

The crime prevention  
triangle explanation  
criminology essay



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In this unit, we will explore specific and general crime prevention approaches and strategies, employed to reduce and control the occurrence of crime in the society. The role of the citizen and the community will be differentiated from the role of the state through the institutions of the criminal justice system.

## **Unit Objectives**

To appreciate the need for citizen participation.

To discuss the role of the Police.

To describe the role of Policy Makers.

To examine the methods used by the criminal justice system to influence reform and rehabilitation.

To analyze at least four approaches to crime prevention employed by the criminal justice system.

## **Readings and Online Resources**

Reid, Oral (1998) Community Policing: A Philosophical Approach to the Study of Community Building.

Reid, Oral. Policing by Consent. The Copper 97 Vol. 1 No. 1

**[http://www.schererville.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=257&Itemid=58](http://www.schererville.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=257&Itemid=58)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTYIPBoeGaU>

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## **Session 4. 1 Community Crime Prevention Approaches**

### **Learning Objectives:**

#### **By the end of this session the student should be able to:**

Define the elements of the crime prevention triangle

Discuss the elements of the crime prevention triangle

Describe the crime prevention triangle

Define the roles of the elements in the crime prevention triangle

Discuss the participation of the elements in the crime prevention triangle

Understand the need for citizen participation.

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Appreciate the role of individual and community groups in the prevention of crime.

Explain the need for the Crime Prevention Practitioners in building a community team

## **Introduction**

In this session we will examine specific crime prevention approaches intended to highlight the critical role of the citizen, the police and policymakers in their effort to address crime control or reduction both at the local level of the community and the state in general.

## **The Crime Prevention Triangle**

### **Figure 4: 1 The Community Crime Prevention Triangle**

Effective crime prevention requires a closer relationship between the police, policy makers, and the community at large. It is necessary for all sides to open lines of communication and work to define their respective roles in such a way that they understand their responsibilities to the overall cooperative effort. The task of bringing these key sectors of the community together is not easy neither can one be effective without the other. The challenge is often that each sector has specific viewpoints that appear to be inconsistent with the needs and expectations of others in the triangle.

For instance, the police have traditionally been one of the most closed groups in Caribbean society. This position has been influenced by several factors among which are the following; Police Forces in the region boast a paramilitary in structure; Many of the social and professional problems they

encounter cannot be discussed with persons outside their profession; and the nature of police work frequently confines them to persons working within their respective formations. The factors listed all support a growing trend towards police isolation from the people they are intended to serve.

On the other hand, most citizens have very limited knowledge of police work. Such views are often further distorted by television programmes that suggest glamorous and unrealistic means of solving crimes and social disorder. Hence a typical citizen's impression of the police is associated with issuing traffic tickets, or arresting felons. The citizen is not likely to be in a pleasant mood in either of these circumstances, and frequently learns to associate officers with enforcement and authority. The police spend most of their time dealing with the less desirable elements of Caribbean society inasmuch as they deal with suspects and vagrants on a regular basis, and sometimes tend to associate the uncooperative behaviour of these elements with the general public. It is not uncommon for the police to threat with suspicion volunteers who want to aid in the management of crime.

Politicians or policymakers are given labels that hold them up to public scrutiny and ridicule. Views expressed during heated campaigns or unrealistic expectations by the public that an official has the power to wave a magic wand and cure the ills of society have served to strain the relationship between the elected officials and their constituents.

All of the above realities show that each side of the triangle has an important part to play in the community crime prevention process but that there are challenges which, if not carefully managed could deepen the divide between

each sector. The strength of a triangle depends on strong linkages. If one of these three groups does not participate, the chances for success will be seriously diminished.

## **Defining the Roles in the Crime Prevention Triangle**

### **Citizen and Community Participation**

The need for citizen participation in community crime prevention is critical to the establishment of a “ crime-free” society. Two essential ingredients are a well-trained police force and an informed and cooperative citizenry. It is often the case that too few citizens have made a commitment to actually participation.

