The crime prevention process criminology essay

\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

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\n[/toc]\n \nAs the young male stood outside of the mall with his group of friends, he felt as if everyone's eyes were fixated on him anticipating his next move. His allegiance to the group was challenged and was to be proven through the theft of an elderly woman's handbag that was hanging off of her scooter. As he approached the bag, he scanned the area and noticed two security guards, a camera up above and a plethora of people in the open area. With these factors in mind, he briskly walked by the bag waving his friends over towards the park and promises to do something else another time. In this situation, the positive attributes of crime prevention, particularly crime prevention through environmental design are present, deterring a criminal act and preventing the victimization of an elderly woman. Crime prevention is often regarded as " the anticipation, recognition and appraisal of a crime risk and the appropriate action taken to remove or reduce crime" (National Crime Prevention Institute, 1986, p. 1), through situational crime prevention, crime prevention through environmental design, and crime

prevention through social development. Crime prevention is often attributed to decreasing victimization rates, discouraging criminals from committing deviant acts and pushing youth away from the justice system. This paper will analyze the effectiveness of crime prevention programs or the lack thereof, while applying various criminological theories that identify vulnerability.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

The core tenets of crime prevention are often correlated to crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). The origins of CPTED stem back to the criminologist C. Ray Jeffery in 1971, who explored a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behaviour particularly through environmental design (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). A proactive crime-fighting technique, CPTED explores a proactive design and the effective use of the built environment to control human behaviour, lead to a reduction of fear, and an improvement in the quality of life. Modifications in environment are often most effective when they are supplemented with direct increasing sightlines, lighting, landscaping, access control points, and places to hide are all taken into account and altered to make the environment less attractive to the potential criminals (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Within CPTED, there are 4 main precepts that are regarded to be most effective which include surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance (Cozens, 2002). Surveillance can be further analyzed into natural surveillance, such as street lighting, or formal surveillance, such as closed circuit television. Surveillance in itself is correlated with creating a sense of safety for victims and instilling fear among criminals. On the other hand, natural access control uses physical barriers and objects to clearly

define the difference between private and public property. Thirdly, territorial reinforcement augments natural access control by using similar objects to assign space to particular demographics, in the sense that people who should not be there stand out to others (Cozens, 2002). The lack of territorial reinforcement is exemplified by skateboarders frequently use a building's landscape to conduct their activities because they are under the impression that it is public property. Upon completing a design change and enhancing security presence, the skateboarders will be deterred from returning in fear of prosecution and will be forced to move to another public space for their activities. Lastly, maintenance of the property, or the lack thereof, is an expression of ownership, which can often be attributed to what activities occur on site due to visibility (Cozens, 2002). The lack of maintenance entices others with deviant mind sets to congregate in that area due to the lack of visibility. Through enacting these 4 precepts of CPTED, owners and businesses alike could experience an increase in security around their property and an increased rate of positive activity while at the same time, complimented with a decrease in decreasing crime and victimization rates.

Situational Crime Prevention

While crime prevention has taken some time to become accepted by the criminal justice society, it is quickly gaining interest in the minds of researchers and the judicial system itself. This can be attributed to the proactive, rather than reactive approach associated with crime prevention. Situational crime prevention gained recognition in the early 1970's by Oscar Newman, who integrated the term defence space to signify that crime can be prevented or displaced through the use of residential architectural

designs that reduce criminal opportunity, such as well-lit housing projects while maximizing surveillance (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Newman envisioned crime prevention can be achieved through the modification of the physical environment to reduce opportunity for crime. The reduction of crime is evident in areas where there is an increase of pedestrian traffic, designated pedestrian paths and crosswalks and constant public lighting (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Research conducted by Tullio and Vallée (2010) defined situational crime prevention strategies as " concerns with the immediate context within which crime occurs and attempts to reduce the opportunity for crime, make the proceeds of crime less appealing, and/or make committing a crime much more detrimental than beneficial" (p. 79). While situational crime prevention explored how one is able to remove situations of crime, it is important to understand the demographic of the criminals that are committing the crimes.

Crime Prevention Through Social Development

Crime dating tells us that most offenders that commit criminal offences are young males (McCormick & Siegel, 2012), who commit crimes after school hours while waiting for their parent, or parents to arrive home from work. With this, some young males turn to crime simply because they find it rewarding, satisfying easy or fun (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). The lack of social, recreational and educational opportunities entices youth to participate in criminal activity (Tullio & Vallée, 2010). Crime prevention through social development is part of a proactive policing model within its community that tries to identify and address the root causes of crime. The intention is to provide young citizens with opportunities for safe and healthy

recreation and to deter criminal exposure. The effectiveness of this approach is most often present in low-income neighbourhoods. If the youth are occupied, particularly with sports or some sort of employment, they will not be wandering the streets creating activities for themselves.

