

# Preventing Gang-Related Crime among Children and Young Adults: Insights from International Research

# Research Questions

1. What interventions prevent individuals from joining criminal gangs?
2. What interventions reduce gang-related crime?
3. What components are frequent in interventions against gang-related crime?
4. What ethical aspects and values are relevant when using interventions?



**P** Children and young adults (0 – 29)

**I** Psycho-social interventions

**C** Any control alternative

**O** Crime or Gang membership

**Design** RCT, NRSI, CITS

**Context** Studies from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand

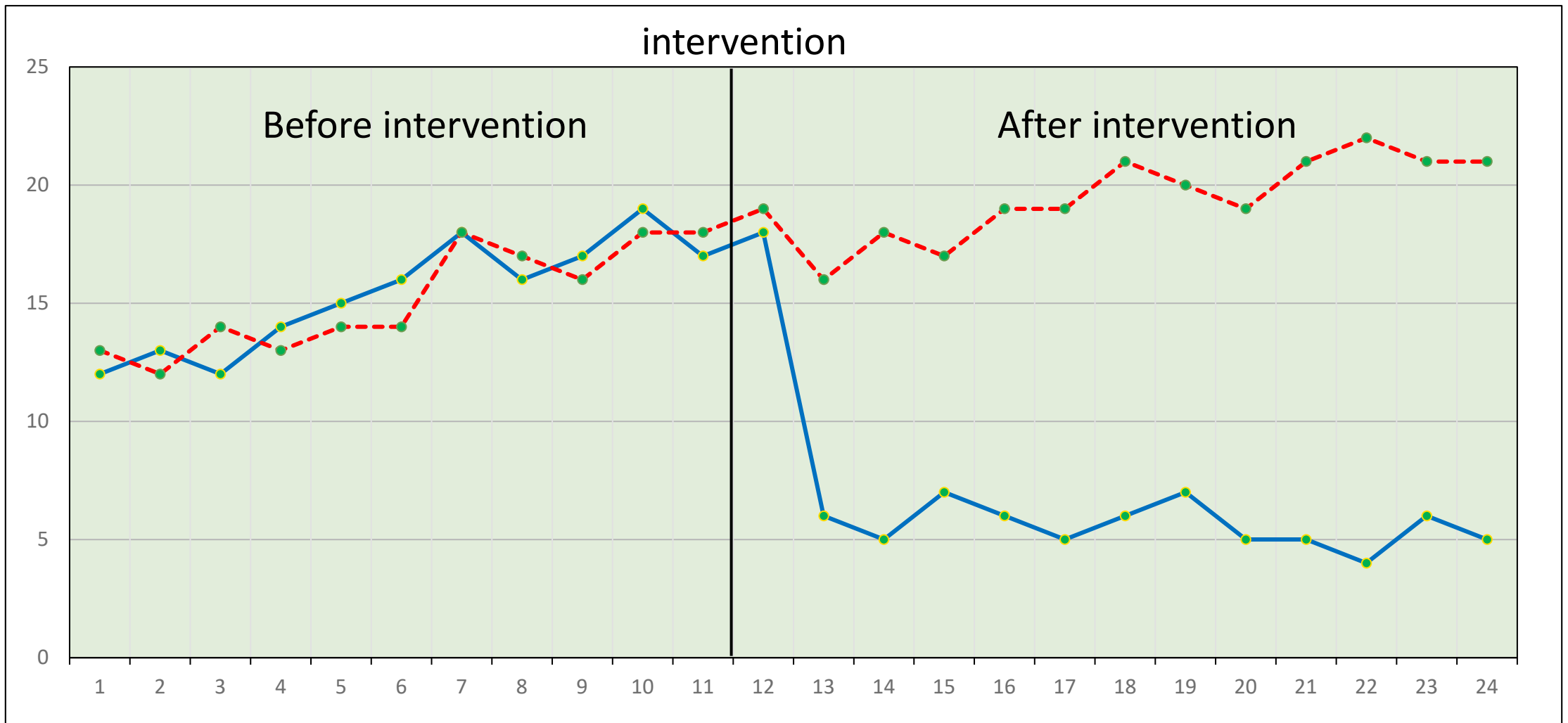
**Search** 2000 – 2023 April

**Exclusions:**

- mafia-style groups, clan-related groups, terrorist groups and outlaw motorcycle gangs
- Interventions that do not include Psycho-social interventions
- "Third world "



# Interrupted time series (example)



## Literature search

- Structured literature search in 7 international databases
- Only peer-review journals
- 18 477 abstracts
- Identified as gang intervention or  
Typical gang related outcomes  
(e.g., Firearm violence)

## Included studies

42 studies

33 branded interventions on universal, selective or indicated prevention

USA: 39

Canada: 2

Scotland: 1

No Nordic trials



# Synthesis without meta-analyses (SWiM)

## Universal prevention

- School-based interventions for middle school students (N = 8 808):
  - Can prevent gang membership (incl. carrying firearms)
  - Follow-up 1-6 years
  - 24-39% lower risk
  - Of the 3 interventions, Communities That Care is used in two municipalities in Sweden

## Selective prevention

- Family-based treatment of antisocial youth (N = 264):
  - It is not possible to assess the effect
  - Short follow-up, 6 months
  - Used on a small scale in Sweden (Functional family therapy and Brief strategic family therapy)

# Indicated prevention - Meta-analysis

## Focused deterrence

- reduces gun violence by 26% after an average of 36 months
- in practice Sweden ("Sluta skjut")

## Interventions against open drug markets

- can reduce drug crime by 35% after 18 months
- the effect on firearm violence cannot be assessed after 18 months