Participation in community “ crime prevention efforts is not merely desirable but necessary. Police and crime prevention specialists alone cannot control crime; they need all the help the community can give them. Despite the later there seems to be an irreversible trend, in recent years, towards less involvement by citizens and increased responsibilities being delegated to the police. Increased specialization in various police forces coupled with increased taxation has encouraged citizens to look to the police, as professionals, to assume the responsibility of community safety.

Subsequently, calls for service to the average law enforcement agency have increased steadily as citizens looked for assistance, not only with criminal matters but also for a wide range of service endeavours, such as invitations to speak to the wayward boy or girl that failed to comply with house rules, retrieving trapped cats and dogs and transporting mental patients to the hospital for treatment. It would be reasonable to assume that as much as 80

percent of police calls relate to noncriminal conduct as opposed to actual investigation or the apprehension of criminals.

Community ranges from isolated individuals to diverse community groups. The levels of expertise vary from novice to accomplished professionals. The motivation to participate is as diverse as the community itself. Yet the secret to changing public attitudes and ultimately behaviour lies within this vast and primarily untapped resource.

The following are various levels of involvement in crime prevention efforts with which citizens feel comfortable and choose to identify. It is helpful to first look at the role an individual can play, and then expand the base for involvement to group roles or collective citizen action.

## **The Role of the Individual**

Practitioners know that a vast majority of a community's population does not belong to an identifiable group but still participates in a wide range of activities. These citizens have concerns regarding crime and should be reached and encouraged to participate in crime prevention programmes as individuals. A few of the ways an individual can participate include:

1. Contributing volunteer time to programme efforts
2. Being an advocate for crime prevention concepts
3. Reporting suspicious activities to the police
4. Taking initiatives to practice opportunity reduction strategies at home/work and while moving

about the community, such as:

- a. installing secure, deadbolt locks
- b. providing good security lighting
- c. trimming shrubbery away from doors and windows
- d. always locking car doors and windows
- e. using common sense and awareness when traveling alone
- f. marking all valuables with a personal identification number
- g. not carrying or displaying large amount of cash
- h. avoiding walking alone after dark

Activity: Crime Prevention Tips

View the Youtube videos below, they offer some useful crime prevention tips for individuals

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTYIPBoeGaU>



## **Activity 4: 1**

### **Collective Citizen and Group Roles:**

The community's role is strengthened when group initiatives are added to individual citizen initiatives. If Crime prevention is to be effective in improving quality of life, the role of the community-at-large must be expanded to include supportive efforts from a broad base of existing private sector groups-businesses, industries, churches, etc. within a jurisdiction. Organized groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, P. T. A., Scouts, Girls Guides, Kiwanis, Women's Clubs, and Church Groups lend their support to community crime prevention programming and bring with them an existing pool of volunteer time, talent, energy, and the additional clout and resources of established organizations. They also bring with them the organizational

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goals, policies, and procedures, resolutions on community issues, and reputation that may or may not precisely fit everyone else's agenda. The role these groups must play is sometimes difficult to define and mobilize, and always difficult to manage.

Yet it is vitally important to reach and involve citizens within their own context. The task is to reach people where they are and with the tools they are accustomed to using. This does not simply mean that everyone has to join Neighbourhood Watch Programmes. It does mean that every citizen can participate in crime prevention doing whatever a citizen is a part of-Boys Clubs, a tenants' organization, the insurance industry etc. The trick to citizen involvement is to provide them hope within their own familiar environments.

The experiences gained in community crime prevention programmes across the Caribbean region have helped define the following points in the community-at-large role:

- The community at large must accept the responsibility for organizing a community crime prevention programme. They have the biggest stake-and ultimately they have more to lose than either the law enforcement or policymaker segments.
- The community must identify committed leadership for an organized crime prevention effort.
- The community must provide the necessary resources (time and funds) for the leadership to receive basic crime prevention training.

- The community must plan organized training for other volunteers in the program.
  
- The citizens must identify the problems of the community through cooperative efforts with law enforcement agencies, using such tools as surveys, opinion polls, and actual crime data.
  
