

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND THE REDUCTION AND PREVENTION OF CRIME - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR TRAINING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL DISCIPLINE

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Paul Ekblom

Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate

Offenders and Corrections Unit

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Background note:

*This paper builds on a range of crime reduction experience in the Home Office and elsewhere, and is the subject of continuing work within RSD. As such it may be updated. It was prepared as background material for the Sub-Group on Education and Training of the Community Safety Guidance Co-ordinating Group for the Crime and Disorder Legislation, and drew on the experiences of members of the Sub-Group and others. It should be read in conjunction with the **Guidance on Education and Training** and the **Guidance on Audits** for local partnerships.*

Education and training for what? The need for conceptual clarity in planning and implementing interventions in crime prevention, crime reduction and community safety

There is an emerging consensus in the field of crime prevention, crime reduction and community safety that cost-effective and appropriate practical action must be evidence-based as well as experience-based. It must also derive from **clear principles** reflecting an understanding of the causes of crime and how to intervene in those causes in specific contexts. These are as much core elements of a professional discipline of community safety as their equivalents would be for example in health sciences. Development of such a discipline offers a way of reconciling the need for well-targeted, good quality interventions against crime with maximum local autonomy in identifying solutions and implementing them.

The key to developing community safety as a discipline is training, education, and briefing. This applies whether it involves educating dedicated expert practitioners or equipping, say, architects or social workers with relevant knowledge. An underpinning of clear and consistent principles is vital both to impart ideas efficiently and to set up an infrastructure of information systems to keep experienced practitioners up to date in a changing world. This has relevance both to the short-term requirements of the Crime & Disorder legislation, and, for the longer-term, to establish a sustainable competence-based system of training and education through the Community Justice National Training Organisation.

To establish these principles requires a body of reliable knowledge of 'what works, in what context, by what mechanisms and at what cost'. (This must be built up through systematic evaluation, in which local partnerships have a collective interest.) It also needs a sound conceptual framework: i) to draw diverse findings and theories together; and ii) to promote effective *local* determination of tasks by providing clarity and consistency in the education and training of practitioners, managers and strategists without imposing undue restriction on the scope of interventions they employ to reduce crime and disorder. The aim of this paper is to set out such a framework, building on previous efforts within crime prevention theory and experience of practical action such as the Safer Cities Programme.

Assembling such a framework is challenging. Crime prevention and community safety cover an extremely wide range of activities; labels and classifications proliferate and terms are subject to fashion and preference. The unhelpful terms 'social' and 'physical' in particular, besides being vague, symbolise a serious cultural divide between policymakers, practitioners and criminologists who favour one or the other (for that matter, the terms are not strictly opposites as is often implied). There is a similar divide between those with a justice-based focus and those who see crime prevention and community safety as a largely separate field of action.

In seeking to address this there is, however, no hidden agenda to force local partnerships to adhere to strict boundaries - only a concern that the requirements of the legislation are met. No one theory, or practical approach, should ever monopolise thinking. Situational and offender-oriented approaches to crime and disorder (and implementation of these at individual, institutional and community levels) must both be considered for incorporation in local strategies without prejudging 'best value'. Crime prevention, which is *forward-looking*, has to be linked to the wider concepts of crime reduction and crime control. (These are not merely alternative labels but actually describe distinct approaches. Since crime prevention forms an integral part of activities to achieve crime reduction and community safety, the relationship between these needs to be clear.) Prevention must also be linked to the mainly *retrospective* criminal justice and victim support systems. This connection follows from both the general nature of the local community safety partnerships and the specific criminal justice provisions that form the bulk of the Crime and Disorder Legislation. (It is helpful to distinguish these past, present and future perspectives, and the criminal events to which they apply. Reaction to *past* crimes prevents *future* crimes - victims shut the stable door before the *next* horse bolts, and offenders are deterred through anticipation of future punishment. Intervention in *present*, ongoing, crimes similarly prevents *future* offending.)

The rest of this paper conveys these requirements more vividly by presenting a conceptual map of crime prevention and community safety. It also highlights links to Criminal Justice.

Crime prevention

Crime prevention focuses on the future. It is *about reducing the likelihood and seriousness of criminal and disorderly events by intervening in their causes*.

