



## Using Focussed Deterrence to Reduce Serious Public Violence

### What is Focussed Deterrence?

Focussed deterrence strategies attempt to reduce offending for specific crime types by directly communicating with at risk offenders the consequences of their behaviour. Offenders tend to underestimate the risk of getting caught and this approach tells them directly they are 'on the radar' of police and they are not anonymously committing crime. A worldwide systematic review of focussed deterrence operations conducted by the Campbell Collaboration showed that it has moderate effects in reducing crime (see below).

### What was Operation Capesso?

Operation Capesso was a focussed deterrence operation targeting offenders who engaged in serious public violence in Southern Metro Melbourne. Detectives and Youth Specialist Officers (uniform) across 13 units conducted unannounced home visits where they engaged with the individuals and where possible, with their families. During the home visits, the officers offered the individuals a candid assessment of their risk of future offending and likelihood of apprehension. Officers provided those visited with a letter which explained the message in clear terms. Officers also offered support referral services across 12 pathways if needed. Visits were conducted in a respectful but clear manner. The material and engagement protocols were designed to nudge the individuals toward law-abiding pathway using supportive and non-confrontational language. Where possible, officers engaged parents and partners when delivering the message to active support and social control around offenders. Officers recorded the outcome of every visit on a single page return to track implementation.

### What was the outcome?

A cohort of 1000 offenders was identified as being at risk, having multiple involvements in serious violent incidents in the preceding 3 years. In order to evaluate the operation, the cohort was randomly allocated into 2 groups of approx. 500, with the treatment group to receive the visits and a control for comparison purposes. **An evaluation tracking the subjects 500 days post implementation, showed a statistically significant reduction in repeat offending (-38%) in the group that received the visits.** Findings also showed that for every 100 persons visited, offenders committed 16 fewer crimes compared to the control group. Overall, 80% of the visits were graded by officers as respectful encounters. Qualitative insights showed that officers were surprised at the extent to which individuals engaged with the police and that it was often helpful if family members / partners were involved. Over 90% of persons spoken to accepted the nudge letter that was offered by officers.

This work demonstrates the potential benefits of proactively engaging specific offending cohorts, not limited to violent offenders, and the potential value of focussed deterrence in the policing context.

### Further links:

Australian Institute of Criminology: [Operation Capesso – ACVPA 2023 gold award winner - YouTube](#)

Podcast: [David Kennedy: 'Don't Shoot:' A Journey to End Gang Violence: NPR](#)

Podcast: [Reducing Crime episode #64 \(Dave Cowan\)](#) (also available on Apple and Spotify and other providers)

Systematic Review Focussed Deterrence: [0110 Braga Focused deterrence PLS EN.pdf \(campbellcollaboration.org\)](#)

Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology: ["I heard it through the grapevine": A Randomized Controlled Trial on the Direct and Vicarious Effects of Preventative Specific Deterrence Initiatives in Criminal Networks \(northwestern.edu\)](#)