DIFFICULTIES IN EVALUATING CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMS: WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS FOR EVALUATORS OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify the major types of evaluation used in evaluating crime prevention programs and to draw some lessons that will be of benefit to evaluators of community based programs. The paper begins by explaining what are crime prevention programs and some of the assumptions underlying their planning and implementation. A typology of evaluation models is used to examine how crime prevention programs are evaluated in Australia. In conclusion, the paper draws some conclusions about what can be learnt from experience to benefit the evaluators of community based crime prevention programs.

Maintaining Victoria as the 'Safest Place to Be' presents enormous challenges for all people and agencies in our community. Community Safety and crime and Violence Prevention are everybody’s responsibility.

(Minister Andre Haermeyer, Minister for Police and Emergency Services (Crime Prevention Victoria, 2002), p.5

The evaluation of the results of crime prevention programs has become increasingly important because of the growing cost of crime (in Australia it is estimated to cost the community $11 billion dollars per annum in addition to up to $6.4 billion spent annually by criminal justice system agencies (Jeffries, Payne, & Smith, 2002)); to ensure that the investment of government resources is directed to programs that can achieve the desired outcomes; to provide evidence of the results being achieved; and to meet funding requirements for accountability. Walker (1997 cited in Jefferies et al 2002) estimated that the crime prevention industry was worth $1.3 billion in 1996. It is therefore important that they be evaluated to justify the resources being spent on them.

The major vehicle for the delivery of crime prevention programs by The Department of Justice in Victoria is through the Safer Streets & Homes Program of Crime Prevention Victoria. The aims of the program are “to improve and change the way we respond to offending and to take action to intervene at an earlier stage to prevent future offending behaviour” (Crime Prevention Victoria, 2002, p.6). To this end the program supports a number of initiatives:

- Community information and education campaigns to promote awareness of issues and reduce the risk of becoming a victim;
- Neighbourhood safety team which safety audits of local areas in collaboration with local service providers;
- Local traders and service providers are recruited to develop local crime reduction plans;
- Safer design guidelines for developers and planners;
- Partnering with and leveraging off programs by other agencies;
- Developing demographic and need profiles of Local Government Areas
- Rigorously evaluating existing and new programs to build cost evidence required for investment decision making.

The purpose of this paper is to identify the major types of evaluation used in evaluating crime prevention programs and to draw some lessons that will be of benefit to evaluators of community based programs. The paper begins by explaining what are crime prevention programs, introduces a typology of evaluation models (Stufflebeam, 2001) and assesses the methods used to evaluate crime prevention in Australia against the standards proposed in the typology. In conclusion, the paper draws some conclusions from the study for evaluators of community based programs.
Defining crime prevention

Crime prevention generally refers to preventing crime and anti-social behaviour before it occurs. (Crime Prevention Victoria, 2002) p.10) defines crime prevention as “any public or privately based initiative or policy aimed at reducing or eliminating criminal behaviour, violence and fear of crime or violence in the community”. There are two broad approaches to crime prevention: opportunity reduction and social prevention (McMillan & Murray, 2002).

Opportunity reduction or situational crime prevention refers to programs developed to meet local priorities such as urban planning and design initiatives. Initiatives in this area are the designed to increase the apparent effort required to commit a crime, increase the perceived risks associated with committing a crime or being violent, reducing the anticipated rewards of committing a crime and removing the excuses for committing crime or violence. The emphasis is on creating friendly and safe space in shopping centres, railways, recreation areas, etc. Social prevention is based on the premise that effective crime prevention strategies must deal with social causes and early preventions (McMillan & Murray, 2002). The strategies appear to have at least two prongs.

One is to promote social inclusion through measures designed to reduce social marginalisation and at the same time enhance opportunities for law-abiding behaviour. Another is based on attitudinal and/or behavioural change by potential offenders, actual offenders, prospective victims or actual victims. For example, at the prospective victim level, promoting safety and preventing crime could take the form of locking doors and cars or not keeping drugs on premises.

