Models of crime prevention: their application

Due to the increasing complexity brought about by modernisation, overpopulation, urbanisation, and globalisation, crime prevention has required a more urgent stance not only from government but also from communities, schools, citizens, families, and non-government institutions. While the prevention of crime has been unanimously agreed upon, the best way to go about it is still under debate. There have been several models of crime prevention which criminologists and law enforcement experts have introduced but until now, there remains no clear " best model" yet. Some of the major crime prevention programmes are situational or social in nature but so-called hybrid approaches or " whole of government" approaches have also gained popularity, especially in Australia. In order to develop a clear appreciation for the many-faceted nature of crime prevention as practiced today, it is necessary to define it clearly and analyse the different models used locally and overseas and examine how each model has fared when applied to actual crime prevention programmes. This essay discusses crime prevention, its models, and its application in the real-world setting.

Defining Crime Prevention

Crime prevention in its simplest definition is the process of deterring crime, criminals, and reducing levels of victimisation. White and Perrone (2005) view crime prevention as " the creation and implementation of proactive programmes and strategies which are designed to prevent crime and address the fear of crime" (p. 15). A more comprehensive definition is advanced by Van Dijk and De Ward (1991) to treat crime prevention as " the total of all private initiatives and state policies, aimed at the reduction of damage caused by acts defined as criminal by the State" (p. 415). The

common thread of these definitions is the suggestion that crime prevention is not the sole responsibility of law enforcement and police, but rather a collective obligation of different sectors in society – in government and in communities. Otherwise stated, crime prevention is a joint effort of various levels of society to work toward strategies that prevent crime occurrence.

Rationale Behind Crime Prevention

While concepts of crime and justice date back to antiquity, the enormity of concern attributed toward crime prevention emerged circa late 1980s and early 1990s. White and Perrone (2005) enumerated three major reasons why crime prevention has taken an unprecedented turn during this period: economic, operational, and community initiative.

Economic. Crime prevention became an important economic concern because crime " definitely pays," to use the popular catchphrase – in huge amounts of fiscal resources. The cost of crime is increasing, and according to 2008 figures from the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), crime consumes almost 4 percent of the country's GDP which is equivalent to $36 billion (Rollings, 2008). Crime-related expenditures include policing, corrections, the security industry, and the criminal justice system as well as " hidden costs" such as medical costs, compensation, and loss of productivity of victims. To curb this gargantuan cost, crime reduction is considered a feasible alternative.

Operational imperatives of policing. Considering the massive cost of crime, it became incumbent upon police and law enforcement agencies to recruit and enlist the assistance of citizens in an effort to arrest the escalating costs of

crime. Policing required the collaboration of the law enforcement structure with citizens in the so-called " fight against crime" (Martin & Perrone, 2005).

Demands of the community. As crime rates increased with demographic changes attributed to the sprawl of urbanisation and migration, citizens have learned to recognise that a singular campaign by law enforcement to prevent crime would not do; hence, citizens have assembled themselves into crime prevention groups based in their respective communities to assist in crime prevention. As citizens became more vulnerable to crime, so did their resolve to empower themselves to stop victimisation.

While one or a combination of all factors may have contributed to the emergence of crime prevention theory and application in the modern world, another theory is the growing concern for human rights and individual freedoms have led to an influence leaning toward non-punishment forms of crime prevention. Sutton and Cherney (2002) emphasised that crime prevention is reflective of society's desire to handle crime by using processes other than those that are " eliminative"; instead of punitive action, restorative means are advanced in the campaign for crime deterrence.

Models of Crime Prevention

Throughout its history, differing models of crime prevention have been used by law enforcement and criminologists around the world to curb crime and reduce victimisation. The major conceptual models of crime prevention include: situation, social, and developmental. Crime prevention has also been classified into primary, secondary, and tertiary forms.

Situational crime prevention. The situational theory of crime prevention suggests that the best way to stop criminals is to design physical space and environment in a manner that will make the commission of crime harder and increase the likelihood of apprehending criminals. The idea is to change criminals' perceptions of the rewards of crime by making the situation harder and much riskier for them. The situational concept of crime prevention was developed initially in the 1980s by criminologist Ronald Clarke. Clarke (1992) suggested that the most effective way to prevent crime is to implement strategies that create conditions which make it harder for criminals to commit crime. Thus, as an intervention model, situational crime prevention requires the proper identification of routines, factors, and patterns associated with criminal activity. Clarke & Cornish (2003) presented five types of techniques which criminology practitioners should consider when using the situational model: " 1) increasing effort required to commit crimes; 2) increasing risks of committing crimes; 3) reducing rewards out of crimes; 4) reducing conditions that provoke crime; and 5) removing excuses for committing crimes" (as cited in Homel, 2005, p. 132).

