

Preventie van herhaald slachtofferschap

Een research synthese van maatregelen ter voorkoming van herhaling

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Summary

Introduction

This report describes the results of a research synthesis on measures to prevent repeat victimization. A research synthesis is a critical evaluation of relevant studies in order to establish what programmes are effective (Van der Knaap, Nijssen and Bogaerts, 2006). The evaluation needs not only to assess the quality of the research design but also to discuss the mechanisms presumed to underlie the measures in question and the circumstances in which they were effective (e.g. Pawson, 2006): the fact that a measure is effective in one context does not mean it will be successful in other contexts.

Based on the various interpretations of repeat victimization found in the literature on the subject, this obtains when (1) the same person or object is the victim of an identical or similar crime more than once, or (2) various persons or objects have been the victim of an identical (or virtually identical) crime at least once or there is a link between the crimes in terms of the social setting or geographical area where they were committed. Given the survey-like nature of the synthesis, the study covers all these types of repeat victimization.

The basic question it sets out to answer is what measures to prevent repeat victimization can be found in the academic literature that have been examined for their effectiveness, what mechanisms are presumed to underlie them, and in what context the effects, if any, took place. It is concerned solely with interventions made in settings comparable to the Dutch situation, as the findings could have informational value for policy-makers and other staff of the Ministry of Justice, the police, Victim Support Netherlands and other organizations involved.

Research methods

Literature sources were collected systematically. Various literature databases at the library of Tilburg University and on the Internet were searched for predetermined search terms. References to relevant studies and the search terms used were stored in an Excel spreadsheet during the process of literature collection.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the preventive measures found in the literature in relation to the context in which they were implemented, the Campbell Collaboration approach was combined with Pawson and Tilley's (1997) Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) model. Criteria developed by the Campbell Collaboration were

used to assess all the selected studies for their internal validity. In line with the CMO model studies were categorised in 'cumulations of evaluations'. To put it simply, a cumulation of evaluations is a collection of studies that examined the effectiveness of identical or similar interventions in different settings. Two researchers were involved in the assessment process.

The various measures identified in the prevention schemes were classified as context-centred, person-centred or both. For the purposes of the study, context-centred measures were defined as measures that aim to achieve prevention by changing the setting of the victim or the potential victim. Context-centred measures also included measures targeted at offenders. Person-centred measures were defined as measures that aim to change the risk of repeat victimization through the victim. Whenever the success of a measure depended wholly or partly on efforts on the part of the victim or a potential victim it was classified as person-centred. A distinction was also made between primary, secondary and tertiary methods of prevention. Primary prevention was defined as preventing new cases of victimization, secondary prevention as preventing victimization among vulnerable persons or objects, and tertiary prevention as preventing the recurrence of new cases of victimization among persons or objects that have already been victimized.

The report goes on to describe for each study the underlying mechanisms and context(s) in which the measures had been implemented. Where these mechanisms could be not identified from the source material available they were 'reconstructed'. Existing scientific theories of crime prevention and behavioural change were used as tools to reconstruct the underlying mechanism of a particular measure.

Each individual study within a cumulation of evaluations was rated according to the Scientific Methods Scale (SMS) developed by the Campbell Collaboration. SMS scores are indicative of such things as the presence or absence of prior measurements, comparable control groups and random allocation of subjects to one of the study conditions.

Finally, the common denominators in the preventive measures that were included in one and the same cumulation of evaluations were classified in terms of effectiveness (effective, possibly effective, possibly non-effective and non-effective). The common denominators were the elements in a preventive measure that were the same in each scheme.

Findings

Thirty-four studies met the inclusion criteria. They related to 39 different schemes and were assigned to six cumulations of evaluations: one on domestic burglary, one on burglary of small businesses, three on domestic violence and one on sexual violence. Two studies were not part of a cumulation of evaluations and for that reason were classified as residual. Remarkably, not a single study related to a scheme implemented in the Netherlands.