The Department of Justice has encouraged local governments to develop and implement community safety and crime prevention plans. The term “community safety” generally refers to the description of a broad approach that includes measures that relate directly to the reduction of criminal events as well as activities which impact on community well-being and affect both perceptions of quality of life (health and injuries, road safety, fire and other emergency situations).

The types of plans are as diverse as the local communities. Some examples are: Community Safety Month in which CPV funds a variety of local initiatives ranging from fire prevention in community housing estates to information on business robbery prevention; partnerships with local schools and DEST to improve students’ learning and attendance through the Student Action Teams, Local Learning and Employment Networks, and other related strategies; projects with the Victorian Law Enforcement Drug Fund to support intervention programs for people from non-English speaking backgrounds, women and aboriginals in “at risk” families; and grants through the Local Initiative Partnerships for improving targeted “specific crime hot spots”.

A hallmark of community programs is that they motivate positive, active participation in a partnership between government, state organisations, non-government organisations and the wider community. Involvement of the wider community can be either direct such as improving street lighting in a shopping centre, or indirect by, for example, assisting the local Policy Officer in the distribution of robbery prevention information by Neighbourhood Watch groups, or by collaboration by a local hardware store in a promotion of household security through using appropriate locks.

Because of the need for involvement in each project of a range of stakeholders, and the wide diversity of local issues and the causes of crime, crime prevention emphasises a “whole of government” and “whole of community” approach in which local resources and partnerships are coordinated across government departments, existing community organisations, and the business sector.
describes this approach to community empowerment and building community capacity as a fundamental change, a paradigm shift, in assumptions and values about managing community problems. Rather than seeking to implement a single program, social crime prevention strategies promote “joined-up” governance through multi-agency collaboration between government and non-government agencies such as justice, health and education, youth affairs and local community bodies. Furthermore, a principle underlying the programs is the promotion of “community involvement and ownership, which permits evidence-based solutions to be formulated or adapted to meet local conditions and needs” (CPV2002, p.14).

The Difficulties of Evaluation of Crime Prevention Programs

The challenges to evaluators is to develop evaluation frameworks that are able to engage with the dynamic, diverse and complex programs delivered in different contexts, by a multitude of actors operating within a diverse range of relationships and to produce the reliable evidence required for valid assessments of a program’s performance.

Evaluation researchers refer to the “messy” contexts of community based programs, their multiple goals, and the networks of mandated and non-mandated actors and actions. Further, context may take a number of forms, e.g. policy, geography, socio-economic, political and institutional (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Consequently, Carlson argues (Carlson, 2000) that the task for evaluators endeavouring to document reality is not linear, nor necessarily rational.

New approaches to evaluation designed to accommodate the search for meaning have included post-positivist approaches (fourth generation evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1989); policy communities:(Jordan, 1990); advocacy coalitions:(Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999); or public energy fields:(Fox & Miller, 1995), and the problem centred model of Carlson (Carlson, 2000). The problem centred model

“is a matter of finding relevant units of analysis- a group of people or a network that organizes a solution to the problem under consideration – and thereby of establishing a logical relation between a number of different goals and identified activities. ….In order to organize a solution to a complex policy problem, people tend to utilize a number of programmes (resources) that might not have been created specifically for the problem under consideration. For the analyst this means that the ‘evaluation space’ ranges over a multitude of programs, but also that the relevant goals are the aims that actors themselves refer to” (p.309).

Since the organising principle is the policy problem rather than the program, this approach is particularly relevant to community intervention programs involving a number of networks of actors in the activities. The process of evaluation becomes one of reconstruction of the perceptions of the relevant problems and creation of the implementation structures. In addition to identifying the formal decision process this approach can identify where the definition and achievement of the local aims and objectives of communities may not have matched the official assumptions of the government interventions.

Similarly to Carlson, Sullivan (Sullivan, Barnes, & Matka, 2002) advocates a “Theories of Change” model of evaluation in which evaluation is based on a ‘bottoms-up’ approach involving identifying the key components in the community necessary for program implementation and also the contribution of interventions to wider community goals.

