

Theories of Crime Prevention

Crime is generally referring to actions/inactions that break the law. This may include anti-social behaviours and other types of crimes violent and non-violent (Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014). It has been established that the initial founding principles of Policing in the UK are based on preventative policing. This Principle is even more necessary in a very dynamic and digital world today. This paper examines the principles and theories of Crime prevention and their impact/use in modern-day police practices. A focus will be made on the Situational Theory, drawing details from correlation in evidence-based policing. A conclusion will focus on the key concept that is likely to be carried forward in future generations of policing.

There is no recognised widely accepted definition of the phrase “Crime Prevention” (Schneider, 2009), but there have been various efforts made worldwide to reduce and curtail the growth/spread of crime. In 2016, the UK Home office released a strategy to aid in crime prevention in society (Home Office, 2016). This document set out six key drivers believed/identified to be the main crime instigators including alcohol, character, drugs, profit, opportunity, and the effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System. (Home Office, 2016). The details aimed to look at crime prevention holistically, from the root cause analysis to the methods used in committing a crime, identification of a collaborative effort across multi-agencies for the implementation and enforcement of the law and structure behind this. This document was to set out proposals to aid in deterrence/making crimes less attractive. It is notable that included consideration towards the prevention of cybercrimes. It was pointed out that

Crime Prevention required a combined effort across various structures, and this was the Home office's way of recognising and contributing to that. The proposals set up were not to interfere with policing in any way and did not replace the strategies adopted in policing practice.

There are theories of crime prevention recognised in policing that form the basis of most interventions/preventative measures put in place depending on locality. Most of these theories can be distinctly categorised under four main areas namely:

- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) (Couzens et al, 2005)
- Defensible Space (Newman, 1972)
- Situational Crime Prevention Theory (College of Policing, 2022)
- The Broken Windows Theory (Kelling and Wilson, 1982)

Each of these theories has strategies that are applied in practical policing with some fundamental examples.

CPTED

The theory of Preventing Crime by Environmental Design involves the use of the physical environment and other physical components to form interventions and crime prevention strategies. These may include the use of

- Access Control to prevent unsupervised access to certain areas. This would also mean positioning vulnerable individuals away from high-target areas where they are more likely to fall victim to crime.
- Surveillance of the environment to create a monitoring and control awareness as a deterrent to criminals. This may be the physical use of guards or security personnel and or the use of technology such as surveillance gadgets, sensors, alarms and cameras.
- Territorial Reinforcement to clearly mark and define spaces for instance public and private/restricted areas.
- Space Management to reflect the standard and culture of that environment.
- Utilisation of social resources to prevent crime, these may include social cohesion, neighbourhood watch, community culture events, and clear threshold capacities.

This Theory addresses the natural/physical environment of crime/criminal activities and not the source/individual involved, hence it may be devoid of the capability to get to the foundation of crime causation in that environment.

Defensible Space

This theory is largely based on the architectural build of an environment, it reflects the profession of the original proponent Oscar Newman who was an architect. He was focused on making a safe housing environment for residents of an area. One of the ways to achieve this was to encourage social inclusion and communication amongst people, thereby making them aware of their environment and alert to any changes that may disrupt a safe community. Similar to the CPTED theory above, this is also leaning more towards structural intervention/prevention and not a root cause prevention strategy.

The Broken Window Theory

This theory refers to an approach of fixing any damage immediately it occurs to reflect the community culture/expectations and hopefully serve as a deterrent to criminal activities. It can be literally interpreted to mean each glass broken is immediately fixed and not left to deface the environment and attract further criminal activities. It also portrays the possibility of surveillance in an area, a thought that may dissuade criminals from taking a risk. The College of Policing (2022) have identified this alongside “Zero-Tolerance Policing”. The latter means there is no room for getting away with even a minor crime thereby sending a message that crime is not tolerated at any level. This has been criticised to be a more aggressive approach devoid of any social tolerance by the police (Dar and Van der Weer, 2013)

Situational Crime Prevention Theory

The theory is focused on investigating the method of committing a crime in an area, and then building prevention/intervention strategies around this to deter criminal activities. First recognised in the 1980's the aim was centred on raising the punishment stakes for crimes committed thereby making it riskier for offenders to attempt and also reducing the available opportunities/avenues

to commit crimes. The College of Policing (2022) has further categorised this into two sub-theories:

- Rational Choice theory: indicating the offenders are likely to rationalise the opportunity and risk before deciding to embark on any criminal activity
- Routine Activity Theory: indicating that the presence of capable guardians near potential victims and other equally threatening barriers that may cause harm/damage to the offender may be a good deterrence to crime.