Crime Prevention Triangle

With each approach to crime prevention, it is important to analyze its effectiveness and value that it may add to a community. To do this, a base line testing must be established with the basic concepts necessary for a crime to occur which include desire, ability and opportunity (Arrington, 2006). While control over the first two elements, desire and ability rests solely with the suspect, crime prevention can have considerable impact on the third – opportunity. Opportunity is directly relatable to the rational choice and routine activities theory. With crime prevention in place, routine activity theory is supported because crime prevention will remove the opportunities for crime to occur. " Potential offenders might view crime as a normal function of modern living and as a decision making process in which they weigh the potential benefits and detriments of an illegal act. These in turn influence criminal choice with the perception of target vulnerability and potential captivity" (McCormick & Siegel, 2012, p. 147). The key to effective crime prevention is to eliminate or minimize risk and to showcase to the potential offenders that the desired benefit of committing a crime is low to none and the odds of being caught are much greater.

Basic Approaches to Crime Prevention

Crime prevention can also have different types of prevention approach levels by individuals throughout society, which is evident in the relationship between opportunity, routine activities and environmental factors. Primary prevention for crime is the action taken to reduce occurrence of a criminal act (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Community crime prevention, or neighbourhood crime prevention, as it is often called, focuses on local identifiable entities. Community crime prevention can take a variety of forms and include numerous techniques which include neighbourhood watches, citizens on patrol, and police-community involvement projects (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Community crime prevention strategies seek to directly influence the levels of crime and fear of crime by helping to increase social cohesion in neighbourhoods in crisis and to provide them with increased social support to respond to crime. Crime prevention is an active approach utilizing public awareness and preventive measures to reduce crime. This is evident in impaired driving scenarios where crime rates are very high. Mother's Against Drunk Drivers is just one secondary prevention level that coordinates crime prevention through providing awareness and possible outcomes of impaired driving. Lastly, communities that communicate effectively participate in tertiary prevention (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Tertiary prevention is evident in intervention programs for youth or adult offenders that prevent further offences such as community notification programs. This shows that the responsibility for crime prevention is not only the responsibility of law enforcement, but lies in the hands of citizens as well.

Police and Crime Prevention

Police services in general have a dignitary duty in crime prevention and are in the proactive mindset to prevent crime. Many police services will use crackdown methods in response to targeting specific crimes or neighbourhoods that can generate fear in a criminal preventing them from committing an offence. However, one disadvantage of this approach includes crime displacement, " where the effect of crime prevention efforts, in which efforts to control crime in one area shift illegal activities to another area" (McCormick & Siegel, 2012, p. 144). Criminals who are looking to burglarize a home will not target neighbourhoods that are well patrolled by police officers and will move to a neighbourhood that is considered safer to commit the criminal offence (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). This brings to light one of the pitfalls of crime prevention.

Crime Control Strategies

The principal focus of crime prevention is the attempt to eliminate or minimize victimization. Within the crime prevention process, criminology theories include crime control strategies based on rational choice (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Situational crime prevention aims is to deny access of motivated offenders to suitable targets such as a home that displays a home security system which signals guardianship. This indicates that the potential reward of committing a criminal offence is not worth the likelihood of apprehension. General deterrence strategies are also a perspective on crime control, as general deterrence makes the criminal fear the consequences of crime. The criminal justice system that includes severe sentencing and aggressive policing styles promotes fear from committing a

criminal act. Another strategy that can be employed is the specific deterrence strategy that intends to punish known criminals with harsh prison sentences and fines in order to lower recidivism rates (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Lastly, the incapacitation strategies removes any and all opportunity for crime by incarcerating the offender for a prolong period of time (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). With this strategy, the duration of the prison sentence and cost to the government are proportionately related.

Future Direction For Crime Prevention

In totality, crime prevention programs need to be effective, valuable and successful. Although it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of crime prevention, measurement through statistical comparison between previous year's crime rates is probably the most reliable. The evaluation of crime prevention programs can provide valuable information about the program's appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency, thereby always seeking for improvements within a community. Crime prevention programs are most effective when an aspect of completing a crime either before, during, or after is eliminated or hindered. The objective is to inconvenience the criminal as much as possible from completing a criminal act. Similar to this, situational crime prevention processes reduce the opportunity to offend by increasing the degree of difficulty when committing a criminal offence. This is most evident in CPTED which relies upon changes to the physical environment that will cause an offender to make certain behavioural decisions. These physical changes are made to encourage law abiding behaviour. Social development crime prevention prompts social well-being by tackling risk factors. Although every effort can be made for crime prevention, criminally

motivated offenders dictate its effectiveness and successfulness. Reality indicates that not all of these strategies are going to stop criminals from doing what they do best. The rational choice theory illustrates that people will commit crime if it's in their best interest, regardless of the predicament they are in, physical environment modification, or pre social developments that are made in effort to reduce crime (McCormick & Siegel, 2012). Most people believe it is best to separate and differentiate between each theory and strategy for tackling crime but it is best to view all of these initiatives as part of an inclusive plan that benefits all parties involved. The intent is to gradually stabilize a community and gradually bring in community members and resources to eventually take control over the community crime prevention initiatives. Crime prevention may have a financial burden, but it should be viewed as a continual investment for the long term to deter crime, protect society and maintain peace. Although initial investments will be more costly in the present, it will prove to be effective in the future from generation to generation.