In order to draw conclusions about the most effective models of community based crime prevention interventions, it is important to develop models of evaluation that can address:
• The causal links between a program’s assumptions and the outcomes desired. (Are crime prevention initiatives based on a sound theoretical underpinning? Do community based programs reduce crime? Do they have other unintended impacts?)

• The effectiveness of the processes involved in implementation of the programs. (Who should be funded? How and to what level? Who should drive the programs? How can agencies best work together?) Understanding what happens and why in program can determine why particular objective were or were not achieved (Owen & Rogers, 1999).

• The effectiveness of individual initiatives. (How successful are different approaches? Which are most successful? Why?What long term effects do they have on prevention? How appropriate are they to different contexts?)

• The contribution of initiatives to wider community goals (health and wellbeing of the community; government policy objectives of a ‘safer community’)

• The cost benefit of both individual community based initiatives and an overall assessment of a program’s multiple initiatives.

The process needs to accommodate:

• multiple goals, and the networks of mandated and non-mandated actors and actions including;
• the particular program’s needs for formative and summative information;
• the particular problems addressed by the interventions;
• the priorities of local communities;

and to ensure the evaluation resets on valid and reliable data collections.

Evaluation Models Used in Crime Prevention

Evaluation is the process of applying systematic methods to make judgements about the worth or value of an entity (organization, person) or activity (program, research, policy, service, etc) (Armstrong,1996). 

Jefferies, Payne and Smith (2002) from the Australian Institute of Criminology compiled a Register of 110 Crime Prevention Projects that have been reported and published in Australia from 1990-2002. They reported that systematic evaluations were undertaken in 33% of the cases, informal or anecdotal in 12% and no attempt at evaluation in 12%. In 48% it was not known if evaluations had taken place. There was not sufficient information in the Report to comment on the quality of the evaluations.

Evaluation is required in Victoria of all crime prevention programs funded under the Safer Cities and Streets Program. CPV

Alternative Models of Evaluation

Various researchers have attempted to classify alternative evaluation approaches. Armstrong and Ogren (1986) classified evaluation models and strategies according to:

• their major methodology as research based, client based, financial, issues based, etc.;
• by the target of evaluation as needs based, process, output or outcome evaluations;
• by their purpose as formative (designed to inform and improve) or summative (designed to determine the worth of the innovation); and by responsibility and accountability for the evaluation (internal/self evaluation or external/independent).
More recently, Stufflebeam (2001) identified twenty-two models of evaluation (Appendix 1) that he classified into four categories. The first category (two models) he labelled pseudo-evaluations because the approaches promoted invalid or incomplete findings. The second category was termed Questions and/or Methods-Oriented, (13 methods), the third, Improvement/Accountability (3 methods) and the fourth Social Agenda/Advocacy (four methods).

The first pseudo-evaluation approach, labelled Public Relations, occurs when it typically presents a program’s strengths, or an exaggerated view of them, but not its weaknesses. The second, Politically Controlled Studies. (p.15) “is illicit if the evaluation and/or client (a) withhold the full set of evaluation findings from audiences who have express, legitimate and legal rights to see the findings; (b) abrogate their prior agreement to fully disclose the evaluation findings; or (c) bias the evaluation message by releasing only part of the findings”. Typically the client or commissioner of such evaluations is politically motivated.

Questions Oriented approaches included objectives based evaluation and accountability studies that typically address specified questions rather than the merit or worth of a program. Objectives based approaches may also examine a program’s logic including delivery processes and objectives. The Methods-Oriented approaches emphasise technical quality. Examples are experiments, standardized tests, and a theory of a program, cost-analysis procedure case study procedures or management information systems. Sometimes a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches is used. Stufflebeam criticises these approaches for being too narrow but suggests that they can be strengthened by judging program objectives against the intended beneficiaries’ assessed needs, searching for side effects, and studying the process as well as the outcomes.

Improvement/Accountability approaches are questions-orientated approaches that restrict the inquiry to examination of outcomes from an independent external perspective. A main question is whether a funding organization charged with delivering and improving services is carrying out its assignments and achieving all it should, given the resources. Accountability studies are concerned with such things as value added, performance, payment for results, accreditation, monitoring and compliance. Their purpose is to assist decision makers and to inform stakeholders.

