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Preventing Repeat Victimization

Crime does not occur everywhere, or to everyone all the time. It tends to be concentrated on particular areas, and on particular places and people within them. A concentration of crime on an individual person, household or business is known as repeat victimisation.

Repeat victimisation is common to many crimes such as domestic violence; different types of fraud; sexual offences such as incest and paedophilia; many types of property offences such as burglary and car crime; racial or hate crimes; and bank robberies. When repeat offences happen, they tend to happen quickly, so prevention measures, regardless how temporary they may be, need to be in place quickly if they are to be effective and worthwhile.

The bulk of repeat offences against the same target are attributable to the same offender. These offenders tend to be more established in their criminal careers. Because patterns of repeat offending and victimisation are so closely linked, research is showing that there are a number of advantages to using prior victimisation to prioritise crime prevention action. The advantages of using prior victimisation knowledge include:

1. Because knowledge of prior victimisation is based on an examination of the individual circumstances of a crime, it will tend to involve appropriate measures, social and physical, for the prevention of repeat victimisation.
2. Preventing repeat victimisation protects the most vulnerable social groups, without having to identify these groups, which can be socially divisive. Having been victimised represents one of the best bases for allocating crime prevention resources.
3. Repeat victimisation is highest in the most crime-ridden areas. These are also the areas that suffer the most serious forms of crime. So, a focus on repeat victimisation automatically directs attention to the areas that need it the most.

There is no magic formula for determining the most appropriate or effective prevention strategy for preventing revictimisation. The action that should be taken depends on the type of crime (e.g. preventing the repeat of a commercial burglary requires a different response to sexual assault), the circumstances and environment in which the crime occurs (e.g. tackling repeat events alcohol related violence in and around hotels and clubs requires different responses to violence in a domestic setting), and available resources and opportunities for rapid intervention (e.g. CCTV surveillance may be more cost effective in the long-term for preventing break-ins in a car park but may take too long to organise to prevent significant repeat events in the short and medium terms). There are other factors, however, what is clear is that one of the critical factors for successful prevention is access to good crime data and careful and applied analysis that can quickly identify patterns of repeat offending and victimisation. Combining this with good problem analysis skills and an understanding of effective prevention measures offers many opportunities for achieving significant reductions in crime.

Further reading:

K Pease (2002) *Crime Reduction* in M Maguire R Morgan R Reiner (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* OUP, Oxford: 947-979

