

Enhancing evidence-based policy: Principles and Practice from a Case Study of Australian Firearms Legislation

McPhedran, S., & Baker, J. (2008). *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*. 20(2).

Executive Summary

Rationale

- Evidence-based policy should be built on rigorous research.
- The current study examined ways to enhance policy through improved research quality.
- Key research principles and scientific concepts were explained using the example of Australian firearms legislation research.
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Achieving Best Practice

- Each piece of research has different strengths and weaknesses.
- Despite their different methods and limitations, the Australian firearms research studies produce consistent results.
- Collectively, the research demonstrates that the legislative reforms did not impact on firearm homicide, and that firearm and non-firearm suicides may have been influenced by broader social changes.
- In situations where the accumulated studies do not show this level of consistency, it is important to adopt best practice guidelines.
- These guidelines include:
 1. Being aware of the shortcomings of different types of statistical analyses.
 2. Selecting methods that fit the data well.
 3. Treating knowledge as a cumulative process.

Conclusions

- It is necessary to apply caution when interpreting statistical outcomes and the conclusions based upon those results, even if method selection is carefully considered.
- Applying the basic principles and concepts discussed in this study can enhance the quality of research and subsequent policy