The evaluation model adopted by the Victorian Government could fit within this category. It is a self-evaluation model that is directed towards assessing whole of government and individual programs on their capability, competence and implementation.

Social Agenda/Advocacy approaches are directed at making a difference in society through program evaluation that empowers the disadvantaged in society. They include approaches advocated by Guba (1978), House and Howe (1998) Karlsson (1998) Patton (1997) and others. Described by Stufflebeam (p.62) “The approaches favour a constructivist orientation and the use of qualitative methods. For the most part, they eschew the possibility of finding right or best answers and reflect the philosophy of postmodernism, with its attendant stress on cultural pluralism, moral relativity and multiple realities. They provide for democratic engagement of stakeholders in obtaining and interpreting findings”. These approaches include stakeholder involvement in client/centered/responsive approaches in which any or all of community groups, beneficiary groups and program experts may provide the questions to be addressed, the criteria for evaluation and their judgements of the program.

This approach has its advantages especially when future program improvements are dependent on the communication and willingness of participants. Its major drawbacks are the time, skill and effort required for its successful implementation.
Each of the approaches to evaluation briefly described above has its advantages and disadvantages. The selection of the appropriate approach depends to a great extent on the purpose of the evaluation, this who will use the data and how, and what information is required to meet their purpose.

Stufflebeam rated the value of each approach on each item of the four categories of the evaluation standards Utility, Feasibility, Propriety, and Accuracy, rating the scores from excellent to poor. None received a rating of excellent but those endorsed for continued use were either Very Good (68-90) or Good (50-67) (Table 1).

While we may disagree with the ways in which Stufflebeam has described the approaches, and there is a bias towards educational evaluation, nevertheless, it is a useful typology for assessing which evaluations are conducted.

All CPV evaluations have an improvement/accountability focus, that is, they seek to allow stakeholder needs to influence program priorities. Programs are planned centrally, although individual submissions from people in communities are the basis for much of the direction. For example, requests for funding for initiatives to be implemented in conjunction with Safety Week came from a variety of stakeholders. Because the requests were community based they reflected community need and also ensured that a ‘champion’ was in place to ensure its success. Similarly, all evaluations are stakeholder centered in so far as a wide range of stakeholder views are taken into account in the evaluations and these include the consumers of the services.

All have a questions/method focus where CPV identifies which questions are important and will have utilisation value. CPV demands both qualitative and quantitative data, i.e. case studies are frequently reported and cost/benefit assessments requested.

Table 1. Ratings of the Strongest Evaluation Approaches within Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Approach</th>
<th>Overall Score and Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMPROVEMENT/ACCOUNTABILITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision/accountability</td>
<td>92 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Orientation</td>
<td>81 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation</td>
<td>60 G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL AGENDA/ADVOCACY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilization-focused</td>
<td>87 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-Centered/Responsive</td>
<td>87 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative Democratic</td>
<td>83 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist</td>
<td>80 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTIONS/METHODS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>80 VG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes Monitoring/Value-added</td>
<td>72 VG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Stufflebeam (2001)

All four approaches with the exception of the social agency advocacy model where the evaluator’s role is not to be an independent actor are widely used.

Perhaps the most limited examples are of evaluations that question the underlying assumptions of the programs.
Lessons for Evaluators of Community Based Programs

The first lesson for evaluators is that there is no one specific model of evaluation that fits all crime prevention programs. CPV uses the most common and highest rated models. Requests for tenders for evaluation in most government departments specify the questions that policy planners need answering in terms of implementation of programs and achievement of outcomes. Some alternative models such as experiments and planning of data collection to meet the need to assess long-term assessment of program results are rare.

