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Situational Crime Prevention: Its Role in Comprehensive Prevention Initiatives

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RÉSUMÉ

La prévention situationnelle est une stratégie qui tente de réduire les opportunités au crime en augmentant les risques et en diminuant les avantages à la perpétration d'une infraction (Clarke 1995). Cette approche s'appuie sur les théories des causes du crime et du passage à l'acte qui postulent que les contrevenants décident de façon rationnelle de commettre un crime en se basant sur les coûts et les bénéfices envisagés. En analysant la manière dont les infractions sont perpétrées dans une communauté ainsi que le contexte social les entourant, la situation peut être changée de manière à ce qu'un contrevenant soit moins motivé à commettre l'infraction. La prévention situationnelle a reçu un support empirique beaucoup plus fort que toutes les autres stratégies de prévention et devrait faire partie intégrante de toute initiative qui tente réduire les taux de criminalité et de victimisation.

ABSTRACT

Situational crime prevention is a strategy which tries to reduce the opportunity for crime by increasing the risks and decreasing the rewards of committing crime (Clarke 1995). The approach is based on theories of crime causation that postulate that offenders make a rational choice to commit crimes based on their expected costs and rewards. Through analysis of offense patterns in their community and the social context of criminal events, the situation can be altered to make it less likely that a motivated

offender will commit a crime. The situational perspective has received much stronger empirical support than any other prevention strategy. Situational approaches and tactics should therefore be more systematically included in initiatives designed to reduce crime and victimization in a comprehensive manner.

Introduction

Many Canadian women were bothered by obscene phone callers until Caller ID systems made it very easy to determine who was calling. Most models of new cars have low rates of theft because they have immobilizers that make it virtually impossible to steal them without having the keys or using a tow truck. About three decades ago, robberies of city bus drivers declined dramatically when transit systems installed sturdy fare boxes and implemented exact change systems so the drivers did not have to carry cash. Researchers in the United Kingdom found that people who were victims of break-ins were often victimized again within a few weeks of the initial crime. In response, they worked with victims to improve home security measures by installing better locks and they established 'cocoon' Neighbourhood Watch programs that enlisted the help of the victims' immediate neighbours. Subsequent break and enter rates declined dramatically compared with similar areas that did not have this follow-up.

These successful crime prevention measures are all examples of situational crime prevention in which people try to reduce the opportunity for crime by increasing the risks and decreasing the rewards of committing crime (Clarke 1995). However, despite hundreds of studies documenting its efficacy, situational crime prevention might be described as the Rodney Dangerfield of the crime prevention world – it often doesn't get much respect. For example, until recently Canada's National Crime Prevention Centre refused to fund situational prevention programs, and few governments at any level in this country have supported these methods¹.

In this paper, I will describe five different crime prevention strategies, describe the theory supporting situational techniques, look at the planning that

¹ One major exception is in the area of airport security where government does not rely upon social development programs or upon the deterrent effects of arresting people who have blown up planes to reduce the number of potential terrorists, but rather screens every individual who will be flying on the plane. However, this area does not fall under the rubric of 'crime prevention' but rather is considered to be part of national security. Auto theft prevention is another exception. The federal government has passed legislation making vehicle immobilizers mandatory for all 2008 vehicles and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation is offering free immobilizers for all vehicles in the province.

is a necessary part of situational prevention, examine some of the evidence supporting its effectiveness, and consider how situational prevention can be facilitated in Canada.

Types of crime prevention strategies

There are five main categories of crime prevention strategies:

- *Social Development Programs* – Such programs seek to reduce the number of motivated offenders by changing the social conditions that contribute to crime. Examples include programs that teach parenting skills, educational programs for at-risk youth, and employment programs for adults. These programs address the risk or protective factors that are predictive of individual involvement in delinquency and criminality.
- *Situational Prevention* – This approach turns our attention to the criminal event. Even if there are motivated offenders in a community, actions such as increasing the surveillance of potential targets or reducing their attractiveness can help reduce crime.
- *Community Crime Prevention Programs* – This category includes programs such as Neighbourhood Watch and Citizens on Patrol where community members actively become part of the crime prevention effort.
- *Legislative/Administrative Programs* – Changes in legislation and businesses practices may help to prevent crime. For example, zoning by-laws can keep undesirable businesses that may create problems away from residential neighbourhoods.
- *Police Programs* – The police can work proactively to prevent crime. Visible police patrols in high crime areas, mandatory arrests of some types of domestic violence offenders, and curfew checks for young auto theft offenders are methods that have demonstrated some success in reducing crime.

