

Music making

Using music programmes to promote the development of prosocial skills.

First published

19 February 2015

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
— No overall change	■□□□	■■□□	■□□□	■■■□	No information

Focus of the intervention

Music-making interventions for young people at risk of offending – defined as being known to youth justice professionals – can be delivered in various justice contexts (for example, custodial, residential or community settings).

They cover different activities including structured group performance, instrument tuition or exploring rap lyrics.

Music-making interventions aim to promote the development of pro-social skills by providing positive experiences and the opportunity for self-development. They are intended to build resilience and contribute to young people's wellbeing (defined as 11-25 year olds).

They are believed to have the potential to prevent offending behaviour in the long run.

This narrative is primarily based on one systematic review covering 11 studies.

Effect – how effective is it?

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that music-making interventions have an impact on crime. However, there are indications that these interventions improve social skills and other outcomes such as self-efficacy in participants.

How strong is the evidence?

Although the review was systematic, many forms of bias that could influence the study conclusions remain. Nevertheless, a transparent and well-designed search strategy was used.

Many of the studies reviewed were considered of weak methodological design with small sample sizes and a lack of detail in reporting the research design. The reviewers assessed the studies as biased, so the strength of the evidence reported in the overall review is weak.

Mechanism – how does it work?

Music subcultures are believed to have a powerful influence on the development of identity and values in young people.

Music-making interventions might reduce crimes committed by young offenders by:

- providing positive social experiences
- addressing problematic attitudes and perceptions
- building resilience and supporting wellbeing
- promoting identity development, at the same time as distracting from negative influences and crime
- allowing participants to experiment with new self-images (for example, a creative self)
- providing an acceptable outlet for aggression and other difficult feelings
- relieving stress and providing an emotional release
- promoting psychological growth and physical mastery

However, none of these potential mechanisms are empirically tested.

The majority of studies report the improvement of intermediate outcomes that could potentially be linked with a reduced risk of future offending, but these are rarely reported as statistically significant

(possibly due to small samples).

Intermediate outcomes include:

- improved confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem
- improved education and work performance
- better interpersonal relationships, social skills and mental wellbeing,
- improvements in emotional feelings or mood
- reduced prison rule breaking and feelings of anger

Moderators – in which contexts does it work best?

Little detail on context is provided by the review authors.

The 11 studies reviewed had implemented music-making interventions in several countries (with different judicial systems), varying justice contexts (for example, custodial, residential or community settings) and were sometimes implemented in combination with other interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy. The variety of settings makes it difficult to generalise from the results.

Participants in the studies were more likely to be male and there was some reporting of ethnic diversity in the samples. However, small samples meant that outcomes could not be analysed in relation to gender and ethnicity.

Implementation – what can be said about implementing this initiative?

Evidence suggests that young people are more likely to participate in the intervention when activities are perceived to be of cultural relevance, for example, rap music is often used (four studies).

Other findings indicate that music-making interventions are more effective in settings that:

- provide a safe predictable relationship between project staff and participants (one study)
- use empowerment-focused group work (one study)

In addition, two studies reported that the short-term nature of the projects was a constraint to successful implementation, which led to participant frustration and disappointment (one study).

Economic considerations – how much might it cost?

The review does not mention costs or benefits. No formal economic analysis is provided.

General considerations

- Ethical issues are not sufficiently reported in the studies reviewed. Practitioners should consider access protocols, participants' rights, consent, confidentiality, risk management and data protection.
- This review has highlighted substantial gaps in the evidence base. Specifically, more studies with a rigorous research design are needed to measure both intermediate outcomes, such as self-efficacy and social skills, and crime outcomes, to properly test whether music making interventions have any effect on crime.

Summary

Overall, there is no evidence to suggest that music-making interventions have an impact on crime

Evidence suggests, however, that they can improve social skills and other outcomes such as self-efficacy.

Music-making interventions are believed to work by fostering pro-social skills in an environment relevant to the young offender.

Using a culturally relevant music genre is believed to improve the chances of recruitment and participation in interventions.

There is weak evidence that it reduces rule breaking in prisons and that delinquent behaviour might be reduced but no details are provided.

Reviews

Review one

Reference

- Daykin, N., De Viggiani, N., Pilkington, P. and Moriarty, Y. (2012). Music making for health, well-being and behaviour change in youth justice settings: a systematic review. *Health Promotion International*. Vol 28(2). doi:10.1093/heapro/das005?

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](#)