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Learning from the Past – Planning for the Future

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Introduction to the inaugural volume of the IPCR

There is a growing body of research evidence that confirms what we know from both practical experience and common sense – crime prevention works. Unfortunately, we are having a great deal of difficulty translating the results of this research into policy and practice. In spite of what we have learned, we continue to invest massively in traditional and reactive responses to crime, victimization and insecurity. Crime prevention remains relatively marginal to the main activities of the criminal justice system, and it has not yet succeeded in overcoming all the sources of resistance to this new way of doing the business of public safety.

The creation of the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (IPC) at the University of Ottawa is our attempt to contribute to redressing this situation. The mission of the IPC is to strengthen Canada's capacity to use evidence and knowledge in order to reduce rates of crime and victimization and levels of fear and insecurity. We have four main objectives:

1. To bring together, and increase, scientific knowledge related to crime and prevention.
2. To make this knowledge accessible to policy-makers, practitioners, the media and the general public.
3. To develop the capacity of Canadians to use this knowledge effectively.
4. To help all orders of government, civil society and the general public to put this knowledge to use.

This inaugural volume of the Institute for the Prevention of Crime Review (ICPR) is one component of a range of IPC activities designed to help us accomplish our objectives.¹ Our goal in publishing the IPCR is to produce and distribute state-of-the-art reviews by experts in the field of prevention. Our attention will be directed to two main issues. The first focuses on the best evidence on what works, or at least what is promising, in the area of the reduction of crime, victimization and insecurity – what kinds of lessons have we learned about prevention? The second deals with the evidence on how to design and implement successful initiatives – how can we adapt or transfer successful programs to problems in different communities?

The theme of this first issue is “Learning from the past – Planning for the future”. The choice of this theme reflects the concern that, as alluded to earlier, crime prevention still has a long way to go to be accepted (and financed) as a full partner in the criminal justice system, a so-called fourth pillar alongside the police, the courts and corrections. Our aim is to take stock of where we stand in a few selected areas of prevention (at least to the extent possible in so brief an issue). To this end, each of the authors was asked, albeit in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, to rise to the following challenge: “If you have learned so much about crime and prevention, what should I know and what should I do?” The authors took the bait and rose to the occasion. We think the results are both informative and, often, provocative.

We also had the opportunity to bring all the authors together for a two day editorial committee workshop at the University of Ottawa where they were able to circulate the drafts of their articles and make a presentation of its contents to their fellow participants. The workshop allowed for a lot of discussion and debate over the current status and the prospects for crime prevention.

In spite of the diversity in the focus of the different articles, the articles and the workshop reveal a significant degree of consensus over a number of issues. The common theme is that the phenomena of crime, victimization and insecurity require solutions that are as complex and as integrated as the problems in question. The quest for a simple answer is illusory, and results in wasted money and lost opportunities. This theme played out over at least four key dimensions of a prevention strategy. Each is discussed below.

¹ For a more complete description of the IPC and of its activities, readers are invited to visit our web site at: www.prevention-crime.ca

The definition of crime prevention

We are still a long way from achieving a consensus over the goals of prevention, or the best ways of achieving them. Given that the experts can't agree, it is hardly surprising that the public remains somewhat skeptical and confused. For the moment, prevention is a popular but ambiguous notion. In order to make progress, we must agree on an integrating framework, a vision if you will, of how to draw upon the best and most promising aspects of what may be competing schools. It is unlikely that any one approach, be it developmental, social, situational or otherwise, has all the answers. We need a paradigm that brings these various strategic approaches together more effectively into a framework for understanding the problem, and for designing and implementing comprehensive solutions.

The need for public engagement

There is a lot of support for prevention, even when people are asked to select between prevention and enforcement. But at this point, there seems to be more talk than action. The challenge is to convert public attitudes into political support and active engagement. This is made all the more difficult in current times when the public and the political realms have so clearly shifted to more reactive and punitive tactics. The support for prevention is broad and consistent, but we need a stronger institutional base for prevention and more effective leadership and salesmanship if we are to make further progress on a prevention agenda.

The reliance on communities

Crime prevention is a domain that is increasingly reliant on communities and local governments for resources. This is so largely by default: central orders of government have proven reluctant to invest in new entitlements, or to divert resources from existing components of the system, and the private sector has seen only limited opportunities for profit in this area. The result is that communities have largely been left on their own. The sad truth is that the consequence is a tendency to reduce crime prevention to only those programs that communities are willing and able to deliver. Too often, the result is an over-reliance on the types of “small” programs that the evidence indicates do not work. Even in the best case scenario, the financial realities are usually such that programs are fragmented and haphazard, and tend to have a relatively short life span. It also means the benefits of prevention tend to accrue disproportionately to those who can afford to do things right rather than to

the communities that need help the most. This may contribute to increasing social inequality rather than reducing it.

Resistance to change

Crime prevention continues to be marginal to power, and its proponents control neither the carrot of vast resources nor the big stick of control and accountability. As a result, justice organizations have tended to see it as more or less peripheral to their mainstream activities. The organizational imperative for survival, and the desires of both organizations and their workers to control their fate, combine to contribute to a climate of resistance to change. This is complicated by the fact that most of these organizations are reluctant to state their goals or objectives in measurable impact terms. The focus continues to be on inputs and outputs, rather than on the measurable impacts of initiatives on crime reduction or public safety. The seduction of prevention is the promise of a more effective and efficient response to crime, but the failure to put in place the conditions for valid benefit-cost analyses makes it difficult to make a compelling case in this regard.

Learning from the past – Planning for the future

The articles in this volume, each in their own way, take on some of these issues. The authors have lent their expertise to helping us understand what is going on now in their area, and what the consequences might be, and have given voice to how they think we could take steps toward doing better. Readers can judge the results for themselves by having a look at the abstracts and through a more in-depth reading of the articles. We at the IPC hope you will find the material useful and stimulating – we also hope that it will help advance the case for a more evidence-based approach to responding to the problem of crime.

Police Innovation Post 1980: Assessing Effectiveness and Equity Concerns in the Information Technology Era

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article dresse un portrait théorique, pratique et évaluatif de quelques unes des principales innovations survenues au sein de la police depuis les dernières décennies. Tout d'abord, il sera question de la première génération de réformes comme la police communautaire, la police orientée vers la résolution des problèmes et la théorie *Broken Windows*. La deuxième génération compte des innovations plus récentes liées au développement des sciences informatiques (*information technology policing*) et qui comprend l'utilisation de *Compstat* et l'examen des « points chauds » (*hot spots policing*), parmi d'autres services de bases de données. Certaines innovations se sont avérées efficaces, ou au moins prometteuses, sous certaines conditions. Néanmoins, il serait important d'en apprendre plus au sujet des coûts et des conséquences de ce type d'initiatives. En guise de conclusion, cet article propose quelques directives pour guider les innovations policières dans les années à venir.

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the theory, practice and evaluation research behind some of the major innovations in policing in recent decades. The paper begins with a focus on first generation reforms such as community or problem-oriented policing, and broken windows policing. It then turns to an examination of the more recent innovations that can be