The prevention schemes in the cumulation of evaluations on preventing domestic burglary were based on an approach often referred to as 'situational crime prevention': this entails taking various measures simultaneously so as to remove the opportunity to commit crime, thus reducing victimization or repeat victimization. In two schemes, target hardening or security upgrading measures were used to remove the opportunity to commit burglary. Neighbourhood watch schemes or cocoon watches were also set up. These methods of prevention were classified as effective. Measures that merely entailed providing information on prevention and informing or educating neighbours were regarded as non-effective.

It was not possible to assess the effectiveness of preventive measures in the cumulation of evaluations on burglary of small businesses due to methodological shortcomings of the studies involved. As in the case of the domestic burglary schemes, the primary aim of the interventions was to remove the opportunity to commit burglary, as the measures essentially entailed various ways of making premises more secure.

Two schemes that aimed to reduce repeat victimization by domestic violence also tried to achieve this by means of opportunity-reducing measures, which included providing information and the use of portable and fixed alarms. The methodological qualities of these studies, however, did not allow these common denominators to be classified in terms of effectiveness.

The findings of the studies that evaluated the effectiveness of police interventions in the area of domestic violence were equivocal, as both positive and negative effects on repeat victimization were observed, making it impossible to judge the effectiveness of arrest. An exception was the findings on the effect of arresting offenders who were employed. In all three of the studies that examined this (Milwaukee, Miami and Colorado Springs), arrested offenders who were in work were less likely to reoffend than those who were unemployed. It was suggested that those who hold jobs are scared of losing them as a result of being arrested.

The studies on Second Responder programmes in the area of domestic violence revealed a negative effect of second home visits by a police officer and a social worker and education campaigns or the combination of the two, as both interventions resulted in a rise in fresh reports of violence and were therefore classified as non-effective. It was noted that a positive interpretation could also be placed on the effects of both interventions, as they might have increased the willingness of victims to report incidents to the police.

Educating female university students on sexual violence was classified as a non-effective method of prevention. An effect on repeat victimization was observed in five of the seven studies that examined this method. A modest effect was found in two studies. In one study an effect on repeat rape victimization was observed (subjects in the intervention condition were less likely to be raped again). Another study found an effect for subjects who were victimized after receiving education; they were less likely to be victimized again in the period following their victimization experience. It was argued that education alone is not enough to reduce repeat victimization.

Discussion

Two points stood out when looking at the various cumulations of evaluations. First, only a few schemes took academic theories into consideration when developing preventive measures. Second, many of the schemes were designed taking little or no account of the possibility of evaluating the effects or did not sufficiently consider the methodological requirements for attributing effects to the interventions involved. The methodological consequences this had for the evaluation of those schemes were discussed.

Recommendations

The study makes two recommendations. First, it recommends that prevention schemes be based on academic theories so as to enable the efficacy or expected efficacy of an intervention to be judged. It emphasizes that not any theory is enough to formulate justifiable expectations regarding the effect of a measure. It argues that a rough distinction can be made between theories that could serve as a basis for context-centred measures and those that could be used as a basis for person-centred interventions. It makes two suggestions on developing context-centred intervention strategies:

- a. It argues that making homes more secure may be achieved by obliging home-owners to take the steps required for the police seal of approval for safe homes.
- b. It notes the possibility of arresting perpetrators of domestic violence who are employed, as they appear to be not willing to take the risk of being arrested again and placed in temporary custody for fear of losing their jobs.

As regards person-centred preventive measures, the study puts forward a model that may be used to improve health behaviour and is based on a psychological theory of behavioural change, the Elaboration Likelihood Model. It explains how this model may be applied to preventing repeat victimization. In addition it urges the application of social learning theory in small social units. This would entail using video messages and role play to reduce risk-increasing behaviour in a group of employees with the same occupation, who work at the same location or in the same sector and are regularly confronted with aggression in the course of their work.

Second, it recommends that developers of schemes ask themselves whether a properly thought-out research design can be used. This means that it needs to be clear from the outset whether the effects, if any, can subsequently be attributed to the measure(s) undertaken. It argues that this applies particularly to context-centred schemes and describes how this problem can be solved in practice.

