

Response – evidence-based approaches

Response as part of a problem-solving approach to homicide.

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5 mins read

Response forms part of the **SARA model** and can be used as part of a problem-solving approach to homicide.

Video Transcript

Response is the third step of problem solving. It is the development or implementation of measures to try to reduce or eliminate the problem.

Following scanning and analysis, you should have focused your attention on a specific type of crime problem.

You should also have a better idea of:

- the scale of your selected problem
- how it's patterned
- the factors contributing to it

You should also have identified one or more pinch points that you believe are open to intervention by the police and partners.

Now is the time to decide how best to address those pinch points as part of your response.

One of the main challenges in problem solving is avoiding the temptation to rush straight to response, without completing the scanning and analysis necessary to frame a problem suitably and select the appropriate responses.

Another challenge is how to respond.

There is no single cure for most crime problems and pursuit of such a cure is misguided.

Crime problems involve a variety of different offence types involving different groups of individuals and likely requiring different responses.

Problem solving is not prescriptive. It doesn't tell you what response will work for your specific crime problem.

The specific details of the crime problem in your area are likely to be unique: times, places victims and offenders vary.

Effective problem solving relies on a commitment to select responses, not on the basis of popularity and precedent, but because they make sense, given what you have learned from your local scanning and analysis.

Two questions can help you in devising your response strategy:

- What has worked previously to reduce this crime problem?
- Will a response work for me in addressing my local crime problem?

Once you've identified plausible causes of your specific homicide problem through analysis, you can begin to think about what an effective response might be.

Evidence-based approaches to tackling crime

Evidence-based policing seeks to identify what works in policing and preventing crime.

The number of activities police could deploy to combat homicide that have been evaluated rigorously is small. The number that have been shown credibly to affect serious violence is smaller again.

However, toolkits are available that provide a good overview of the evidence base for preventing a range of different crimes.

College of Policing crime reduction toolkit

Our [**crime reduction toolkit**](#) details interventions designed to tackle many different crime problems. It can be filtered depending on the:

- crime (problem)

- target group (population)
- nature of the intervention (focus)
- driver (factor)

It also provides an assessment of how effective an intervention type is thought to be (effect).

Beyond impact on a crime problem, the toolkit also describes:

- how the intervention is thought to work (mechanism)
- conditions where it works best (moderator)
- how to get it working (implementation)
- what it will cost (economic costs)

Youth Endowment Fund toolkit

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) toolkit aims to succinctly describe the evidence on what is effective but with a more precise focus on youth violence. The set of interventions can be broken down by:

- the experience of the target group (prevention types)
- the place in which the intervention might be delivered (settings)
- what aspect of violence it might be expected to affect (outcomes)

Role of partnership in violence prevention

The interventions described in the toolkits often stretch beyond the policing context. They include other partners, such as health, social, education and children's services, as well as the community and voluntary sector.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. It reflects the origins of violence and homicide as being beyond the immediate crime situation in terms of causes, responsibility and solutions.

Strategies detailed in the toolkits that have shown promise in reducing violence include:

- focused deterrence
- cognitive behavioural therapy
- hot spots policing
- mentoring

- pre-court diversion
- social skills training

In many of these interventions (cognitive behavioural therapy, mentoring and social skills training) police are not a main delivery partner but can still play a role in the selection of individuals for intervention.

Only in hot spots policing is the intervention delivered exclusively by police. The role of police in focused deterrence can vary depending on the approach taken.

- See also our hot spots policing guide for tackling serious violence

Although the interventions described have been evaluated independently, there's no reason why several intervention types cannot be integrated in a problem-solving framework.

Limitations of the evidence base

An important omission from the outcomes or problems addressed in the toolkits is that none discuss homicide specifically. The low frequency of homicide makes it a challenging issue to evaluate rigorously. This limits the base of evidence on what works to prevent it.

A practical solution to this is to include other serious violent offending or incidents as the indicator of a programme's effectiveness. This also overcomes the law of small numbers problem and places greater emphasis on the behaviour (violence) than its outcome (homicide).

The few studies that have used homicide as a problem/outcome are often interventions to reduce the availability or accessibility of firearms. This is less relevant to a low firearm jurisdiction such as England and Wales.

However, policy makers in low firearm areas should not be complacent. There can be little doubt that regardless of homicide type, firearm availability is one of the major facilitators of homicide worldwide. Any changes in the legal or illegal availability of firearms should be strongly resisted.

The availability and accessibility of other types of weapons, such as knives, is also a significant causal factor of homicides. We've produced a problem-solving guide that focuses specifically on knife use in violence. This guide describes a selection of promising interventions that while not focused on homicide, may reduce it through their effect on reducing weapon use in violence.

Another important observation is the lack of specialisation in the evidence base according to homicide type. In particular, domestic abuse (a major source of female violent victimisation) is not well represented in the review literature. However, there is a growing collection of evidence evaluating domestic abuse interventions, such as perpetrator programmes.

Next steps

The crime reduction toolkit and YEF toolkit both show that few interventions directed at homicide have a strong evidence base. However, it's important to recognise that:

- many of the interventions in these toolkits have only been developed and evaluated in the past 20 to 30 years
- the focus of these interventions is rarely as precise as the homicide problem you have identified through scanning and analysis

That means that there's a lot of opportunity to create innovative solutions and responses to specific crime problems.

Tags

Homicide Crime reduction