- The members of the community must plan a coordinated approach to crime prevention efforts by designing and matching projects to the interests of various volunteer groups.
  
- The leaders must establish an effective mechanism for outreach and input so various groups know what others are doing. This will help ensure coordination, and is frequently termed networking.
  
- The community group must solicit commitments from various groups supporting crime prevention efforts to ensure programme continuity.
  
- The group organizers must provide opportunities for all groups or individuals to participate in the community-wide programmes (while allowing groups to retain their separate identity).
  
- The group organizers must establish an ongoing process of obtaining and assessing project information for evaluation purposes to aid further decision-making.
  
- The organizers must identify and obtain resources to properly fund a sustained crime prevention effort.

- The leaders of the crime prevention unit must facilitate the wise use of collective citizen power to influence public policies that promote crime prevention concepts.
- The community group must serve as a strong advocate for increased communication between the various segments forming the crime prevention triangle.
- The groups must ensure the participation of the media as a partner in the total community crime prevention programme.

Community volunteers have learnt much about their role in crime prevention during the last decade. Their role will become even more clearly defined through the next decade as volunteers acquire additional knowledge in organizing and maintaining community crime prevention programmes.

## **Police Participation**

The attitudes of the citizens towards the police service are generally inconsistent. The police are appreciated when they are needed but often feared because they are perceived as the state's representatives of power and authority. The reality is that only rarely is the real nature of the police service broadcast and very rarely is the man inside the uniform understood or known. Yet we understand his role to be critical.

What is generally agreed is that when faced with trouble, people expect quick police response and victims want and expect the effective service of a professional. Based on the wide range of service demands there is little wonder that both citizens and police alike are sometimes unclear about the

definition of the role of the police in the prevention rather than the detection of crime. The following points are essential:

The police are not separate from the people. They draw their authority from the will and consent of the people.

The police are the state appointed instruments through which citizens can achieve and maintain public order.

Police officers are decision makers and often decide whether to arrest, to make a referral, to seek prosecution, or to use force.

Police officers are just as accountable for their decisions as the magistrate or judge is for decisions deliberated for months.

The police officer must understand complex cultural and social problems and relationships to be efficient and effective.

A police officer is a part of and not apart from:

- a. The community served
- b. The criminal justice system that determines what course society will pursue to deter lawbreakers or rehabilitate offenders in the interest of public order
- c. The government that provides the formal base of authority.

The police officer initiates the criminal justice process through arrest of suspects and can be held accountable where they fail to take action.

The police are the criminal justice element in closest contact with the public (and therefore are frequently blamed for failures in other parts of the system).

The police are helpless to control crime without the cooperation of a substantial portion of the people.

The role of the police thus becomes:

to anticipate that crime will occur when risks are high, to recognize when a high-crime risk exists

to appraise the seriousness of the particular risk

to initiate action to remove or reduce the risk.

“ Educational, technical and supportive resource- an enabler rather than a primary doer.

The police role in crime prevention strategies should:

- Utilize the patrol function to create and maintain efforts to identify and arrest suspects
- Serve as a source for public information and training regarding crime prevention programs
- Coordinate crime prevention activities in their respective jurisdictions
- Share information with the public gathered through police data analysis capabilities

concerning the kinds of crime and the methods being used by perpetrators against citizens

- Take initiative to develop organized crime prevention functions within each department

## **Policymaker's Participation**

Many earlier efforts to establish crime prevention programmes carefully skirted the issues of assessing the role of the public sector or seeking to involve the policymakers. This hesitancy was brought about in part because notions of crime prevention were seen as new and untested and hadn't been accepted as a viable response to long-standing social and economic problems. Very few programmes have been able to document specific successes in actually demonstrating a reduction of crime. Additionally, some communities had experiences with receiving political support for crime prevention programmes during the course of a political election, only to be quietly swept under the rug when elections were over and the difficult job of meeting budgets was underway in the face of declining resources.

