

Evidence Standards

Criminal Justice

Why the design of a study decides how much weight its finding can carry.

Study design, and what each design can and cannot rule out.

Design	What it controls for	Confidence
Randomised trial	Selection into treatment	Highest, if well delivered
Matched comparison	Observed differences only	Moderate
Before and after	Almost nothing else	Low on its own
Correlational	Little or nothing	Weak for causal claims
Systematic review	Pools across studies	Depends what it pools

Educational reference. The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale formalises this ranking and is widely used in crime policy reviews.