In this paper, we will focus on situational crime prevention. However, the safest communities are those that take a comprehensive approach to crime prevention and use a combination of different kinds of programs. For example, while better lighting and closed circuit television may reduce crime in a particular building, in the long run the community should also be implementing social development programs so that in the longer-term the number of potential

motivated offenders is reduced and the community will not have to overly rely on defensive strategies in order to keep crime rates low.

The theory behind situational prevention

The situational approach to crime prevention was developed in Britain, where researchers from the Home Office concluded that little more could be done to prevent crime through conventional justice system responses. The catalyst for this was research done in the 1960s and 1970s which showed that misbehaviour in juvenile institutions seemed to depend more on the way the institution was run than on the personality or the background of the juvenile (Clarke 1995). This research led Clarke to suggest that opportunities were a function of the institutional regime and could be “designed out”. Other research, including an Edmonton study by Engstad (1975), which showed that geographical factors such as the location of bars could be used to explain patterns of crime, gave further support to the situational approach. Offenders themselves told researchers that they selected targets based on their perception of risk and reward (Waller and Okihiro 1978), again suggesting the possibility of reducing crime by changing the risk/reward perceptions of potential offenders. A few criminologists, including Matza (1964) and Briar and Piliavin (1965), began to explore the idea that delinquents were not strongly committed to their deviance, but in many cases were reacting to situational inducements.

This work was the basis of *rational choice theory* (Cornish and Clarke 1986) which postulated that crime was the result of deliberate choices made by offenders based on their calculation of the risks and rewards of these choices. The basic assumption of rational choice theory was that “crime is purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender’s commonplace needs for such things as money, status, sex, and excitement, and that meeting these needs involves the making of (sometimes quite rudimentary) decisions and choices, constrained as these are by limits of time and ability and the availability of relevant information” (Clarke 1995: 98). Rational choice theory did not focus on the individual’s background, but rather on the situational dynamics involved in the decision about whether or not to commit a crime. The theory recognized that not all crimes resulted from the same social processes. Thus the analysis of particular crime problems is the key to understanding the dynamics of the offense and to planning prevention programs.

Situational crime prevention theory was enhanced by work done in the United States. Hindelang, Gottfredson and Garofalo (1978) used data on patterns of crime to develop a theory of personal victimization. Their *lifestyle/exposure*

theory postulates that the lifestyle and routine activities of people place them in social settings with higher or lower risks of being victimized. For example, people who spend a lot of time in public places at night have a higher risk of being robbed than do people who spend most of their evenings at home. Similarly, people whose lifestyles put them in frequent contact with people who commit crimes are more likely to be victimized than those whose time is spent with law-abiding companions. For example, members of biker gangs have higher rates of homicide victimization than most other Canadians because they participate in a lifestyle in which violence is used as a means of settling disputes and in which factors like the competition for right to monopolize illicit drug sales in particular areas ensures that there will be many disputes to settle. One major implication of lifestyle/exposure is that a person’s risk of being victimized can be reduced if they alter their patterns of activity.

Cohen and Felson (1979) broadened lifestyle/exposure theory into the ‘*routine activities approach*’. This approach begins with the observation that three factors must be present simultaneously for a crime to occur: (1) a motivated offender, (2) a suitable and available target, and (3) a lack of guardianship of that target. Changes in any of these factors can contribute to increases or decreases in crime or victimization. For example, thirty years ago, electronic equipment was bulky, heavy and difficult to carry. Today, potential criminals have the opportunity to steal laptop computers, portable MP3 players, automobile CD players, and other valuable electronics which weigh very little and which are easy to conceal. Cohen and Felson (1979) found that unless small, attractive items are carefully protected, theft rates will increase as these items become more common. However, less suitable targets are less frequently stolen. For example, not many people steal refrigerators and washing machines (Cohen and Felson 1979). Another example of the importance of suitable targets was the discovery by young people in Winnipeg and Regina that some models of Chrysler vehicles built in the 1990s were very easy to steal. This helped fuel a boom in joyriding that saw rates of motor vehicle theft soar in both cities and led to the emergence of an auto theft culture that has been very difficult to control (Anderson and Linden 2002). On the other hand, vehicles that are protected by electronic ignition immobilizers that make them virtually impossible to start without a key are very rarely stolen.

