

Focused deterrence

Focused deterrence for drug crimes.

First published 19 October 2022

3 mins read

Focused deterrence strategies are also known as pulling levers approaches. They attempt to reduce offending behaviour for specific crime types by combining:

- law enforcement
- community mobilisation
- social services

Forces can use focused deterrence strategies with individuals and groups.

A key feature of the approach is combining improved access to support with strict law enforcement. Close family and community members are also involved to communicate the wider impact of the behaviour to the offender.

Effectiveness of focused deterrence strategies

Systematic review evidence has found an overall reduction in crime through the use of focused deterrence strategies (Braga, 2019).

The greatest impact of these strategies has been when used with gangs. They have also worked for open drug market intervention.

The authors identified that drug market intervention programmes are most likely to suffer implementation problems, which reduce their effectiveness.

Implementation of focused deterrence

Successful implementation of focused deterrence approaches involves:

- multi-agency working involving a range of partners – these include law enforcement, social services and community-based practitioners
- analytical work to identify key offenders, groups and behaviour patterns

- developing a response to offenders that uses a variety of interventions – both access to services and support, and criminal justice processes
- directly and repeatedly communicating with offenders to make them understand why they are receiving this special attention

Example of relevant practice

Project Adder (addiction, diversion, disruption, enforcement and recovery)

This initiative is sponsored by the Home Office and Department of Health. It aims to deliver reductions in the:

- rate of drug deaths
- drug-related offending
- prevalence of drug use

An independent evaluation is due in 2023.

The programme seeks to:

- ensure more people get effective treatment
- ensure more people get enhanced treatment and recovery provision (including housing and employment support)
- improve communication between treatment providers and courts, prisons and hospitals

Alongside the support there is coordinated law enforcement activity to:

- disrupt high-harm criminals and networks
- expanded diversionary programmes (such as out of court disposal orders), using the criminal justice system to divert people away from offending

This initiative aims to assist police to target drug dealers. It also aims to assist local councils and health services to help people with addictions.

Lessons learnt

Lessons learnt from project ADDER were as follows.

Working relationships

Close working relationships between partners were important, as was ensuring that the right organisations were involved from the start of the project.

Close working relationships between partners could also be encouraged by:

- the provision of joint training
- co-location of functions
- alignment of goals and governance structures.

The involvement of individuals or groups with lived experience was also important to ensure effective communication with service users. This also reduced social stigma which could prevent individuals engaging.

Project resourcing

When setting up local projects, organisations must understand the geography and the needs of service users. They must ensure that resources to deliver projects are in place prior to go-live. Some projects experienced issues with recruitment of specialist staff which hampered their ability to deliver the intervention effectively.

Data-sharing

Other enablers that assisted with the effective functioning of project ADDER partnerships included robust data-sharing agreements between agencies, having dedicated long-term funding which should be pooled to allow partners easy access, and integrated commissioning processes.

Delivery of Project ADDER

In terms of the delivery of Project ADDER, a number of different lessons have been identified.

- For enforcement-based interventions, working closely with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was shown to be essential in ensuring that charging decisions were obtained quickly. Arrest outcomes could also be improved by joined up working with the CPS prior to arrest, especially when cases involved forensic evidence. With regard to police resources, overtime-led models proved to be problematic, leading to burnout and a subsequent lack of applicants for the additional

work. Also, there were concerns that newly trained officers may not have the requisite skills to work in this specialist area.

- For interventions relating to police diversion, strong relationships between drugs workers and custody have proved to be useful. Funds to embed drug workers into custody were beneficial, especially if the drug workers have relevant lived experience and could engage with service users. It is important that drug workers are available at times when custody is typically busy in terms of drug treatment referrals. For the courts, there is scope to make greater use of treatment-based requirements as part of an order when an individual is sentenced.
- Regarding Project ADDER and the impact on prisons and probation, there needs to be processes available to allow quick access to service users, without lengthy delays whilst awaiting security clearance. Access to Project ADDER services needs to commence upon entry into prison, and particular provisions must be in place upon release after long prison sentences or if an individual is released on a Friday. Finally, continuity of care for remand prisoners needs to be improved, given that they are not supported in the same way by probation officers as sentenced prisoners and are often released at short notice.
- Drug treatment forms a significant element of the Project ADDER approach and opioid substitution therapy such as buprenorphine has proved to be effective in assisting recovery in service users. Other products and processes that have been shown to be useful are support for families of service users, including bereavement support in cases involving death due to drug use, addressing physical and mental health needs, street triage involving specialist support to officers, and the provision of Naloxone to target groups. In addition to these, a greater emphasis on residential treatment is also seen to be a beneficial step.

Tags

Crime reduction Evidence-based policing