These causes are many and complex, and can be quite remote - such as children's early upbringing, socioeconomic influences generating deprivation and inequality, or even the market price for car spare parts. But the remoter influences all act through chains of cause and effect, which ultimately channel through a common set of **immediate precursors** that combine to generate the criminal or disorderly event. (This is, in effect, where all theories of crime have to converge.) Here, an **offender** encounters, seeks out or engineers a crime **situation** comprising a suitable **target** of crime, in a favourable **environment** and in the absence of capable **preventers** (or guardians). This can be called the **conjunction of criminal opportunity**.

The conjunction of criminal opportunity

We can look at the precursors in more detail. For a crime to occur:

- The potential **offender** must be ready, willing, able and equipped for crime:
 - having a **predisposition** for crime (criminality)

- lacking **resources to avoid crime** (such as ability to restrain impulses, exercise social skills and gain a legitimate living)
 - being currently **ready to offend** (eg motivated by boredom, shortage of money or need for drugs, being in a conflicting relationship, being in a particular emotional state)
 - having the **resources for crime** (skills, inside knowledge, criminal contacts, tools, weapons etc)
 - **anticipating** that risk and effort are minimal enough and reward sufficient to decide to act
 - being **present** in the situation or otherwise able to influence it (eg obscene telephone call or hacking computer via Internet)
- **crime preventers** must be absent, incapable, or at least not credible as a threat. Preventers can be anyone with a formal crime prevention responsibility (police, community safety staff, concierges) or an informal one (residents, parents, teachers or employees in general). In advance of the criminal event preventers can reduce its likelihood by shaping the situation (eg by locking doors) or influencing the offender (eg by applying social pressure not to steal). They can intervene during the event (defending themselves or their property, or that of others) or react after it. The preventers' *potential* to intervene and react can influence the *current* crime event through the offender's anticipation ('Will the victim or passers-by overpower me? Will I be identified to the police?'). It can also influence the *next* event by the action taken (eg victims securing their house against repeat burglary, or reporting to the police to initiate detection, criminal proceedings and punishment).
 - **crime promoters** by contrast increase the likelihood of a criminal event by careless or provocative behaviour or more practical contributions such as supplying weapons or buying stolen goods.
 - the **target** of crime may be human, physical property, data, environmental or service-related.. Targets must be attractive or provocative, and vulnerable.
 - the target may be sited within a vulnerable and perhaps attractive **target enclosure** such as a fenced compound, building or safe.
 - the whole situation is located within a broader physical and social **environment** which helps the offender (access, concealment, escape), hinders preventers or brings them together; and may motivate offending particularly through conflict (eg thin party walls between flats causing disputes over noise).

Some crimes and disorderly events, by their definition in law, do not involve a target at all, but merely comprise inappropriate behaviour (disorder, nuisance, possession of proscribed drugs) - but the rest of the picture applies. **Victims** of crime play remarkably diverse roles: owner of the target of property crime, target of crime against the person, crime preventer and (in the case of provocation) crime promoter.

The conjunction is brought together through social, economic and psychological processes ranging from the structure of society and the market to victims' and offenders' current life circumstances, routines and lifestyle. From the **offender's** perspective, the aim is to exploit, or otherwise cope with, the situation using available resources to maximise material, psychological or social reward from the crime whilst minimising effort and the risk of detection and punishment. This process ranges from the rational, sophisticated and organised planning of a range of 'scenes' (eg seeking out target bank, stealing getaway car, executing robbery, escaping and disposing of the proceeds), to the opportunist search for a house with an open window, or to an impulsive violent retaliation for an insult just received.

Disrupting the conjunction: crime prevention

From the **preventer's** perspective the aim is to counter these processes by **interventions** which ultimately **disrupt** the conjunction of criminal opportunity, either by changing the situational or offender-related precursors in advance of the criminal event, or by preventing them coming together.

The point of intervention may be remote (eg changing the predisposition for crime by community-level action to influence children's upbringing) or immediate (eg occupying young people's leisure time more constructively to prevent vandalism, or installing screens in buses to prevent assaults on drivers). Where the causes are reliably known or self-evident, preventers can tackle them explicitly. With remoter influences, however, the causes themselves may not have been conclusively established and the only indications available to act upon may be so-called *risk factors* - positive correlates of offending such as poor parental discipline - and *protective factors* or negative correlates such as good social bonding with teachers.

The *professional* preventer may directly intervene in the chain of cause and effect leading to the criminal event (eg installing an alarm system or working to reduce a youth's aggression). But more often, the professional's role is to **act at a distance** - to motivate, inform and assist other, often informal, preventers (such as families, teachers or site managers) to implement it.