To illustrate how changes in guardianship have affected crime rates, Cohen and Felson (1979) showed that as daytime occupancy of homes decreased as a result of factors such as the increased employment of women outside the home increases in the length of vacations, there was a substantial increase in daytime residential burglaries. At the same time, the proportion of commercial burglaries

declined. Thus in addition to explaining patterns of victimization, routine activities theory also offers a way of understanding changes in crime patterns over time. Crime trends are the expected outcomes of routine activities and changing social patterns. Cohen and Felson (1979) take offender motivation as a given. Their objective is to demonstrate the relationship between crime trends and changes in target suitability and effective guardianship.

The rational choice perspective has been extended to incorporate two additional variables – intimate handlers and crime facilitators. Felson (1986: 119) has described “the ‘handled offender’, the individual susceptible to informal social control by virtue of his or her bonds to society, and the ‘intimate handler,’ someone with sufficient knowledge of the potential offender to [control the offender]”. This variable incorporates into rational choice theory social bonds such as ties to parents and other community members that have been shown to reduce involvement in delinquency and crime (Linden 2004). Clarke and Eck (2003) have proposed that the choice of whether or not to commit a crime may depend on the presence of crime facilitators. These facilitators can be physical, social or chemical. Physical facilitators are objects such as guns to be used in an armed robbery or scanning devices that enable restaurant employees to steal debit card numbers along with the identification codes associated with them. Social facilitators can be peers who teach the individual the techniques of committing crime and provide immediate social support during the criminal event. Chemical facilitators include drugs and alcohol which reduce inhibitions and lead to acts that might not be committed if the individual was not under their influence.

The work of Patricia and Paul Brantingham on *environmental criminology* also makes up part of the theoretical basis of situational crime prevention. They have studied the nature of the target search process that precedes involvement in a crime. Like everyone else, criminals have patterns of routine activities and the environmental opportunities they encounter in the course of these activities influence their decisions to commit particular criminal acts (Beavon, Brantingham and Brantingham 1994). For example, criminals are more likely to commit their offenses along the paths they travel in the course of their daily activities. Thus criminal opportunities are shaped by road networks and other factors that shape the criminals’ daily routines. Even if these actors are not actively seeking criminal opportunities, they may take advantage of vulnerabilities they encounter in the course of their daily affairs. Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) analyzed crime patterns in terms of nodes, paths, and edges. Nodes are important places to would-be offenders – the places where they live, work and socialize – and they frequently commit crimes in the areas around these nodes. Paths are routes between nodes and

these routes are vulnerable to crime. For example, a convenience store on the route from junior high school students’ homes to their schools is vulnerable to shoplifting, and homes that are on the route from a large bar to the area where patrons have parked their cars may be vulnerable to vandalism and other types of minor disorder as well as to burglary. Edges are boundaries or barriers between different types land use. An example is a street that separates an industrial area from an adjoining residential neighbourhood. Crime rates are often high in these areas because social control may be weaker and because they may contain properties that attract or generate criminal activity. The environmental approach has also been applied to the analysis of many kinds of criminal activities including crime in residential neighbourhoods. Beavon, Brantingham and Brantingham (1994) studied the influence of street networks on patterns of property crime in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, British Columbia. They found that property crimes are most likely to occur on street segments that are readily accessible, have high flows of traffic or people, and include attractive targets. Planners can use this knowledge to help prevent crime when designing roads and accessibility routes in new communities.

Another line of research and practice that has contributed to the situational approach is *crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)* and the related notion of defensible space. The use of physical and environmental design to control crime is not new; fences, locks and surveillance have always been used to protect people and property. CPTED focuses on buildings and their locations within the neighbourhood. Target hardening includes measures taken to reduce the vulnerability of the physical environment, such as better locks and windows and more secure door jambs. While CPTED forms an important part of many crime prevention programs, it has limits: people may be unwilling to spend the money and time necessary to harden targets; too much reliance on locks and bars can destroy feelings of community; and determined criminals may use enough skill or force to defeat attempts to harden targets.

