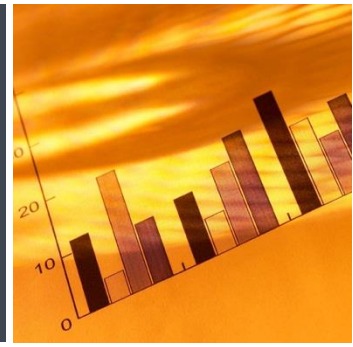


Crime Prevention Programs in Canada: Examining Key Implementation Elements for Indigenous Populations



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Background

This research study sought to examine the specific implementation issues for crime prevention programs aiming to serve Indigenous populations. In Canada, the need for culturally relevant and context specific programming is well documented. Indigenous peoples and communities have unique factors that may impact program engagement, responsiveness, and success. Examining the implementation process and its key elements for these specific initiatives can assist crime prevention practitioners and policy makers in their understanding of common challenges associated with implementing programs for Indigenous populations, provide practical information about how they may be addressed and mitigated, and offer strategies for improving implementation in the future.

The application of implementation science in criminal justice settings is an emerging field, and offers an opportunity to provide insights to adapt evidence-based practices in the field and to improve the quality and effectiveness of initiatives. The implementation of a crime prevention program is multifaceted, and requires a clear understanding of the elements that interconnect, and their impact on this process.

Through a review of the literature, each part of the implementation process and the unique implications and considerations for Indigenous peoples were examined, highlighting the importance of recognizing historical experiences and the impacts of crime. Additionally, it demonstrated how culture, community, and traditional knowledge contribute to the development of effective crime prevention programs. Finally, it highlighted how process evaluation can be used as a tool to better understand program implementation, and identify strategies to promote program success.

The current research study examined implementation information from a subset of crime prevention projects with a completed evaluation funded under the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS).

Methodology

This research study used an exploratory research design, whereby data gathered from evaluation reports and related documents were examined and analyzed in detail. Modeled after Currie & Roberts' (2015) approach to examining program implementation, the sample included 49 crime prevention projects focused on Indigenous populations funded through the NCPS and that were completed between 2008 and 2019. Using a repository coding guide and a validated data collection form, data was collected retrospectively from process evaluation reports. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative information and thematic analysis for qualitative information. Methodological limitations included the variety of evaluation designs employed across projects and a lack of consistency in the reporting of implementation related information (e.g., dosage guidelines, use of fidelity tools).

Findings

The 49 projects were implemented in a variety of often small and remote Indigenous communities across Canada. The majority were delivered to youth aged 12-17 (63%). Of these participants, many had mental health, drug-alcohol issues, and were at risk of offending or reoffending (67%). The projects sought to address a variety of crime issues (e.g., violence-related, property crime) as well as other participant focused issues (e.g., challenges with basic needs, mental health). The projects employed different program models, many considered promising or innovative, and there were 10 main service elements identified. Mentoring, life skills training, and counseling services and other forms of therapy, were the activities most often delivered (71%).

Approximately half of the projects described one or more challenges related to the recruitment (49%) and retention (55%) of participants in program activities. Challenges included: difficulties engaging high-risk youth and securing family commitment; lack of trust in the program and/or of service providers; and competition with other extra-curricular commitments.



With respect to project fidelity, approximately one third of the projects (39%) made some adaptations from the pre-established program model, and in the case of three projects many adaptations were made. Adaptations reflected the needs of individual projects and were highly variable. The most common adaptations involved dropping or reducing some elements of the program.

A majority of the projects (80%) reported having at least one partner that contributed to program implementation. Community organizations, schools, and Indigenous organizations comprised the main partners involved with each project, with just over half (61%) having partnerships with Indigenous organizations. The main contributions made by the latter included: developing cultural programming and adaptations including Elder involvement; assistance with program planning and design as well as participation on advisory committees; and the provision of volunteers, facility space, equipment, and transportation for participants.

Implementation challenges were identified in most projects (92%), often due to factors relating to community readiness and mobilization. Challenges frequently included: program accessibility attributed to minimal transportation, poor weather conditions and securing a safe project location; lack of funding; and management and administrative issues. Approximately half of the projects (53%) employed implementation strategies to overcome challenges, including: building strong relationships through sustained communication and networking; providing additional training to staff and making efforts to hire more staff; offering diverse activities that were appropriate and interesting to youth; incorporating cultural teachings in materials and cultural activities/events where applicable; flexible program delivery to adapt to life challenges; and providing transportation, child care, and meals.

Lessons learned for project implementation identified the need for flexibility to adapt the program model as required; for the selected program to consider the community's characteristics (e.g., context, historical background); and for geographically large communities, transportation is a challenge and is required for program activities. Lastly, in isolated or remote communities, the program organization needs stability (i.e., a track record and history in the community); experience with the target group and partners; and the ability to implement new and promising programs.

Implications

- This research study highlighted the importance of incorporating cultural elements, working with

different community members, and recognizing the diverse social, political, and geographic differences that exist for Indigenous populations in project implementation.

- To build the Canadian knowledge base on evidence-based crime prevention programs and efficient and effective implementation strategies, the use of robust process and impact evaluations together with strong monitoring systems should be promoted to encourage the proper implementation of crime prevention programs. This would ensure that evidence-based programs are carried out with fidelity to their design and incorporate elements that are critical to their success.
- While this research study aimed to contribute to the body of literature on implementation science, specifically, the implementation of crime prevention programs aimed at serving Indigenous populations, further exploration and analysis is still needed in the area to examine the implementation of initiatives involving different populations and contexts. This would further contribute to the overall body of empirical knowledge on generalizable and unique aspects of implementation in the crime prevention domain.

Sources

Cortés-Kaplan, H. & Dunbar, L. (2021). *Crime Prevention Programs in Canada: Examining Key Implementation Elements for Indigenous Populations*. Research Report 2021-R001. Ottawa, ON: Public Safety Canada.

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