Figure 1 shows the conjunction of criminal opportunity and maps onto it the entire field of crime prevention. Working outwards from the **crime or disorder event** at the centre, it shows the full range of **immediate precursors** of the criminal event (arranged under Situation and Offender), and beyond these the corresponding types of **crime prevention interventions** that disrupt or divert the precursors at some point 'upstream'. The diagram is of course a simplification. Even quite narrow prime prevention actions may work through several interventions/ disruptions simultaneously (eg target hardening may both physically block a crime and discourage the offender from attempting it; or a 'wheels' club for convicted joyriders may involve remedial changes to criminal attitudes, supplying skills for holding down a legitimate job and finding constructive ways of occupying time) but these are not shown.

[Figure 1 here - scanned in]

Competences for crime prevention

As the main Guidance on training shows, the range of competences required of practitioners in the crime prevention/reduction and community safety field is extremely wide. But the central defining features of professional practice in this area must be a thorough working knowledge of:

- the causes of criminal and disorderly events, risk and protective factors
- the offender's perspective on crime opportunities - risk of punishment, effort and reward
- evidence-based interventions, and how these work in particular contexts
- implementation both directly and through 'action at a distance' - getting other people or organisations to deliver the interventions - and the perspective of these front-line preventers themselves

In identifying the core competences for prevention, experience suggests that a 'cookbook' approach - rigidly applying preventive methods drawn from a limited repertoire - is inadequate. The ability to apply theoretically sound principles through a practical, problem-oriented approach is vital. This approach has become known simply as the **preventive process** (a term which has close affiliations with Problem-Oriented Policing). It is the tactical equivalent of the strategic process set out in the Guidance on Audits, and involves several stages:

- homing in on specific crime and disorder problems identified and targeted through the strategic Audit and target-setting process, by collecting and analysing more detailed local information
- local target setting

- devising preventive action closely tailored to the specific circumstances, with interventions based on evidence of effectiveness and/or through application of sound principles
- implementing the action
- monitoring, evaluating the action and its impact on the local and strategic crime targets, tuning, and reviewing

Gearing up against crime: keeping up with changing opportunities and adaptive offenders

The preventive process is a way of forestalling future crime by identifying risks on the basis of past patterns of offending. **Anticipatory prevention** tracks new **emerging crime problems** and new **potential offenders** - the latter through **audits of risk and protective factors** (affecting individuals, particular jobs that expose employees to temptation, or whole neighbourhoods). It also scans further ahead to unfolding trends (such as demographic growth in an area's youth population), new causes and new patterns of crime. It keeps alert to the **obsolescence** of existing crime prevention methods as adaptive offenders find ways round them and perhaps exploit new tools (such as cordless drills or colour photocopiers). Within this context **crime impact assessment** can play a role similar to environmental impact assessment - in such fields as planning decisions (for example, what are the crime consequences of siting a particular housing estate next to a particular industrial estate?), proposed changes to local policies on employment or housing allocation, or the design of buildings and the surrounding environment. Competence in crime impact assessment not only prepares local or national partners for the future, but also helps foster alertness to crime and disorder issues throughout their organisations.

Crime reduction

Crime reduction is closely related to prevention and can be characterised by the same framework. But it is a wider concept, encompassing both the **future** orientation of prevention, and action in the **present** to frustrate specific crimes as they happen - for example through police operations. It involves *reducing the likelihood and seriousness of criminal and disorderly events by intervention in their causes, or by intervening directly in the events themselves*. The focus is thus on crime *and* the causes of crime.

The interventions act to influence both offenders and immediate crime situations at many levels in society:

- individual situations/places and offenders
- family
- peer groups
- institutions, including schools and companies
- local communities
- regional, national and international

Following a public-health distinction widely-used in crime prevention, crime reduction may be:

- **primary** - focusing on the general population of potential offenders, or of potential human and material targets of crime
- **secondary** - focusing on those at particular risk of offending or of victimisation
- **tertiary** - focusing on those already convicted or victimised

At its widest, reduction links to empowerment of citizens and institutions to reduce crime and disorder through informal social control and protective behaviour. It also connects with conflict resolution and depends on broader social and economic policy and practice. It follows that the competences and knowledge of the profession as a whole - covering both principles of prevention/reduction and how to

apply them in these very different contexts - need to be extremely wide-ranging. It is unlikely, though, that any one individual would have to cover the whole spectrum of professional skills.

