

Evidence synthesis meets Criminal Justice

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Evidence synthesis is a science that emerged in the 1990s, in response to the fast-growing array, or disarray, of research findings across many fields of science. With similar studies varying in terms of quality, methods and, as it might appear, conclusions; and results spread over numerous journals and reports; one could feel confused rather than better-informed by the divergent results. Hence, the time has come to take stock of the knowledge base and so evidence synthetic techniques evolved: combining the multiple sources of evidence. Meta-analyses represent the statistical aspect of these systematic reviews, aggregating and analysing the quantitative results as a whole.

The field of criminal justice research presents largely uncharted ground for statisticians. This paper tells of a success, and then a failure story of meta-analysis in this field. We present firstly our success: a meta-analysis of studies investigating the risk of drug-related death early after release from prison; and then move on to discuss the issues we encountered when trying to do the same with randomised studies of drug treatment courts.