Notions of defensible space and CPTED go far beyond the relatively simple measures involved in target hardening. The term ‘defensible space’ applies more generally to the creation of a space where crime is discouraged, whether inside a particular building or housing complex or throughout an entire community. Work done in the 1920s by the Chicago school of sociology began linking the physical environment to human behaviour (Jeffery 1971) and was applied to urban planning by Jane Jacobs (1961) in the sixties. Jacobs’ thesis was simple: people, not police, are the guardians of the public space. She focused on the role that “eyes on the street” played in maintaining social control. Her critique

corresponded to a growing concern over the physical design of urban America, which emphasized high rise apartment buildings separated by public space without any specific guardianship. Zoning and other land use practices tended to produce extreme cycles of activity throughout the day. Office areas became vacant after supper. These building practices led to a cessation of informal surveillance and to a reduction in the sense of community among residents. According to Jacobs, city streets were unsafe because they were deserted. Making them safe requires building design that allows the “eyes of the street” to monitor activity and continuous (24-hour) use of the streets. Urban planners in the sixties looked to the European city and its high levels of street activity as a model to counter the impersonal high rise residential areas which they saw as endemic to urban America. By having amenities such as cafes, schools and shops, people would be drawn to the street; the high levels of activity would allow constant monitoring and crime would be discouraged.

However, research provided only qualified support for this theory. Ramsey (1982) found that bars are trouble spots and crime centres. Engstad (1975) showed that commercial locations such as bars are associated with high levels of crime, and Greenberg, Rohe and Williams (1982) found that residential burglaries were higher near commercial areas. Mawby (1977) and Maxfield (1987) argued that more people can also lead to greater “incivility” and increased cover for many types of crime. The presence of more people does not necessarily increase feelings of community. Despite the lack of strong research support for Jacobs’ views about the relationship between city form and crime, she has had a significant impact on urban planning since the sixties. Her notion that increased activity at street levels would increase monitoring and control of anti-social activity is a forerunner of later developments which stress surveillance as a method for controlling crime.

Since the early sixties, significant resources have been expended on better understanding the relationship between the built environment and crime. Angel (1968) provided one of the earliest attempts to link specific physical forms to types of crime and coined the term “environmental prevention” which evolved into the current term “crime prevention through environmental design”. The most important work from this era is that of architect Oscar Newman (1972, 1973 and 1980). His term “defensible space” has become an important element of the urban planning and crime prevention language. Newman provided a detailed foundation for the relationship between environmental design and crime – a foundation which has frequently been oversimplified. In his later writings he moved beyond a purely physical design orientation to encompass social control and management issues, but he remains firmly fixed in urban

planning literature as the major proponent of the design of buildings and neighbourhoods as a method to reduce crime.

In this interpretation, the physical environment promotes a sense of territoriality and community among residents. Schneider and Pearcey (1996) have outlined the three inter-connected design principles of defensible space:

1. Providing a clear definition of controlled space;
2. Providing clearly marked transitional zones between private and public space; and
3. Designing space to maximize natural surveillance.

The application of these general principles has led to a mass of design manuals and specific directions to planners and builders. Newman also provided specific advice to public housing projects such as Clason Point Gardens in New York City where several simple measures were taken to convert formerly public space into clearly controlled private space. According to Newman and Franck (1980) the proportion of residents who felt they had the right to question strangers on project property almost doubled, and crime rates fell by half.

Notions of CPTED and defensible space may be more familiar to some than situational prevention, but they can be considered part of the situational approach. Ronald Clarke (1995: 96) has noted that both the CPTED and defensible space approaches are “more narrowly focused on the design of buildings and places, whereas situational prevention seeks to reduce opportunities for crime in all behavioural contexts”.

Planning and analysis: The keys to situational crime prevention

Unlike most types of crime prevention activities, situational prevention explicitly requires planning and analysis. A major difference between the situational approach and other crime prevention strategies is that the situational approach explicitly requires an analysis of specific crime situations, and develops prevention strategies and tactics that fit these specific circumstances. While strategies may be borrowed from elsewhere, this should not be done without assessing whether or not they fit the current problem and its community context. By definition, situational prevention means that the solution must be tailored to a particular situation that has facilitated criminal activity. The situational prevention model also stresses the need for a coordinated approach to developing and implementing solutions, and to evaluating results.

