

What is the effect of reduced street lighting on crime and road traffic injuries at night? A mixed-methods study

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Plain English summary

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What was the question?

Some local authorities in England and Wales have reduced the provision of street lighting at night. Common methods of doing this include turning lights off at 12 a.m. (midnight) and dimming lights. This saves money and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The public and the media, however, have raised safety concerns.

What did we do?

We analysed data from 62 local authorities to see whether road traffic casualties or crime increase when street lighting is reduced. We also investigated opinions on the effect of reduced street lighting on health and well-being. We interviewed residents, workers, community groups and the general public in eight local authorities and sent questionnaires to 1000 households.

What did we find?

We found no evidence that reduced street lighting at night increases road casualties or crime. The public were most concerned about personal security, road safety, fear of crime, ability to see the night sky and quality of sleep. Some residents in urban areas said that street lights show that a local authority cares about their welfare. Households reported feeling less safe when walking alone at night in streets where the lights switch off at midnight.

What does this mean?

The current evidence suggests that local authorities can safely reduce street lighting at night without increasing road casualties or crime. Local authorities should consider public concerns when they decide where, and when, to reduce lighting at night.

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