



Juvenile curfews are not effective in reducing crime and victimization



The pattern of evidence suggests that juvenile curfews are ineffective at reducing crime and victimization.

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review assesses the effects of juvenile curfews on crime and victimization. The review summarizes findings from 12 studies.

The evidence suggests that juvenile curfews do not reduce crime or victimization.

What is this review about?

Curfews restrict youth below a certain age—usually 17 or 18—from public places during night time. For example, the Prince George’s County, Maryland curfew ordinance restricts youth younger than 17 from public places between 10 P.M. and 5 A.M. on weekdays and between midnight and 5 A.M. on weekends. Sanctions range from a fine that increases with each offense, community service, and restrictions on a youth’s driver’s license. Close to three quarters of US cities have curfews, which are also used in Iceland.

A juvenile curfew has common sense appeal: keep youth at home during the late night and early morning hours and you will prevent them from committing a crime or being a victim of a crime. In addition, the potential for fines or other sanctions deter youth from being out in a public place during curfew hours.

This review synthesizes the evidence on the effectiveness of juvenile curfews in reducing criminal behavior and victimization among youth.

What are the main findings of this review?

What studies are included?

Included studies test the effect of an official state or local policy intended to restrict or otherwise penalize a juvenile’s presence outside the home during certain times of day. This must have been a general preventive measure directed at all youth within a certain age range and not a sanction imposed on a specific youth.

Twelve quantitative evaluations of the effects of curfews on youth criminal behavior or victimization are included in the review.

Do curfews reduce crime and victimization?

The pattern of evidence suggests that juvenile



How up-to-date is this review?

The search for this review was updated in March 2014, and the review published in March 2016.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

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

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) and is based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2016:03 'Juvenile Curfew Effects on Criminal Behavior and Victimization: A Systematic Review' by David B. Wilson, Charlotte Gill, Ajima Olaghere, and Dave McClure (DOI: 10.4073/csr.2016.3). Anne Mellbye (R-BUP) designed the summary, which was edited and produced by Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration).

curfews are ineffective at reducing crime and victimization. The average effect on juvenile crime during curfew hours was slightly positive - that is a slight increase in crime - and close to zero for crime during all hours. Similarly, juvenile victimization also appeared unaffected by the imposition of a curfew ordinance.

However, all the studies in the review suffer from some limitations that make it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Nonetheless, the lack of any credible evidence in their favor suggests that any effect is likely to be small at best and that curfews are unlikely to be a meaningful solution to juvenile crime and disorder.

Other studies have suggested curfews may be ineffective as juvenile crime is concentrated in hours before and after school, and that under-resourced police forces focus on more urgent demands than enforcing curfews.

What do the findings in this review mean?

Contrary to popular belief, the evidence suggests that juvenile curfews do not produce the expected benefits. The study designs used in this research make it difficult to draw clear conclusions, so more research is needed to replicate the findings. However, many of the biases likely to occur in existing studies would make it more, rather than less, likely that we would conclude curfews are effective. For example, most of these studies were conducted during a time when crime was dropping throughout the United States. Therefore, our findings suggest that curfews either don't have any effect on crime, or the effect is too small to be identified in the research available.