Slowly, isolated experiences surfaced that demonstrated a positive relationship between renewed citizen participation in crime prevention/opportunity reduction programmes and a lower residential burglary or vandalism rate in neighbourhoods. Policymakers were willing to take a closer look. Such closer scrutiny led in Barbados to the establishment of the National Task Force on Crime Prevention in June 1996. This agency collaborates with the Royal Barbados Police Force on the analysis of national crime statistics and initiate programmes aimed at reducing crime in selected

residential communities. In 1968 in the United States of America, Congress established a legislative priority and provided monetary resources to jurisdictions for mounting crime prevention efforts and funded them through the Justice Department Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA).

### **Activity: A Caribbean Perspective**

The aforementioned has been the American experience.

Can you think of ways this approach can be adapted to match the Caribbean reality appropriate for your country.

Post your suggestions in the discussion forum and react to suggestions posed by your classmates.

### **Activity 4: 2**

As a result of this increased interest by officials in the public sector and the interaction within communities, there is now a more clearly defined role of the policymakers in the community crime prevention process. Practitioners are confident that this role will continue to evolve and clarify over time, but for the present, I offer the following points on the role of the policymaker:

1. Provides leadership in setting public policy that establishes a jurisdiction-wide crime

prevention programme.

2. Encourages coordination and cooperation between government agencies to maximize existing



resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

3. Develops and adopts building security codes.

4. Actively promotes opportunity reduction practices for public owned properties, such as:

a. marking all valuables with property identification numbers

b. providing adequate, security lighting

c. installing deadbolt locking devices

5. Promotes crime prevention education and training for employees within the public sector.

6. Provides financial support for crime prevention programmes.

7. Publicly supports crime prevention programmes to encourage other groups and individuals to participate.

8. Designates a permanent public agency to serve as an organizational base for crime

Prevention programmes.

9. Demonstrates a long-term commitment to crime prevention by passing a formal resolution to

sanction the crime prevention programme.

10. Requires accountability of programme efforts.

## **The Crime Prevention Practitioner: Building a Community Team**

Even after the various elements within a community have a basic understanding of their role and responsibilities in a community crime prevention effort, there still remains vital work to be done in order to establish a promising crime prevention programme in a community.

Much effort has been virtually wasted in the past as various groups go about well-meaning attempts to establish programmes for prevention without a coordinated approach.

Likewise, a community crime prevention “team” doesn’t just happen. The various elements that exist in your community must be linked together before any game plan can be written. This task requires specific attention. One or more individuals must be identified to play the coaching role and to mold representatives from various sides of the triangle into a working team.

These specialists are called crime prevention practitioners. Who are they and what do they do?

Practitioners across the country represent a wide cross-section of our population. Some are criminal justice professionals, some are elected officials. Many are business people, school teachers, or civic club volunteers. Crime prevention practitioners sometimes volunteer while others are elected. In either case, they play a significant role in the community crime prevention process. A profile of successful practitioners would include:

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- willingness to contribute a significant amount of time to crime prevention efforts

- the enthusiasm to motivate others

- a basic knowledge of the criminal justice system

- a comprehensive understanding of the concepts of crime prevention and the ability to teach and

advise others . .

- capability of assessing skills and resources within the community

- the ability to relate to all interested groups and match these interests to the overall program

effort

- the expertise to facilitate links that achieve a coordinated approach to programming

- good organizational skills

- an understanding of the nature of the political process and the guidance that enables public

support to be translated through decision-makers into public policy

Above all, the successful practitioner will possess two primary attributes:

COMMITMENT to the cause, and

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the PERSISTENCE to continue the commitment over time in the face of obstacles that are sure to arise.

### **Activity: Mini Investigation**

Identify and categorize the crime prevention practitioners in your territory.

Report your findings to the course coordinator or tutor.

### **Activity 4: 3**

#### **Summary:**

In this session we have examined specific crime prevention strategies focused around the crime prevention triangle. In this session we highlighted the critical roles of individuals as a sub-sect of organizations, at one end of the continuum and the community as whole. The role of the police, and policy makers were also highlighted as essential to the construction of good crime prevention policy and practice. In the next session we will look at the role of the criminal justice system in the control of crime and acts of unsocial behaviour.