For evaluation to meet the need for both accountability and long term sustainability of crime prevention outcomes:

- Evaluations should not be “one-off” each three years because there is no basis for comparative evaluation of the value of alternatives.
- The government has a commitment to a whole-of-government approach to crime prevention. The most useful evaluations will be those that are planned and receive support from all involved.
- Monitoring and evaluation should be built into the planning phase of each program, not added on at the end.
- Social indicators to measure outcomes should be agreed upon by the stakeholders, as should be commitment to data gathering
- For cost-benefit analyses, implementation of ‘partnerships’ should include records of the contributions of the partners in cost and other resources.
- As the results of programs are often not realised until some years later, evaluations should be long term.
- The evaluation designs need to take account of milestones and steps that signify progress towards achievement of goals and objectives.
- The designs also need to be flexible so that should progress evaluations indicate a need for change, so too should the target of the evaluation change.
- Evaluations need to be both internal and external.
- The internal evaluations should focus on monitoring the key indicators and maintaining the documentation that will give substance to an external evaluation.
- External evaluations should meet the need for summative as well as formative purposes, for assessment of efficiency and effectiveness/quality.
- Evaluations should not be limited to measuring outputs or even outcomes, but examine the underlying assumptions on which programs are based.

Finally, evaluations require resources and commitment from crime prevention agencies. If the evaluation is not directed at examining the real worth of programs, if data are not available, and if stakeholders were not involved, evaluators would be well advised to consider whether their efforts are not better invested elsewhere.

Conclusion

The paper began by explaining what are crime prevention programs and some of the assumptions underlying their planning and implementation. A typology of evaluation models is used to examine how crime prevention programs are evaluated in Australia. In conclusion, the paper drew some lessons from previous experience for evaluators of community based programs.
References


Ref. AIConfMarch2003Difficulties of Evaluation
## Appendix 1. Evaluation Models, Approach and Focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Model</th>
<th>Evaluation approach</th>
<th>Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudoevaluations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Public Relations-inspired studies</td>
<td>Advertises a program’s strengths, ignores the weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Politically controlled Studies</td>
<td>Non-disclosure of results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions- and Method-oriented Evaluation Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Objectives-Based Studies</td>
<td>Determines whether a program’s objectives have been achieved. Usually internal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Accountability, Particularly Payment by Results Studies</td>
<td>Focus on questions about outcomes. Usually external. Often use an auditing approach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Objective Testing Programs</td>
<td>Tests of student achievements</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Outcome evaluation as Value-added Assessment</td>
<td>Sophisticated analysis to compares the system components and their contribution to student achievement</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Performance Testing</td>
<td>Assessment of student performance on life-skills tasks and the content of courses</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Experimental studies</td>
<td>Draws conclusions based on random assignment to experimental and control groups</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Management Information systems</td>
<td>Provides program managers with program information</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Cost-benefit Analysis</td>
<td>Provides costs and benefits: Inputs/outputs Costs/program objectives Positive/negative Short and long term</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Clarification Hearing</td>
<td>Judicial adversarial approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Case study evaluations</td>
<td>In-depth description analysis and synthesis of a particular program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Criticism and Connoisseurship</td>
<td>Expert evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Program Theory-Based Evaluation</td>
<td>Identifies the program assumptions in order to decide what questions, indicators, and linkages should be used to evaluate a program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Mixed Method studies</td>
<td>Focus on using both quantitative and qualitative methods</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improvement/Accountability-oriented Evaluation Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Decision/Accountability</td>
<td>Emphasises that an evaluation should be used proactively to improve a program as well as retroactively to judge its worth in terms of delivering cost-effective services</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Consumer- oriented Studies</td>
<td>Regards consumer welfare as a program’s primary justification: aims to determine which alternative is the best choice in terms of costs, consumer needs, values of society, and evidence of both positive and negative outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Accreditation/Certification Approach</td>
<td>Used for professional accreditation of courses, institutions, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social/Agenda/Advocacy Approaches</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Client-Centered Studies</td>
<td>Evaluator works with and for the support of a client group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Constructivist evaluation</td>
<td>Employs a subjectivist epistemology to emancipate and empower those involved or affected disenfranchised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Deliberative Democratic evaluation</td>
<td>Contributes to democratisation through democratic participation, dialogue and deliberation to assess a program’s worth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Utilization focussed</td>
<td>Aims to ensure that an evaluation makes an impact by being useful to decision makers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Stufflebeam (2001)