

# What is crime prevention



There are many definitions of crime as it is hard to find a single definition which everyone would agree upon. Feldman (1993) defines crime as ' anything forbidden or punishable by the criminal justice system.

' Therefore crime prevention can be defined as ' any activity intended to reduce the frequency of events defined as crimes by the criminal law. '

(Sanderson, 1993. ) Another definition of crime prevention is the process of ' predicting an outcome and intervening in that process to change the predicted outcome. ' (Walklate, 1996. There are many methods of crime prevention, these methods are categorized in three ways, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary.

Primary prevention is concerned with reducing the opportunities to offend. Primary prevention consists of three theories these include the rational choice theory, the routine activities theory and the lifestyle theory. The rational choice theory is a neoclassical approach. The theory began on the idea that offenders commit crimes in order to benefit themselves.

This approach looks at the decision made by the offender to commit a crime at a particular time. It is based on the assumption that offenders weigh up the costs of committing the crime against the benefits, and then come to a rational decision whether to commit the crime or not. Therefore in order to prevent rational choice offences we need to increase the costs of committing a crime and reduce the benefits. (Pease, 1997. ) The routine activities theory originally only covered predatory crime but since has been altered to include other types of crime.

This theory states that three key factors have to be present at the same time for a crime to be committed. These key factors are ' a motivated offender, a suitable victim, and the absence of a capable guardian. ' (Pease, 1997.

Unfortunately modern day life means that targets have increased, and an individuals routine activities means guardianship of targets has been decreased. The lifestyle theory looks at the variation in rates of victimization according to factors such as age, sex and occupation. It concludes that the risk of being a victim of crime is directly influenced by the lifestyle of the victim.

Pease, 1997. ) Situational crime prevention is very much the same as primary prevention, Poyner (1983) described it as ' attempts to prevent crime by changing the situations in which crime occurs. Clarke (1997) looked at 12 techniques of situational crime prevention which are effective. They include a wide diversity of methods including steering column locks, CCTV, vehicle licensing and drinking age laws. However it is important to realize that not all methods of crime prevention prove to be successful.

Secondary prevention involves changing peoples behaviour, aiming to prevent people embarking on a criminal career by targeting those who are at risk of becoming an offender, or by working with all people who are seen as potential offenders. This method is usually left to the local authority, social workers and youth services etc. Pease, 1997. ) Tertiary prevention deals with the treatment of actual offenders in order to prevent them from re-offending. Tertiary prevention is mostly in the form of the prison service and national probation services.

The problem with this method is it is hard to predict which offenders will continue will their criminal careers. Another major problem is that the method relies on successful prosecution of offenders. Since only a small minority of offenders are detected and prosecuted, this method is not very effective on reducing the crime rate. (Pease, 1997. ) Even when crime prevention methods are successful there is still the problem of isplacement.

Displacement is when the offender is prevented from offending and so moves to committing the crime at other times or in different ways.

Criminologists have discovered four types of displacement these are: temporal displacement where the offence is committed at a different time, spatial displacement where the offence is committed in another area, tactical displacement where a different method is used for committing an offence, and functional displacement which means committing a different offence from that which was originally intended. (Hughes 1998). Recent emphasis on crime prevention can be the result of many factors. Persuasion campaigns in the media aimed at potential victims and targets have pushed crime prevention more into the public eye. However these campaigns are not always effective.

A study by Brickman (1975) looked at the use of a media campaign to encourage bystander intervention in crimes. He found that the campaigns had hardly any effect upon whether the public intervened or not. (Feldman, 1993. ) Interest in crime prevention began to grow the late 1970's across many different groups of people including the general public, politicians and researchers.

During this time there was a huge demand for products and services to reduce crime. (Hughes, 1998. As the idea of crime prevention became more and more popular the general public decided to protect themselves and their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood watch schemes were set up with the first being established in the UK in 1982.

(Walklate, 1996. ) The schemes became successful and by 1994 there were over 155, 000 schemes. These schemes made the public more aware of crime and so they noticed it more, and more crimes were reported. This meant that since these neighbourhood watch schemes have been introduced the rate of reported crime has increased.

(Rosenbaum, 1988. A multi-agency strategy was also introduced around the same time as neighbourhood watch schemes. This type of strategy encourages the community to get involved in crime prevention by teaming up with the various agencies that work in the area. These agencies would be those that are in some way linked to factors such as education, recreation and housing. The purpose of the strategy is so that the community and agencies work together instead of working at cross purposes, and causing problems for the future. (Walklate, 1996.

In the 1980's a new idea was introduced to the police in order to reinforce primary crime prevention. This idea was called problem-oriented policing (POP), its purpose was to seek the main route of the crime and analyse it in order to understand why the crime had happened. POP became a success in the UK and North America. (Pease, 1997.

) Crime prevention in Britain has always been seen as being the responsibility of the police. The British crime survey in 1982 showed that crime was four times higher than police had recorded it. (Walklate, 1996. ) And more recently Barclay, (1995) found that only 3% of government expenditure on crime and criminal justice matters was spent on crime prevention. (Pease, 1997.

This showed that that the police alone could not combat such a level of crime. Walklate (1996) stated that the responsibility for the development of crime prevention policy lies centrally within the Home Office. ' The government also has other departments which deal with crime prevention such as the Urban Aid Programme. The community needs to take a strong role in crime prevention.

This is mostly done in the form of neighbourhood watch schemes as discussed above, and also in the form of the NACRO framework. NACRO is a voluntary organization established by a crime prevention unit in 1979 and by a safe neighbourhood unit in 1980. The police, public and local councils are involved in carrying out the key issue which is community safety. The NACRO framework includes services for the victims of crime and looks at protecting the most vulnerable to crime.

(Walklate, 1996. ) Employers also need to take some sort of role in crime prevention, especially since the crime rates recorded in businesses is higher than that for households. It is important to realize that customers, staff or even the business itself can be the offender or the victim. The employers

have a legal requirement to protect their staff from crime and so must carry out the appropriate measures.

Gill, 1994. ) To conclude we can say that crime prevention falls into three categories; primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention is the most popularly used and most methods are effective. We can account for the recent emphasis on crime prevention from the media and various schemes and strategies set up by the government, the police, the public and other agencies. Responsibility for crime prevention lies within several groups of people. The main groups are the government, the police, and communities.