Crime analysis

Successful situational crime prevention strategies require careful analysis; knowing as much as possible about the crime and its social context can help determine the best prevention strategies. What do we need to know to develop these strategies?

- *Characteristics of the Victim or Target* – We need to understand why certain people or locations are vulnerable. If we find that night-time robbers are targeting gas bars with only one employee on duty, an obvious tactic might be to require two employees or some other form of security.
- *Offender Characteristics* – An awareness of factors such as the age, sex, criminal history, and the nature of travel to the crime target can help us to design prevention programs. The patterns of auto thefts committed by adolescent joyriders are very different than those of thefts committed by older professionals, and those who commit stranger assaults may have little in common with domestic violence offenders.
- *Community Characteristics (physical and social)* – Factors such as transportation and circulation patterns, type and condition of housing, concentration and types of businesses and industries, and community stability and engagement may facilitate crime.
- *Timing of the Offense* – Variations in patterns can be linked to the time of year or the time of day, and knowledge of these patterns can help to prevent crime. Thus shopping malls may increase security in their parking lots during the pre-Christmas season when car break-ins increase significantly.
- *Distinctive Methods of Committing Crimes* – These can identify vulnerability factors. If units in a housing complex are targeted for break-ins through basement windows, it may be a relatively simple matter to make these windows more secure. The current practice of illegally swiping credit cards through a magnetic card reader (which can easily be bought on the Internet) means that credit card companies will have to begin requiring a PIN number or even a biometric identifier along with the card.
- *Location of the Offense (Analysis of Crime ‘Hot Spots’)* – Many crime prevention strategies are based upon the location of the offense. If cars are being stolen during the day from commuter car parks, authorities can increase surveillance in the parking lot or provide exit screening.

- *Opportunity Factors* – A wide variety of factors may increase criminal opportunities. For example, if lighting in a downtown area is bad, pedestrians may be at risk. Some bank employees have discovered they could easily take money from inactive accounts as the account owners often did not pay much attention to their bank statements. Improved auditing procedures by the banks can help to stop this practice.

There are a wide range of sources of information about all these factors, including the police, municipal officials, social planning authorities, business owners, and school officials. Some innovative prevention programs have been developed by researchers who interviewed criminals to find out more about their perceptions of the targets they found attractive. The re-location of convenience store cash registers to a visible location near the door is one change that was made based on such interviews.

Techniques of situational crime prevention

Ronald Clarke (2005) has identified five categories of situational crime prevention techniques to guide those who are dealing with crime problems and has provided examples of strategies that have been used for each category (see also Brantingham, Brantingham and Taylor 2005 for a summary of these techniques). The five categories of techniques are:

- Increasing the effort required to commit a crime by target hardening or by controlling access to targets or the tools required to commit a crime.
- Increasing the risks by increasing levels of formal or informal surveillance or guardianship.
- Reducing the rewards by identifying property in order to facilitate recovery, by removing targets or by denying the benefits of crime.
- Reducing provocations by controlling for peer pressure or by reducing frustration or conflict.
- Removing excuses by setting clear rules and limits.

There have been hundreds of studies showing the effectiveness of situational prevention programs. Rather than trying to review these, I will list some of the research cited in a recent paper by Clarke (2005) to illustrate the potential of the approach:

- In the U.K. suicide rates declined when natural gas was detoxified, making it impossible for people to commit suicide by putting their heads in a gas oven.

- Bus robberies in New York were almost eliminated through implementing an exact fare system.
- U.S. cell phone companies were able to dramatically reduce fraudulent phone calls by developing 'anti-cloning' technology.
- Electronic tagging of library books has reduced theft from libraries.
- Better inventory control reduced employee thefts from an electronics retailer.
- Tighter procedures for mailing credit cards helped reduce rates of credit card fraud.

This work provides a strong basis for arguing that these types of techniques should form part of any comprehensive crime prevention initiative.