## Psychosocial interventions during probation

- can reduce recidivism by 44% after 12 months (n = 1,289)

## Mediation between gangs

- The effect on gun violence cannot be assessed after 24 months

## Key features of focused deterrence strategies (Kennedy 2006)

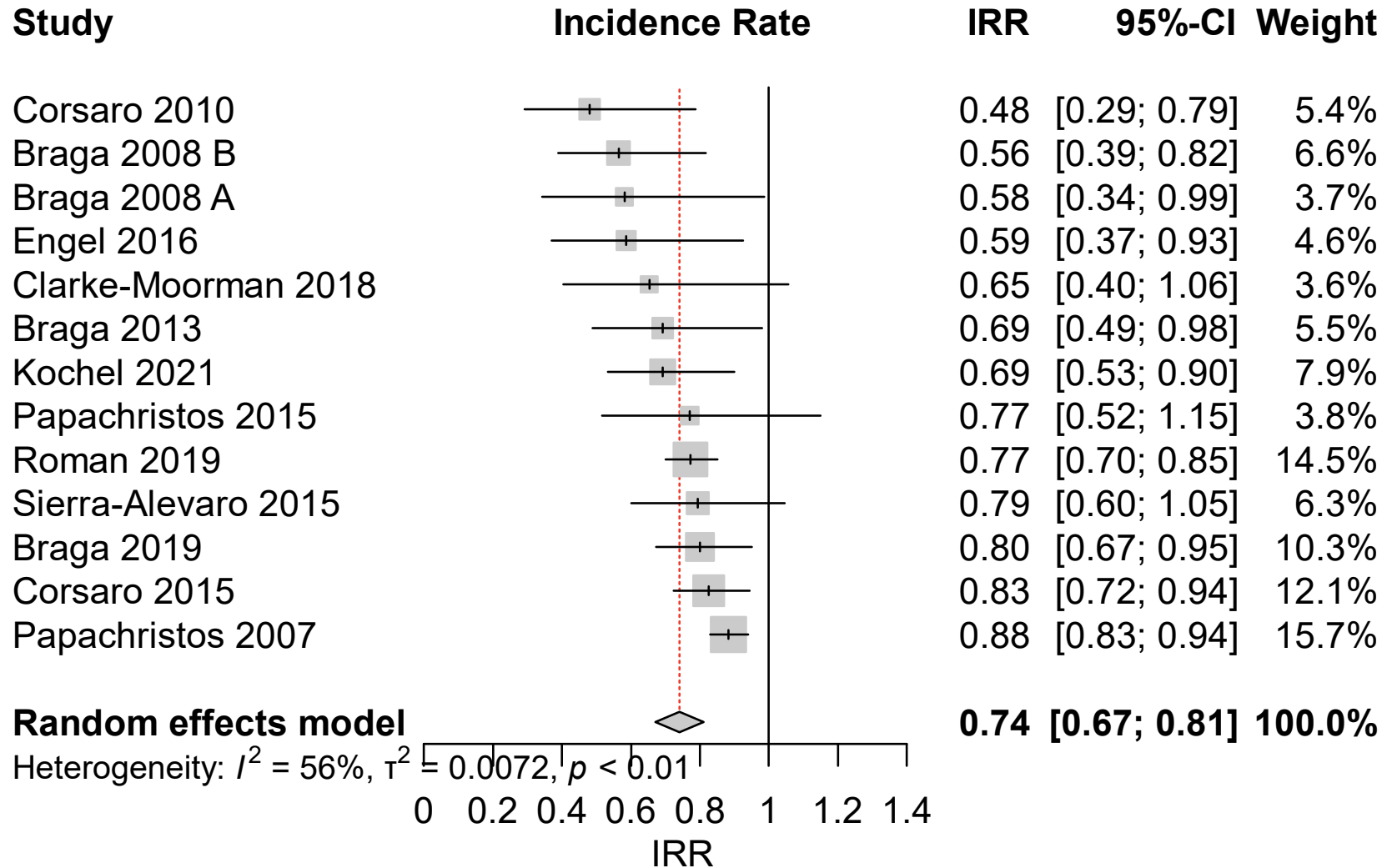
1. Selecting a particular crime problem (e.g., youth homicide or street drug dealing).
2. Forming an interagency enforcement group (incl., police, social services & others)
3. Conducting research to identify key offenders or groups of offenders
4. Informing the targeted criminals of the increased enforcement and sanctions that will follow, and what they can do to avoid increased attention (“call-in”)
5. Matching enforcement actions with efforts to direct social services and the moral voices of communities

This is NOT Scared straight





## Focused deterrence (13 studies)



# Research questions 3 and 4

## Components in indicated interventions

- Collaboration occurred in all 34 studies
- 33 out of 34 offered support from social services
- Don't focus on brands but on components - 10 studies with different names all corresponded to focused deterrence

## Ethics

- Interventions with unclear effects and possible risks (e.g., reduced trust in social functions; stigmatization), needs to be evaluated.
- Interventions for children and young people involve a complex ethical situation where the guardian's right to decide needs to be weighed against the child's best interests, the child's right to decide over himself and the child's ability to make rational decisions.



# Transferability from U.S. to the Nordic countries

## Pros

- Nothing is unequivocal
  - Collaboration
  - Social services
- Example of initial assumption that have been falsified
  - Individual placement and supervision system (Brinchmann et al, 2020)

## Cons

- Significant differences in
  - Crime level
  - Policing
  - Judicial system
  - Social welfare

**Need for Nordic effectiveness trials**