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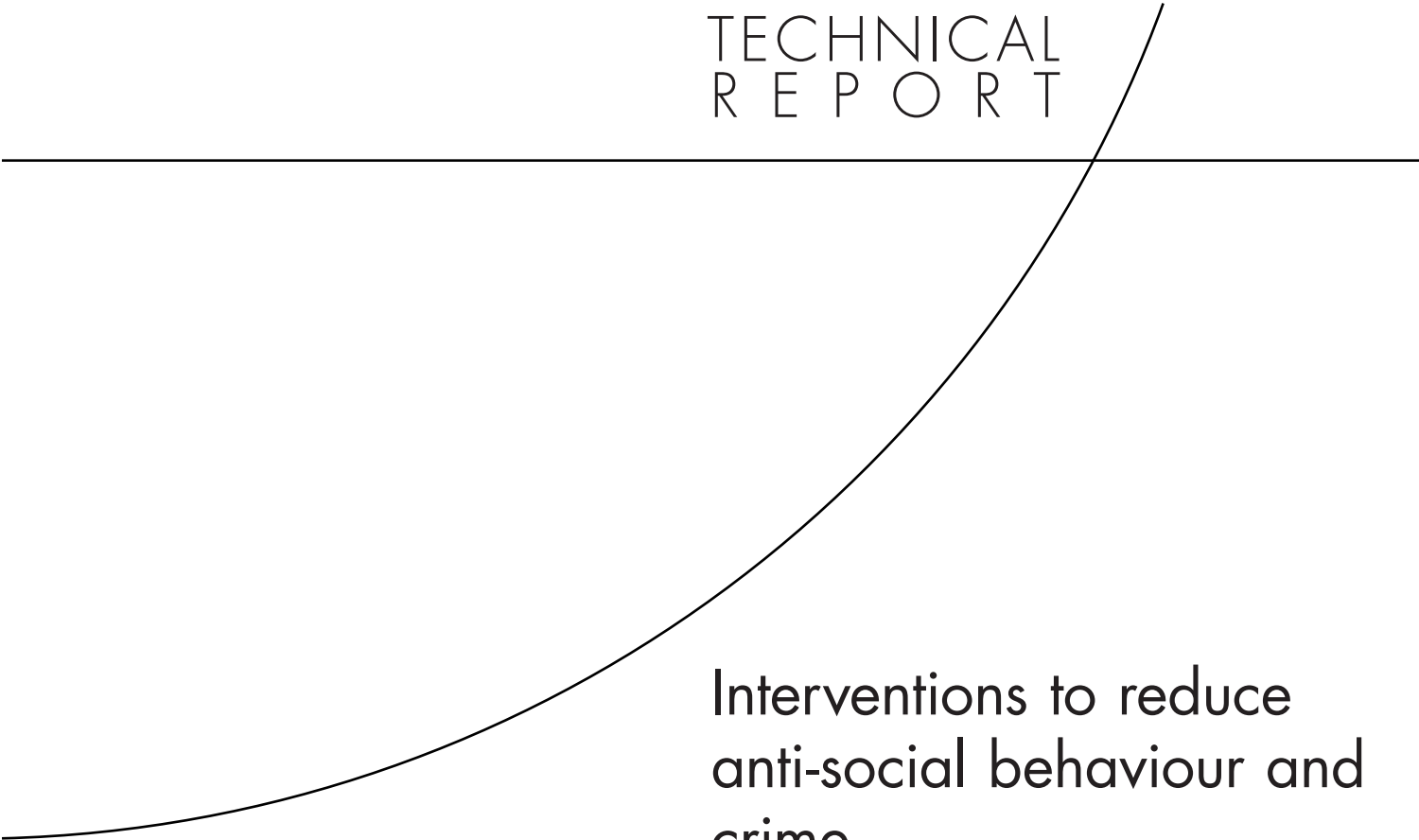
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# Interventions to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime

A review of effectiveness and costs

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Prepared for the National Audit Office

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# Executive Summary

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Anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a costly and increasingly key topic of public concern in the UK. In response to this problem, the UK Government is introducing new legal instruments and policy initiatives to tackle ASB. These initiatives range from Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to cognitive behavioural programmes and parenting skills training for at-risk families. Despite growing interest in these measures, there is a paucity of rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness. Even more limited data exist on the cost-benefit implications of programmes. This review focuses on available UK and US literature on the effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis of interventions, and includes data from other countries where available. The following are the key findings from this review.