Criticisms of situational prevention

Situational prevention addresses symptoms, not causes

Laycock and Tilley (1995) have noted that many critics are uncomfortable with the view that opportunities cause crime. These critics feel that situational prevention is only a temporary solution and that social development is the only way to remove the root causes of crime and hence to reduce crime rates. While it would indeed be desirable to deal with crime by reducing the number of motivated offenders, there are several problems with this approach. First, while there is evidence that social development programs can work, these programs can be very difficult to implement. It can be challenging to implement a small-scale demonstration project, but it is much more difficult to try to change an entire school system or to ensure that expectant mothers across a large city receive visits from a nurse.

Second, major social programs are already targeted at many of the conditions that social development proponents are trying to change, so the incremental changes that can be achieved in the name of crime prevention are likely to be only marginal ones. Thus it may be possible to change the lives of a small number of people through social development programs, but it is much more difficult to expect these programs to have an impact on overall crime rates. CPSD programs also can take a long time to have an impact – it can be hard to try to explain to a group of seniors who are afraid of being mugged on their way to the supermarket that a pre-natal mentoring program for expectant mothers will ensure that the community will be safer in thirteen years when the children become teenagers. Further, the studies that show that CPSD approaches can be effective have typically been implemented only on a small scale. For example,

only 58 children were enrolled in the famous Perry Preschool Program which is justifiably cited in virtually every discussion of crime prevention through social development. While the results of this project are indeed very impressive (Schweinhart et. al. 2005), 40 years after the project the program has never been implemented on a broad scale, so we do not know if it could be adapted across a whole school system. By contrast, situational programs can have very quick results.

Situational programs simply displace crimes

Some critics have said that if effective situational programs are established criminals will simply move to other areas or to other types of offenses. There certainly are examples of situational programs that result in crime displacement. For example, if a few homes on a block have alarm systems potential burglars can easily move to adjoining houses. Closing down an urban drug market will just move the crime because addicts have a non-elastic demand for drugs. However, research has found that displacement is almost never total and that in most cases it does not have major impact. In fact some studies have found that situational programs can have a 'diffusion of benefits' in which crime reductions are found in nearby areas where the programs have not been implemented. The most thorough review on this issue was conducted by Hesseling (1994) who examined 55 studies of situational prevention programs. In 22 of these programs there was no evidence of displacement (and in 6 of these there was evidence of a diffusion of benefits) while in 33 there was some displacement but this was usually very limited.

Situational crime prevention and social policy

Politicians and many members of the public have focused more attention on increasing penalties than on preventing crime despite a large body of research demonstrating that locking people up is not a cost-effective way of reducing crime (Waller 2006). Situational approaches have also suffered from the fact that many criminologists have not been comfortable with a theoretical perspective that did not focus on offenders and victims, but rather on the situational context. There have also been concerns about whether situational techniques may lead to a fortress society or to a 'big brother' state where our actions are always subject to scrutiny. Finally, many practitioners and academics have viewed social development as the only acceptable way of preventing crime. They have gone from the reasonable position that society needs to do something about the root causes of crime to the not so reasonable position that social development programs are the only ones that should be funded.

In fact, developmental and situational approaches are complementary. We can distinguish between ‘criminal involvement’ and ‘criminal events’ (Clarke 1995). Criminal involvement relates to criminal careers and is appropriately addressed by social development approaches. Criminal events are short-term acts that may be more appropriately addressed by situational prevention.

Moreover, while there is evidence that social development programs can be effective (see Welsh 2007, this volume), these programs can be very complex and costly, very difficult to implement, and their success is far from certain. Also, even if all the changes proposed in a social development ‘wish list’ could be implemented, the pool of motivated offenders would only be reduced not eliminated.

In some respects the distinction between situational and social development approaches may be an artificial one. Situational strategies may actually play a critical role in the social development of communities. For example, in their discussion of the problem of youth violence in the United States, Moore and Tonry (1998) note the importance of cultural supports for violence. They feel that a culture of violence has grown up in some communities because of the emergence of violent street drug markets, particularly those associated with crack cocaine. Young people growing up in such communities will find violence very difficult to resist. In these circumstances, creating a safe, orderly environment is a necessary first step toward changing the neighbourhood. In many high crime and socially disorganized communities, situational and police strategies may actually be vital components of a social development strategy. Unless order is first restored, local residents and organizations will be unable to rebuild their communities. This view is supported by the results of a study by Painter and Farrington (1997) who showed that improving street lighting reduced crime significantly in a public housing project compared to a control project where the lighting was not changed. Not only did crime go down, but residents reported feeling much safer, and pedestrian traffic increased. Somewhat surprisingly, rather than congregating at the nearby poorly-lighted control estate, the numbers of young people who gathered at night in the experimental estate actually increased significantly. Thus the improved lighting helped to strengthen the social capital of the estate and to reduce crime. Situational strategies can serve as the catalysts needed to initiate a ‘virtuous cycle’ of prevention that can lead to changes that would be categorized as social development.

