

Closed circuit television (CCTV) as a crime prevention tool



Surveillance is more effective at preventing crime in car parks, and less effective in city and town centers, public housing, and public transport.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review examines the effects of CCTV on property crime and violent crime. The review reports on whether using CCTV results in crime displacement, and also assesses whether using CCTV leads to the spread of crime prevention benefits. The authors found 44 evaluations. The studies were from the UK, the USA, Canada, Norway and Sweden. Most of the studies (34) were from the UK.

CCTV surveillance has a modest effect on personal property crime but not on levels of violent crime. CCTV can be effective in reducing crime in car parks.

What is this review about?

The use of closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance is increasingly common in public spaces. A common justification for using CCTVs is that it reduces crime by deterring potential offenders. CCTV surveillance may alert police and security personnel quickly so they intervene more rapidly. CCTV surveillance may help to make people feel safer and more secure.

CCTV, however, is expensive. In the UK, it is estimated that between 1992-2002, more than £250 million of public money was spent on CCTV. This form of surveillance is the most heavily funded crime prevention measure outside the country's criminal justice system.

This review summarizes the evidence on the effects of CCTV surveillance cameras on crime in public spaces. The review examines which settings and conditions CCTV is most effective in, and whether the use of CCTV prevents crime overall or displaces it elsewhere.

What studies are included?

The systematic review included studies which investigate the effects of CCTV on property crime and violent crime. Studies including other interventions are included only if CCTV surveillance was the primary intervention. All studies have before-and-after measures of crime and compared an experimental area in which the intervention was used, with a control area in which it was not.

The review summarizes 44 studies. The majority of the evaluations were conducted in four main settings: city and town centres, public transport, public housing, and car parks. In addition, two



How up-to-date is this review?

The research was completed in April 2007. This Campbell systematic review was published on 2 December 2008.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

Campbell is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was written by Simon Goudie (Campbell Collaboration), based on 'Effects of Closed Circuit Television Surveillance on Crime' by Brandon Welsh and David Farrington. (DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.17).

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studies were conducted in residential areas, and one in a hospital. The majority of studies are from the UK (36). The other countries included are the USA (5), and Canada, Norway, and Sweden (1 each).

What are the main findings of this review?

CCTV has a modest impact on crime. Effectiveness varies across settings. Surveillance is more effective at preventing crime in car parks, and less effective in city and town centers, public housing, and public transport. CCTV appears most effective in car parks at reducing vehicle crimes such as thefts from cars or stealing cars. The effectiveness of CCTV surveillance is greater when camera coverage of an area is high.

CCTV surveillance does not have an effect on levels of violent crime.

In all six of the CCTV car park studies, CCTV surveillance was an element in a broader package of crime prevention measures, such as extra security guards, better lighting, and fencing. It is not possible to assess the independent effects of each of these different components.

The available evidence does not allow a conclusion as to whether CCTV leads to a displacement of crime or a diffusion of crime prevention benefits to other areas.

What are the research and policy implications of this review?

CCTV can be a useful tool for reducing thefts from vehicles or thefts of vehicles in car parks. CCTV is less useful as a crime prevention tool in other settings. A more targeted, context-specific approach to the use of CCTV is therefore appropriate.

CCTV is not an effective tool for preventing violent crime.

There is a need to investigate further (1) why CCTV surveillance works in some settings but not in others, (2) whether CCTV reduces crime or shifts it elsewhere, and (3) longer follow-up periods as to whether crime reduction benefits are sustained over time.