies of publications on Neighborhood Watch. We also contacted leading researchers who had conducted evaluations of Neighborhood Watch. We used the following search terms when searching online databases: Neighbourhood Watch, neighbourhood watch, street watch, block watch, apartment watch, home watch, community watch, home alert, block association, crime alert, block clubs, crime watch, big three.



For More Information

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
1100 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20530

To obtain details on COPS programs,
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800.421.6770

Visit COPS Online at **www.cops.usdoj.gov**