Social crime prevention. The theory of social crime prevention aims to prevent offending by changing not the physical environment but the social environment. Social prevention intends to create social conditions that will deter potential or actual offenders from doing crimes. Hence, strategies associated with social crime prevention include empowering communities with resources and programmes that create a diversion from criminal behaviour. As an intervention model, social prevention focuses on youth and children, and programmes liked to this model including employment

programmes, skills building activities, leisure programmes, youth " drop-in" centres, and other activities that increase productive behaviour.

Developmental crime prevention. Developmental crime prevention as a theory strives to link childhood development with later delinquency. Researchers that have conducted prevention experiments were able to establish that factors surrounding early childhood are significant precursors to delinquent behaviour. These risks to delinquency include poor parenting, socially disruptive behaviour, and cognitive deficits (Sutton & Cherney, 2002). Poor parenting could involve factors such as neglect, conflict in the home, deviant behaviour of parents, and early experience of family disruption (Homel, 2005). Among the developmental intervention strategies used courses related to proper parenting and other school-based measures.

Crime Prevention Programmes

The theoretical concepts of crime prevention discussed earlier have generated various intervention strategies all aimed to preventing crime.

Situational prevention. Situational prevention strategies aim at designing the physical environment in order to make it less desirable and riskier for individuals to commit crime. Advocates of situational prevention strategies are more likely than advocates of other models to claim empirical effectiveness in preventing crime. Situational prevention involves among others, identifying cities that are " crime hotspots," the use of surveillance cameras or CCTV cameras, screens, reducing cash-handling among banks to curb robbery, the use of boom gates to reduce car theft, and the use of underground's inroads to prevent vandalism and graffiti (O'Malley, 1997).

One of the strongest critiques against situational prevention is that the approach is inherently biases in favour of the rich and against the poor. Moreover, opponents claim that the opportunity reduction strategy gives only cosmetic remedies and that crime involves economic and cultural aspects associated with capitalism and mass consumerist ideology (O'Malley, 1997).

Social prevention. In lieu of situational prevention techniques, some criminologists have advocated social prevention instead because of the view that crime as a social problem is deeply ingrained within the economic and cultural structures in society. One of the most prominent social prevention strategies implemented was the Bonnemaison programme of Epinay, France, named after the town's mayor, Monsieur Gilbert Bonnemaison, MP (Cornish, 1995). This programme was implemented in France during a period of turmoil characterised by high levels of unemployment, ethnic rioting, and violence. The French central government collaborated with the local governments to develop " diversionary" programmes for the youth and made it a national priority. Some of these crime prevention programmes inspired by the Bonnemaison strategy include (Cornish, 1995):

education of young people;

re-training of those who failed to cope in the education system;

better housing; employment; adequate health service;

aid to victims of crime; better conditions for immigrants and ethnic minority groups;

drug abuse treatment;

after school activities for the young;

provision of youth, cultural, training and recreation centres in each council area. (p. 188)

Another overseas example of successful social prevention strategies include the so-called " head start" projects pioneered in the United States since the 1960s. These programmes focused on social justice as a crime deterrent by empowering poor and disadvantaged families with educational and other family enrichment programmes (Cornish, 1995). To date, several community-based and community development strategies of crime prevention have been modelled after the social prevention concept.

Hybrid or " whole of government approaches". Instead of focusing solely on just one crime prevention strategy, several programmes have combined several strategies and developed so-called " hybrid" programmes or " whole of government approaches" as it is known in Australia (Homel, 2005). An example of this " customised" approach toward crime prevention is the " Safety Action Projects" implemented in Surfers Paradise and Queensland during the middle of the 90s. Other projects that were national in scale include " Safer Australia" and subsequently, the " National Campaign

Against Violence and Crime" (NCAVAC) geared at the promotion of community-based crime prevention through coordination and operational partnerships with local and central government (Homel, 2005).

Conclusion

Crime impacts overall quality of life because it influences one's actions, where one lives, how one travels, people one associates with, and others. The major conceptual models of crime prevention are the situational, social, and developmental crime prevention strategies. However, there has been increasing acceptance that crime is more complex in nature so that not one single strategy is effective in deterring crime. The emergence of hybrid approaches toward crime addresses both situational and social factors, and is considered to be more appropriate for the complexity of the 21st century.