







Youth curfews

Restricting the presence of young people in certain public spaces during specified periods of time.

First published

7 May 2019

| Effect scale | Quality of evidence | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| | Effect Impact on crime | Mechanism How it works | Moderator Where it works | Implementation How to do it | Economic cost What it costs |
|  Mixed findings |  Very strong |  Low |  Low |  Low |  Low |

Focus of the intervention

Juvenile curfew laws are used in the USA to restrict the presence of youths in certain public spaces during specified periods.

The laws give police the power to stop and question young people (typically those aged 17 years or under) who are suspected of breaking the curfew, and require them to return home or be detained if deemed appropriate.

Juvenile curfew laws can be used to try to reduce specific types of crime, such as gang-related activity, or to reduce all juvenile crime.

These interventions share some similarities with the UK dispersal orders.

This summary is based on two systematic reviews – Review one covering 12 studies and Review two covering 10 studies. All individual studies included in the reviews were based on evidence from the USA.

Effect – how effective is it?

There is some evidence that juvenile curfew laws have either increased or reduced crime, but no evidence that overall the intervention has had a statistically significant effect on crime.

The overall evidence is taken from Review one. Meta-analytic results from Review one (based on seven studies) found that curfew laws had a non-significant effect on youth crime during curfew and non-curfew hours.

Two individual studies in Review one found that curfews led to an increase in juvenile arrests (during curfew and non-curfew hours), one study found that curfews led to a significant decrease in crime and four found non-significant effects in crime compared to youth crime during non-curfew hours or adult crime rates.

How strong is the evidence?

The overall evidence is taken from a meta-analysis of seven studies (Review one).

The Review was sufficiently systematic that most forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions can be ruled out.

The search strategy was well-designed and transparent and a valid statistical analysis was undertaken, including a thorough analysis of heterogeneity, and consideration of inter-rater reliability, statistical outliers, and the validity of the outcome constructs.

However, biases were identified within the individual studies included in Review one.

These included a lack of comparability across action and control groups and the potential for contamination (some members of the control group received the intervention when they should not have done). Both these biases limit the confidence that can be placed in some of the individual study findings.

Mechanism – how does it work?

Reviews one and two suggested three causal mechanisms by which juvenile curfew laws might affect crime – opportunity theory, deterrence and parental supervision.

- Opportunity theory – curfews reduce the opportunities that young people have to commit crime because they spend less time on the streets (clearly this would not be relevant to cybercrime).
- Deterrence – police authority to stop and question young people during curfew times may act as a deterrent to criminal behaviour. However, reported crime may also go up as police could detect other illegal activities when stopping juveniles suspected of breaking their curfew.
- Parental supervision and authority – making parents specifically responsible for their children during the time the curfew is in place could assist in crime reduction.

None of these suggested mechanisms were tested in either review.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

Review one wanted to test for differences in types of curfew policies, but the number of different policies was too small to allow for such analyses.

Review two notes that the effect of the intervention might differ according to the types of crime committed. This potential moderator was described in some individual studies but not analysed or tested in the reviews.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

Review two identified implementation issues surrounding the involvement of parents in the enforcement of curfew laws.

Juvenile curfew laws place much emphasis on parental responsibility and identify parents as the first line in the enforcement of these laws.

Many curfew laws will sanction both juveniles and their parents for violations, and some sanction parents only.

This emphasis on parental responsibility may present challenges for the implementation of the intervention. If the juvenile does not have a safe home environment or parents willing and able to take responsibility for them, the initiative is less likely to be effective.

In one weekend curfew study in Dallas, the police could not arrange for a parent to come and collect the child in approximately 30% of curfew violations. This meant that overnight accommodation had to be found for them, which was problematic and costly.

Review two noted that juvenile curfews that were short-term, highly focused and used as part of a multifaceted crime control effort were most successful. However, this was not tested in the review.

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

Review two estimates direct costs of the implementation of juvenile curfew laws.

One study found that for the year 2000, curfew enforcement cost the New Orleans police department \$600,000 during which time 3,572 youths were arrested. The size of the area was not mentioned.

Another study in Texas in 2002 found that for one weekend curfew, the cost including overtime for officers came to \$10,500. The review noted that while curfews are often seen as an inexpensive way of addressing juvenile crime problems, the total cost of the curfew would actually be influenced by many factors. These include police salary structure, the use of overtime, and the costs associated with taking juveniles into custody.

General considerations

- Review two suggested that curfews may be used as a means of identifying young people who are at high risk of criminal offending by being in public spaces during curfew hours, and that social services could then be directed to their families.
- Most of the studies took place in high crime areas or locations with large black and minority ethnic populations.
- Whereas an increase in stop and question of young people during curfew times may act as a deterrent to criminal behaviour, reported crime may also go up as police could detect other illegal activities when stopping juveniles suspected of breaking their curfew.
- All of the evidence is based in the USA, so caution should be taken when generalising these conclusions to other geographical contexts.

Summary


There is some evidence that juvenile curfew laws have either increased or reduced crime, but overall the interventions have not been shown to have a statistically significant effect on crime.

Juvenile curfew laws aim to deter young people from committing crime, reduce opportunities for crime and increase parental responsibility for their children.

The successful implementation of curfews may depend on parental support, the delivery of the curfew for a short period of time and as one part of a multi-faceted approach to juvenile crime control.

Reviews





Review one

| Quality of evidence | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Mechanism How it works | Moderator Where it works | Implementation How to do it | Economic cost What it costs |
|  Low | No information | No information | No information |

Reference

- Wilson, D., Gill C., Ajima O., McClure D. (2016), '[Juvenile Curfew Effects on Criminal Behavior and Victimization: A Systematic Review](#)', Campbell Systematic Reviews, (12), 3, 1-99

Review two

| Quality of evidence | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Mechanism How it works | Moderator Where it works | Implementation How to do it | Economic cost What it costs |
|  Low |  Low |  Low |  Low |

Reference

- Adams, K. (2003) '[The Effectiveness of Juvenile Curfews at Crime Prevention](#)', The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 587, 136-159

Summary prepared by

This narrative was prepared by UCL Jill Dando Institute and was co-funded by the College of Policing and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESRC grant title: 'University Consortium for Evidence-Based Crime Reduction'. Grant reference: ES/L007223/1.

[Return to the toolkit](#)

Tags

- [Crime reduction](#)
- [Gangs and youth violence](#)