## **There is an evaluation gap.**

The relative absence of rigorous programme evaluations in Europe means that there is insufficient data to allow robust analysis of the effectiveness of many interventions to reduce anti-social behaviour. However, there are some interesting evaluation initiatives currently underway in the Netherlands, such as the construction of cost-benefit models and careful tracking of new programmes. The UK is also increasingly attempting to assess and track the outcomes of interventions and programmes to reduce ASB and crime. This is important because evaluation of interventions allows comparison of programmes, and thus informed decision-making about the design and implementation of further programmes.

## **Early interventions can work, including those aimed at increasing participation in education.**

There are some parenting training and early childhood interventions (including prenatal support) that have been rigorously evaluated and turn out to be some of the most effective forms of intervention for reducing crime in target populations. The positive effects on crime reduction found in evaluations of such programmes have been shown to persist through to adulthood (Karoły *et al*, 2005). Educational incentives such as educational maintenance allowances (EMAs) and graduation incentives may effectively reduce crime in at-risk populations.

## **Preventing recidivism can work.**

There is insufficient information gathered from evaluations and comparisons to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs). However, there are more rigorously evaluated interventions – such as multi-systemic therapy and cognitive behavioural programmes – that have been shown to reduce recidivism. The data on the effectiveness of punitive

measures is ambiguous at best, but many developmental or rehabilitative programmes show positive results. These include cognitive behavioural programmes, interpersonal skills training and counselling, and family-based interventions.

### **Restorative justice merits further evaluation.**

Restorative justice interventions bring offenders into contact with the consequences of their actions, in the form of meeting with the victims of crime or being made aware of the extent of damage to property. Given the difficulties offenders may have with impulse-control and with taking account of the impact of their behaviour (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2000), it may prove effective to show individuals the harm they have caused, and, as in some cases of restorative justice programmes, to require them to compensate for that harm by repairing damage or by engaging in community service. Thus, restorative justice is a form of intervention that merits further evaluation. Apart from possible benefits for offenders, restorative justice programmes may be linked with improved outcomes for victims by giving them a sense of control in the process, and may thereby reduce psychological ramifications associated with being a victim of crime (New Zealand Youth Justice).

### **Situational interventions can be an effective means of reducing offending.**

Situational interventions are designed to reduce the opportunity to offend in a given context. Implementing such interventions is an acknowledgement of the complex confluence of factors determining the incidence of crime, including the offender's proclivity, the vulnerability of victims and the situational variables that make criminal activity more likely or act as deterrents. Encouraging prosocial behaviour, for example by keeping neighbourhoods clean and free of litter, and improving other features of the context such as street lighting can effectively reduce the incidence of crime and ASB.

### **ASB and crime are expensive.**

There are a range of direct costs, such as property damage, associated with ASB and crime. These are relatively straightforward to quantify. There are also significant wider, indirect costs to the community, to victims, to local businesses, etc. that are less readily quantifiable. However, measures of direct and indirect costs of ASB and crime are high. Aggregate data suggest that the cost of vandalism alone is in excess of one billion pounds annually in the UK, and that the savings by diverting an individual from future involvement in ASB and crime in the USA ranges from 1.7 to 2.3 million dollars. These significant costs and potential savings highlight the importance of implementing and evaluating interventions to prevent or reduce offending.

### **Cost-benefit matters when choosing between intervention options to optimise the allocation of funds.**

Cost-benefit ratios provide information about the unit of money saved, or the benefit, for a given unit of money invested by implementing an intervention. This ratio provides a useful 'at-a-glance' understanding of what may be the most efficient use of resources when choosing between ASB and crime-reduction interventions. In order to make these calculations data are needed about the differential effectiveness of programmes, the cost of those programmes, and the benefits, or money saved, by reducing or preventing offending. Comparing well evaluated, effective interventions, produces a range of cost-benefit ratios,

with the lowest (in the meta-analyses covered in this report) providing a benefit of only 1.26 pounds for every pound spent and the highest providing a return of 17.07. However, cost benefit is not the whole story. There may be benefits associated with certain 'lower-yield' interventions that are more difficult to quantify or are in any case deemed worthy of pursuing. For example, the cost-benefit ratio of 1.26 pertains to Nurse-Family Partnerships lower-risk sample. Implementing the programme has a much lower yield with a lower-risk sample than it does with a higher-risk sample. This may be due to the fact that in the lower-risk sample fewer of the children would actually have gone on to become offenders. While the higher-risk sample therefore has a higher cost-benefit ratio, policy makers may nonetheless decide that it is worth intervening for the benefit of those few children who would have gone on to become offenders. It is also possible that certain high-yield programmes may be difficult or less desirable to implement, for example because of political sensitivity or high start-up costs.