The most sensible strategy to pursue is one that recognizes that all crime prevention strategies have their strengths and weaknesses. A comprehensive

strategy should include prevention programs that involve cooperation among different levels of government and other agencies and groups that can contribute to the solution; that are targeted to areas where they are most needed; that use a broad range of prevention approaches tailored to the specific needs of the communities; that draw upon programs that have been shown to be effective in other places; and that give the community a meaningful role in prevention.

Comprehensive strategies deliver an integrated series of programs by coordinating the efforts of a broad range of partners and participants. Comprehensive planning for crime prevention emphasizes the need for a detailed understanding of the problem grounded in knowledge of the social and physical environment in the local neighbourhoods in which the problem occurs, and the financial and human resources available to respond to the problem. This approach also stresses the need for a coordinated approach to developing and implementing solutions and the evaluation of the results.

Since it does make up an important component of a sound crime prevention strategy, how can we ensure that Canadians benefit from the demonstrable value of situational prevention? I would make four recommendations in this area.

1. The vision of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) should expand to include situational approaches and initiatives.

Situational crime prevention has been much more widely-accepted in Europe than in Canada or the United States. The technique was originally developed by the Home Office in the United Kingdom and the British government has continued to support both the development of knowledge and the practice of situational prevention. The Netherlands and Sweden both have government-supported organizations that support situational prevention (Clarke 1995). In contrast, until very recently the National Crime Prevention Centre supported only social development programs and would not provide funding for situational strategies.

2. The National Crime Prevention Strategy must also become more reliant on evidence-based strategies.

John Eck has set out the criteria for judging proposed prevention programs (2005: 700). Moving from the specific to the general, we would want evidence that shows that:

- a) For a specific crime problem an intervention is the appropriate choice;
- b) The application of this intervention resulted in the prevention of the type of crime we are interested in; and
- c) If we applied the intervention again we will obtain similar results.

Another change that should have a positive impact on situational prevention is the decision to focus more on sustainability by funding longer-term projects. It should be noted here that the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) is in the process of making these changes. Since their 2005 renewal, NCPC has developed plans to fund evidence-based comprehensive prevention initiatives and to work with other levels of government to try to ensure sustainability (National Crime Prevention Centre 2006)

3. *The NCPS should provide funding for research and development of situational strategies.*

While the federal government should have leadership role in this activity through the National Crime Prevention Centre, all levels of government should share the responsibility for developing effective prevention strategies. In addition to the involvement of the department of Public Safety through the NCPC, other government departments can also be involved. For example, Transport Canada was responsible for legislation requiring vehicle immobilizers in all new vehicles beginning with the 2008 model year. Many other situational measures could fall under the jurisdiction of one or more of the three levels of government.

The private sector may also have a role to play in developing situational prevention techniques. Many corporations such as 7-Eleven and credit card companies have done research and established situational programs to prevent losses to their businesses. Other companies, such as vehicle immobilizer manufacturers and those conducting research on biometric security devices see potential profits in developing new products and services that will improve security levels. While the National Crime Prevention Centre did not have great success involving the private sector in its social development programs, there is the potential for developing partnerships in the area of situational prevention given that these programs may have more immediate impacts on the corporate bottom line.

4. *Building the expertise and community capacity needed to enhance situational prevention.*

While situational methods have had some success in Canada, their impact has been limited because communities lack the expertise and the capacity to develop these programs. This is another task in which the NCPC can take a lead role through the strong links it has developed with partners such as Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, as well as with new partners who can help advance the state of situational crime prevention. A major part of the task of building capacity will be to gather evidence about the effectiveness of situational strategies so that sound programs can be adapted for use elsewhere and ineffective programs ended.

The bottom line is that we are not likely to reap the full benefits of investing in crime prevention unless we more systematically include situational approaches and tactics in our planning and implementation of initiatives designed to reduce crime and victimization.

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