

Rapid Evidence Assessments: Reflections from Experience

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Rapid Evidence Assessment Toolkit Launch
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Background



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- Two young women shot and killed in Aston, Birmingham on 2nd January 2003
- Focused efforts of agencies in addressing gang-related behaviour in the city
- Led to development of operational management forum (Aston and Handsworth Operational Group, AHOG)
- Membership of AHOG/BRGV: Police (operational and strategic), Learning and Skills Council, Local authority, Education, Community groups, Youth Services, GOWM, Connexions
- One key strand of AHOG's work was *research*



Why an REA?



- 'Supply led' environment
- Identification of 'What works' seen as a way of steering course through conflicting demands
- Limitations in existing evidence
- Issues of timeliness and policy relevance
- Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) method chosen after consultation with Cabinet Office and Home Office colleagues
- 'Rapid' a selling point in itself



Methodology



- Framing the question: What is effective in preventing or reducing young people's involvement in gang and gun related activity, as victims or offenders?
- Commissioned ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice to undertake the searching
- 311 abstracts identified
- **Filter 1:** Does the abstract address the research question?
- **Filter 2:** Is the paper based on a primary study examining the effectiveness of an intervention?
- 93 papers called for.



Assessing quality



- 69 papers received & distributed amongst review team
- 'Maryland Scale' used
- Quality Assessment Tool
- Each of the studies marked according to its methodology in four areas:
 1. sample selection
 2. bias
 3. data collection
 4. data analysis
- Studies scored for methodological rigour by at least two reviewers.
- Six studies remained



What was delivered?



Synthesising the evidence

- Six interventions identified
- Overall, they fell under four main types of intervention:
 - The co-ordination of gang reduction activity through a multi-agency, multi-modal strategy, specific to one city or locality
 - Civil injunctions
 - Peer mentoring
 - School based learning
- Look at 'drivers for success' – what made an intervention successful?
- We examined:
 - theories of change in papers
 - critical mechanisms



Critical Mechanisms



Recommendations

The main findings were that effective interventions:

- Adopt a problem-solving approach and analyse the local problem rather than simply importing an intervention
- Have a strong management structure with clear leadership of the intervention
- Target behaviour (gang violence) rather than affiliation (gang membership). This applies to all interventions, whether strategic or tactical.
- Offer both a 'carrot' by providing opportunities out of gang activity through employment, training, treatment and family support, and a 'stick' through enforcement , prohibitions and sanctions
- Focus on reducing incidence and reducing lethality
- Support partnership working by adopting a collaborative approach among front line staff
- Exchange information both formally and informally
- Engage community groups and voluntary groups via existing networks
- Market effectively. Once a strategy is agreed it should be marketed to the target audience and the wider community. The enforcement elements of the strategy should be implemented consistently and as advertised



How was it delivered?



- Presentations
- Full, referenced report
- 1 Page summary
- Reports to conferences
- Research group formed in BRGV

- Methodological interest:
 - Used by ESRC
 - Used in Systematic Review and REA training
 - Journal articles and book chapters
 - And as example in toolkit!



Positives



- Opportunity to engage diverse audience in using research
- Delivered practitioner relevant information in a user friendly but evidence informed way
- Some impact on regional practice
- Good feedback - requests for similar approaches in other subject areas
- People remain very interested in REA methodology



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Timescales



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- 60 person days for REA
- Contracting out searching saves time
- Reading/scoring could be done by larger group to save time



Advantages over full Systematic Review



- Quicker
 - ‘Rapid’ works well with practitioners/policy people
 - ‘Interim’ works better with researchers
- Skill acquisition makes a full SR less intimidating



Challenges



- Scoring the papers collectively
- Communicating research methodologies and hierarchies
- Maintaining the REA in ‘supply led’ environment: *“here’s an idea I saw last week at a conference”*
- People see the elements that they want to see



What Worked



- **Need for cohesive review team with different skills: methodology, marketing, organisation**
- Ongoing relationship allowed 'doers' to convince 'users' that Rapid Evidence Assessment was the right approach
- Communication: interim reports, clear presentations, report freely available
- Importance of effective project management
- Buy-in from the top/ policy interest



In sum



- Our REA had two of the three essential qualities of a systematic review (Davies), namely:
 - Being systematic and rigorous in the ways in which they search and find existing evidence.
 - Having explicit and transparent criteria for appraising the quality of existing research evidence, especially identifying and controlling for different types of bias in existing studies (the QAT).
- Lack of the third quality - an explicit way of establishing the comparability (or incomparability) of different studies and of combining and establishing a cumulative effect of what the existing evidence is telling us.



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