

Examining the study of rational choice theories criminology essay



Within the Criminal Justice field, the goal is to reduce crime by utilizing methods that may deter offenders from committing a heinous act. The aspects that are going to be explored in this manuscript will explain how Rational Choice Theory and crime prevention techniques refer to one another. Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) techniques will focus on different types of offenders, their crimes and the success rate of prevention in different levels of criminal activity. Furthermore, some case studies have been reviewed to give a comparison of preventive techniques of crime and its effects. The following research will discuss negative effects and its alarming concern for SCP techniques.

Examining the study of rational choice theories and how useful it can be in crime prevention

Academic Scholars, along with law enforcement officials review criminal activity in the event to develop methods for which crime may be prevented. Having an understanding of the theory reviewed will further explain the approach investigators take when apprehending perpetrators, interviewing witnesses, and interacting with victims. The research will explore many different views of scholars and the differences in crimes that can be committed. The theory that has been discussed is Rational Choice Theory. Rational Choice Theory is a perspective that criminality is a conscience choice that predicts that individuals choose to commit crime for the sole purpose of the benefits outweighing the cost of the crime (Schmallegger, 2006). This manuscript will provide information on the examination of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) and how the examples of the methods given have been successful.

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Literature Review

Verma (2007) wrote an article that discusses the approach of situational crime prevention and how it pertains to mass casualties. His article, with assistance of I. K. Mackenzie (1982) recommends a five stage action plan that may dissolve mass casualties before they start (to be discussed later). Verma argues that enforcement officials should work harder on strategies to better leadership skills in the event of a riot.

Vance and Trani (2008) focus on crime prevent in white collar crimes. Many individuals in our society believe that white collar crime is not as heinous an act as other crimes. The issue Vance and Trani want to address is that white collar can be a larger issue if overlooked.

Schmallegger (2006) is one of the many scholars who have developed books on criminology and its success in educating future scholars. He introduced to other scholars what situational Crime Prevention (SCP) truly means and how understanding crime better could assist in understanding the criminals. The debate that Schmallegger has with other scholars is the difficulty in which criminals are subject to become repeat offenders.

Cullen and Agnew (2006) comprised a reading text called Criminological theory: past to present, 3rd edition. It discusses the comparison made by Clarke and Cornish of classical theory and economic theory and the strong connection these theories have to rational choice theory. Furthermore, the text continues to process this choice by defining two major stages that are important to know about rational choice theory.

Ratcliffe (2006) developed a manuscript on video surveillance in public places that may deter criminal activity; in which he provided information about a closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance system. He explains what CCTV is and how it was developed to prevent crime and also how the development of this system brought unintended consequences.

A chart, established by Clarke outlined 25 techniques (Center for Problem Oriented Policing, 2010) that may be useful in the SCP theory. The chart is broken down into five categories and examines different parts of criminal activity. Clarke further breaks down the categories into subsections to explain the techniques correctly in accordance with the category.

Several other studies have been reviewed and analyzed to provide information or examples of Clarke's SCP techniques (Center for Problem Oriented Policing, 2010). The crimes that will be incorporated with this study in further depth are the security needs of passenger on public transportation (Smith, 2008), closing off opportunities for crime with alley-gating (Bowers, Johnson, and Hirschfield, 2004), and crime in libraries incorporating all five of Clarke's SCP techniques (Cromwell, Alexander, and Dotson, 2008). For the entire criteria of Clarke's 25 techniques, see Appendix A.

Discussion

There are many different ways to explain Rational Choice theory and how it is incorporated to Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). Schmallegger (2006) defined SCP as a social policy that looked to develop a greater understanding of crime and with strategies concerning the organizational and environments that make crime possible. Other academic scholars go on to state that <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-study-of-rational-choice-theories-criminology-essay/>

Rational Choice Theory is a choice process that occurs in two stages; First, the criminal will need to decide if he wants to engage in crime to satisfy his needs and second is when the decision is made to engage in criminal activity, what particular offense will he commit (Cullen, and Agnew, 2006).

However, the best or most innovative explanation was developed by Clarke with his twenty-five techniques of situational crime prevention (Vance and Trani, 2008). The techniques in the chart give examples of SCP and how each category and sub sections apply to a criminal act. The categories of the chart are divided in to five groups, which are: increase the effort. Increase the risk, reduce the rewards, reduce provocations, and remove excuses. This manuscripts main focus is to discuss the two categories that are connected to rational choice theory and situational crime prevention. The first category happens to be increasing the efforts, which has a subsection of target hardening and deflecting offenders and the second category is increasing the risks, which has a subsection of extend guardianship and strengthening formal surveillance.

Increase the Effort

The Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) subsection category of deflecting the offender is applied by creating a separation for men and women in public surroundings, which in turn does not give offenders the opportunity to create a "hot spot" for their victims (Innes, 2003). For example, most sex offenders have a tendency to victimize certain women that appear to be vulnerable or less aggressive than they are. There was a study performed on several sex offenders and the process they go through in order to hunt their

victims. The study discussed the rational choice the perpetrators make so that the outcome of the assault gives them pleasure.

The starting point of the crime is where the offenders seek to benefit themselves by their criminal behavior; that this involves the making of decisions and of choices, however rudimentary on occasion these processes might be; and that these processes exhibit a measure of rationality (Beauregard, Rossmo, and Proulx, 2007). The separation that has been made for men and women in public places are the development of men and women restrooms and changing areas in department stores. With these adjustments, crime in public still occur but committing assault in public would appear to be more difficult and offenders would have to make more of an effort to assault their victims.