There are 25 identified techniques for the implementation of Situational Crime Prevention, and these can be summarised in the following five categories:

- Measures to increase risks for offenders: this includes utilising formal/ natural surveillance such as good lighting, alarms, and space design, reducing anonymity, engaging location/facility managers, and extending guardianship.
- Measures to reduce opportunities and increase effort such as controlled facilities access, marked entrance and exit points, tools and weapons, and hardening target areas/object by reinforcement of security measures.
- Measures to reduce rewards or proceeds to be derived from the crime such as concealing/removing targets,
- Measures to remove provocations for criminal activities such as the use of positive social engagement mechanisms to reduce frustrations, prevent disputes, neutralise pressure and discourage imitation.
- Measures to prohibit excuses for any crime using rules/legislation, clear instructions with sanctions, request compliance and prohibitions.

There have been efforts made by the Government to adopt a multi-agency approach to the prevention of crime, including the use of legislation as a tool. Some other notable legislations include the Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) 1998, and the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998. This has given rise to the question of whether crime prevention theories and strategies can legally be enforceable as law or are merely

existing rhetoric (Moss and Stevens, 2006). This has been analysed from a viewpoint of the legislation requiring the enforcement to go beyond the Police, who are traditionally recognised as the enforcers of the Law in society. There has been the involvement of Local Authorities who sought to incorporate legal elements as a preventative measure in town planning activities and implementation. It has been opined citing relevant case law such as *Aquarium Entertainments Ltd v. Brighton and Hove Council* (2000) that the application of the CDA 1998 has so far been unsuccessful in reducing crime via adoption in planning activities. It is therefore implied that there must be a strong research base and implementation trial to inform which preventative approach is relevant in any area.

Evidence-based Policing is hinged on the concept of utilising academic research and extensive case studies to make effective decisions, policies and strategies in policing. Therefore evidence-based strategies for crime prevention will be heavily reliant on trialled interventions with proven effectiveness as a crime prevention approach. This means the Police will at any point in time use the best approach relevant to any given situation/environment/geographical location. This is a very significant factor that considers other important variables that may affect the rate of crime such as demographics, education, social and cultural values and education in an area. Other important areas in recent years in line with the global digital transformation are the rise of cybercrime and the efforts to curtail and prevent this.

Goldstein (1990) in introducing the Problem-oriented policing approach identified the need for police engagement with other agencies, utilising a scientific approach to discover effective strategies for policing and crime prevention. The utilisation of the evidence-based approach means there is a tailored and effective analysis of the problem and all considerable factors in deciding the most effective strategy to adopt at any time. This is an important mindset to inculcate into new recruits who are also more adept with the technological changes and digital advancements of this modern age. An innovative method of evidence-based policing is a key strategy that will also enable the Police to gradually move towards the UN SDG Goals and the UK Government Digital Strategy implementation across all arms of government (Policing Vision, 2025).

In conclusion, the efforts of the Government, specifically the Home Office to Recruit new education requirements and training strategies for the Police at all levels is a positive indicator of the attempt to educate, inform and implement effective preventative measures in policing. The Policing Vision further emphasises the co-production approach of the community and the Police in tackling crime prevention more effectively in the future, also by utilising more innovative and digital tools. Like every other foundation, this development may take time and will even evolve more as the digital world is fast-paced. It is therefore imperative that the existing leadership are effectively included in all new training and development strategies and the scientific approach effectively utilised alongside effective traditional methods. It will take a while for new recruits who may be more technically advanced to grow to leadership positions, therefore it is important to also consider the internal policing structure and perhaps mentoring approach to also build trust within the police and encourage innovative growth just as the police aims to build trust and connect with the society.

There is no singular approach to be identified as the best as shown in this research, therefore effective crime prevention is a multi-dimensional approach that requires the cooperation of all identified stakeholders at any point in time.

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