

After-school programmes

Structured activities for otherwise unoccupied or unsupervised children and young people.

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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	 Very strong	No information	No information

Focus of the intervention

After-school programmes (ASPs) are organised activities targeted at children and young people who would otherwise be unoccupied or unsupervised. These programmes are often voluntary and can include recreation-based activities, drop-in clubs and tutoring services delivered after school.

This narrative is based on one systematic review covering 12 studies. Ten of the primary studies in the review were based on evidence from the USA, one study from Canada and one study from Sweden.

Effect – how effective is it?

There is some evidence that ASPs have either increased or reduced crime, but overall they have not had a statistically significant effect on crime.

The results of the meta-analysis show that ASPs had a non-significant effect on crime when measured by self-reports, police records, and teacher or parent reports of arrests and incidences of delinquent behaviour.

Three primary studies found that ASPs led to a reduction in delinquent behaviour, two reported an increase, and seven showed no significant differences between young people who attended ASPs compared to those who did not.

After analysing the effect of different types of activity (academic, recreational, and skills training and monitoring) on crime, the authors found that the type of ASP had no discernible effect on delinquency.

How strong is the evidence?

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

This evidence is taken from a systematic review covering 12 studies, which demonstrated a high-quality design. It had a transparent and well-designed search strategy, featuring a valid statistical analysis, sufficiently assessing publication bias, the risk of bias in the analysis and considering the validity of the way outcomes are measured and/or combined. However, the review did not quantify an overall effect for unanticipated outcomes or conduct a separate analysis for different research designs.

Mechanism – how does it work?

The review suggested two mechanisms by which ASPs might have an effect on crime.

First, the formal supervision of young people in a controlled environment with structured activities can reduce opportunities for delinquent behaviour.

Second, programmes that include structured activities targeted at a particular skill set provide children with additional resources and time to develop positive attributes, knowledge and social networks. These may also act as protective factors against delinquency. In other words, the purpose of ASPs is not solely to reduce unstructured time, but rather to dedicate time to educational or recreational activities.

However, neither of these potential mechanisms were empirically tested.

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

The review tested whether the effects of ASPs might be moderated by a number of factors.

- The context in which the activities were delivered – whether ASPs were held in the community or at school.
- Youth risk level – comparing high risk with mixed risk.
- School grade level – comparing lower than 8th grade, from 9th to 12th grade, and all grades.
- The duration of the programme – whether ASPs lasted less or more than one year.

Variation in the effect of ASPs cannot be explained by these factors as the findings of the analysis were non-significant in all cases.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

The review gave no account of how the intervention was implemented, or of any implementation challenges that the primary studies encountered.

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

There is no mention of costs or benefits of the intervention in the review and no formal economic analysis was provided.

General considerations

- Although evidence suggests that ASPs had a non-significant effect on delinquency, the findings do not indicate any pattern of harmful effects. Future evaluations of ASPs need to pay special attention to programme fidelity.
- The majority of the evidence is based in the USA so caution should be taken when applying to other geographical contexts.

Summary

After-school programmes (ASPs) are expected to reduce delinquency by increasing formal supervision, providing academic support and promoting social skills to young people.

There is some evidence that ASPs have either increased or reduced crime, but overall such programmes have not had a statistically significant effect on young people's offending.

There was no evidence that the effects of ASPs were moderated by the duration or context of the programme, or by the risk or age of the young people. Additional evidence is required to identify implementation issues and analysis of costs.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Taheri, S. and Welsh, B. (2016). After-School Programs for Delinquency Prevention. A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice. Vol. 14(3) 272-290.

Summary prepared by

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