Everyone in America can remember what they were doing or where they were at the time of the September 11 attacks. Since the attack, transportation in this country and around the world has experienced some form of target hardening. When a passenger steps into an airport, bus or train station, the passenger is checked almost from head to toe. This policy is more abundant in airports but in major cities, passengers on a train or bus are still checked in an attempt to prevent another major attack since 9/11.

There was an article by M. J. Smith (2008) that addressed the needs of women passengers taking public transportation. Smith goes on to address four key elements for analyzing the security need of women passenger, and they are: (1) women's reported victimization, (2) issues related to calculating the risk of being a crime victim, (3) the rationality of women's

fear of crime and disorder, and (4) the need for effective and comprehensive crime prevention measures to address those security-related issues. These concerns and policies have made transportation more equipped with metal detectors, more uniformed and plain clothes officer stationed in subways, airports, and train stations, along with additional baggage tagging and inspections.

Increase the Risks

Strengthening the observations of society may help in preventing individuals from becoming a victim. For example, many crimes happen during the holiday season and for good reason because individuals get wrapped up in the three P's, which are: presents, parties, and planning. Families are planning to go on vacations for the holiday season, friends are picking out outfits for all the parties they will be attending and presents will be exchanged among co-workers before the end of business day. The crimes that are more common during the holiday season are burglary and theft. Kane (2008) suggest that being aware of your surrounding and recognizing motivated offenders will help prevent individuals from becoming a victim during the holiday season. That does not mean taking matters into your own hands; it means to practice being alert when out enjoying the festivities of the holidays.

One way to being more alert is to ask a neighbor or a friend to house sit for you while you are off on vacation. You can direct this individual to check on your house once a day or every other day in order to give off the impression that someone is home. If you live in a community with police patrol, you can

ask for the officer or security to check on your home in your absence. Or you can develop a form of prevention that closes off opportunities for crime.

Bowers, Johnson, and Hirschfield (2004) studied a recently introduced prevention technique in Great Britain that involved fitting a gate to several alleyways along the back of terraced properties to restrict access to local residents and reduce the offender's opportunity to commit a crime. The study was performed on homes that were narrow in space and could be connected to other dwellings for the purpose of the experiment. The alley-gates could secure an entire block and all the houses within this radius. The gate will be accessible with a key for which only the residents will have and there will be a limit to the number each household can acquire. This study demonstrated that a small gated community had reduced its burglary attempts in comparison to communities that were not gated.

Video surveillance is one way police can deter offenders from committing crimes. By upgrading the performance of surveillance, it is less likely that a criminal will want to commit a crime because of the risk of apprehension.

When using the method of strengthening surveillance, one of the most employed surveillance technologies is closed-circuit television (CCTV). CCTV is a number of cameras connected to a loop or closed circuit, with images produced being sent to a monitoring station (Ratcliffe, 2006). Using this type of surveillance is predominately for large groups of people that congregate in areas that are too wide for regular patrol. For example, college's campuses, sports arenas, department stores and major club venues are the kinds of establishments that CCTV systems are employed. The cameras are placed in locations that may be more prone for criminal activity which will

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allow the individual operating the camera access to see what the actual crime has or will be committed. There has even been an incident or two where the individual operating the cameras has given a warning to other individuals making them aware that they can be seen committing some type of foul play on camera. The primary goal of utilizing video surveillance is to increase the perceived risk of capture in the hope that any measure of the offenders improprieties will have them reconsidering to commit a crime (Ratcliffe, 2006).

SCP Application

Among the Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) examples stated above, there have been several other studies that represented SCP and its effects on the prevention of crime. One study discussed the situational crime prevention approach when dealing with mass casualties or riots. This research suggested that riots could be prevented by aligning practical guidelines and theoretical considerations by a recommended five-stage action plan. The stages incorporated are: (1) attempt to identify, isolate and remove those individuals who precipitate the incident before the crowd begins to organize, (2) break the crowd into smaller groups to disrupt communications, (3) quickly deal with the crowds leaders and remove from the spot, (4) create diversions in other places, so there is no focus, and (5) do not let the crowd gain strength in numbers (Verma, 2007).

In the article, *Crime and Incivilities in Libraries*, Clarke's five SCP techniques are explored and further examined to uncover how crimes such as theft, vandalism, and assault have reared its head into the library.

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Cromwell, Alexander, and Dotson (2008) conclude that the crimes mentioned above, along with problems with disruptive patrons can be substantially reduced by the implementation of SCP strategies and a well-conceived security plan for staff training. The research discussed more incivilities that could occur while at or in a library, however they were not addressed in this manuscript.

Unintended Consequences

With any research or study, there are concerns that are discussed that will possibly bring about some negativity towards any technique, theory or experiment. Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) is not perfect and it has its concerns with an issue of displacement. Ratcliffe (2006) describes displacement as offenders moving their offending to a place that has less risk of being caught. For example, an offender may not want to rob a jewelry store if he can see that there is a camera system set in place to identify him. This is a concern for the perpetrators because in the rational choice theory, a criminal wants to seek the benefits from the act with the least amount of punishment. The turnout for unintended consequences are not high, however the concerns still prove that displacement can occur and using current SCP may reduce a higher percentage in the future.

Conclusion

Without the hard work performed by researches, investigators, and academic scholars the study of rational choice theory and its assistance in situational crime prevention (SCP) may not have been explored. SCP is an important and useful tool in the prevention of crime. The research and studies <https://assignbuster.com/examining-the-study-of-rational-choice-theories-criminology-essay/>

mentioned in this manuscript on the prevention of crime have been reviewed in all types of criminal offenses. The SCP techniques have assisted in giving steps to maintain order in riot situations, white collar crime and women passenger travel using public transportation. These SCP techniques may prevent criminal activity in places that offenders deem easier to victimize individuals but it does not deter criminals from seeking pleasure in other venues that are not affected by preventive solutions.

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