

Physical environment interventions

Changing the physical environment to improve safety in public spaces.

First published 18 March 2022

4 mins read

At a more tactical level, systematic review evidence exists on several physical environment interventions that could be deployed to better protect women and girls in public spaces.

The evidence, however, tends to be broad and does not always specify whether interventions are effective specifically in respect of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Improved street lighting

Overall, improved street lighting has been found to reduce crime. On average, violent and property crime reduced by 21% in areas where street lighting was improved, relative to areas where it was not. It is possible that improved street lighting is likely to have more of an impact in those places where lighting is currently poor.

For full details, [see Street lighting](#).

- Strong evidence

CCTV

While the evidence suggests that CCTV can reduce some crime types, there is no evidence that it is effective in reducing violent crime. CCTV tends to be most effective in reducing drug crimes, vehicle crime and property crime, particularly in car parks and, to a lesser extent, residential areas.

CCTV is more likely to be effective when live footage is actively monitored, when there are high levels of camera coverage, and when used alongside complementary interventions (for example, street lighting).

For full details, [see CCTV](#).

- Strong evidence (no evidence in relation to VAWG specifically).

Neighbourhood Watch

Overall, the evidence points to Neighbourhood Watch having resulted in modest reductions in crime, though the evidence mainly focuses on its effectiveness in reducing burglary, rather than violence in public spaces.

For full details, [see Neighbourhood Watch](#).

- Strong evidence (no evidence in relation to VAWG specifically)

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)

A combination of many features of the urban environment can have an impact on crime prevention and safety. There is a wide range of research that describes how CPTED can be used to tackle crime and reduce fear.

These design features, which are often used in combination, include the following.

Closing roads, footpaths and subways

Evidence points towards crime reduction effects, but mainly for burglary.

For full information, see page 60 of the [Safer Streets Fund – Crime prevention toolkit](#).

Lighting and visibility

There is a range of evidence to suggest that good lighting can reduce perceptions of fear and increase public usage of space.

Maintenance and guardianship

Evidence in relation to transit environments suggest that they can be planned in a way that reduces the possibility of crime occurring, including by:

- improving surveillance and visibility

- reducing areas of conflict by controlling access and improving overall perceived safety (Ceccato and others, 2022)

Maintenance

Maintenance is a fundamental aspect of the safety of public places for a variety of environments, such as school grounds, parking lots and transit stations. Poorly maintained areas subject to vandalism and disrepair can affect people's perceptions of fear (Ceccato, 2020).

Improved guardianship

In research examining the perceived safety of park users, respondents reported feeling safe when someone else was around, including other people, police or city guards, or their dogs. They reported feeling unsafe in the presence of alcohol consumption, or in presence of homeless people and vandalism (Bogaka, 2020).

The signal crimes perspective (Universities' Police Science Institute, n.d.) suggests that some events were more important than others in shaping the public's perceptions of crime and people's feelings of safety. Research suggests that levels of disorder such as vandalism can be as important in shaping peoples' perceptions of fear as witnessing or experiencing crime.

Reassurance could therefore be improved by understanding local people's perceptions of an area, then by identifying and targeting the crimes, incidents and events that adversely affected people's feelings, thoughts and actions related to their safety.

- Moderate evidence

Tags

Violence against women and girls