Crime reduction and the Criminal Justice System

The Criminal Justice System (CJS) focuses its procedures on dealing with *past* wrongs in dealing equitably with those coming before the courts and maintaining public confidence by imposing punishment commensurate with the offence. In dispensing fair and satisfying justice, the judicial and penal process reduces the pressure for crime proliferation through vigilantism and revenge and reinforces the moral order that underlies self-control and informal social controls. Reaction (or '**repression**' in European circles), also has the aim of reducing present and future crime through incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation. **Incapacitation** within the CJS (imprisonment, driving bans or electronic tagging) aims to exclude convicted offenders from crime situations. **Deterrence** as delivered by the CJS - the anticipation and fear of being caught by the police and judicially punished - seeks to influence *convicted* offenders' decisions to commit the *next* crime and through example, *potential* offenders' decisions to commit any crime. In theory, at least, it reinforces much of situational prevention which relies on heightening perceived risk of apprehension. More broadly speaking, however, current research evidence suggests that *increased* use of the CJS as a crime reduction tool is unlikely to be cost effective.

For constitutional reasons, **Judicial crime reduction** as just described is tightly circumscribed, and for the most part is difficult to link explicitly with partnership activities. However, application of specific civil and criminal legal powers to bind over to keep the peace, evict noisy neighbours or close down unruly pubs may form part of a wider local crime reduction strategy. Indeed, legal remedies of this kind feature prominently elsewhere in the Crime and Disorder legislation. Conflict resolution through **civil** law, informal mediation, restitution or the planning process can also reduce violence and criminal damage between neighbours, or landlords and tenants.

The various agencies involved in the CJS - prison, police, probation - also implement a range of activities which are intended to deflect groups at risk of committing crime or to rehabilitate existing offenders. These operate, for example, by altering the predisposition or motivation to offend or supplying skills and the social and economic opportunities to avoid offending and go straight. Supervision in the community, for example, through probation services, may set the scene for efforts to resolve problems in offenders' life circumstances (such as unemployment) which may be motivating them to commit crime. And the police, of course, patrol the streets, frustrate offenders' preparations for crime, intervene in ongoing crimes, administer formal cautions and advise on prevention. Due to their significant impact on individual liberty and privacy, these activities are subject to stringent procedural checks and balances and are often formally linked to the penal process. Together they might be called **Parajudicial crime reduction**. Competence in these areas comes under the core education and training that the relevant organisations provide. But special knowledge and skills are required for partnership work; and co-ordinators and managers in strategic roles in local partnerships need to be equipped with the ability to take an overview of *all* the tools in the crime reduction toolkit.

Crime control

Crime reduction (and prevention) aim simply to reduce the frequency and seriousness of criminal events, on the (reasonable) assumption that they are already intolerably high. But it is possible to set reduction in a particular strategic framework which may help to prioritise the use of finite crime reduction resources with reference to the severity of *consequences* of crime and disorder. The term 'crime control' captures this strategic viewpoint, albeit from a fairly narrow perspective. It can also be cast in the wider frame of community safety.

The 'bottom line' of crime control simply involves halting rapid or accelerating growth in crime risk. Such growth may happen with a specific crime problem (such as a spate of convenience store robberies in a city), or on a wider front. It may be a qualitative deterioration as well as quantitative, and may feed back on itself - with increasing seriousness and organisation of offending, intimidation, and ultimately corruption of agents of the CJS and (as has happened in some countries) partial collapse of the state's power and legitimacy.

The more 'everyday' aim of crime control involves (it is suggested) holding the risk of criminal events and related misbehaviour below a tolerable level. This level is determined, primarily, by considering the harmful consequences of the particular criminal events in question for individuals and the community. These consequences include fear, harm to person or property or restrictions on economic and social behaviour. (With serious crimes and disorder problems, or those minor ones which, left unchecked, may lead to wider trouble, it may be appropriate to strive to hold their level down as low as possible.) Other considerations relate to the availability of cost-effective methods to reduce the relevant crime problems, and competing priorities for funds and other resources. The **tolerance threshold** for a given type of crime nationally, or in a given locality, or for particular groups of victims, is an important consideration in setting community safety targets.

Community safety

Community safety is a term which achieved prominence after the 1991 Morgan Report. It is a rather elusive concept and it may be premature to define it too closely. However, community safety is perhaps best seen as *an aspect of 'quality of life' in which people, individually and collectively, are protected as far as possible from hazards or threats that result from the criminal or anti-social behaviour of others, and are equipped or helped to cope with those they do experience. It should enable them to pursue, and obtain fullest benefits from, their social and economic lives without fear or hindrance from crime and disorder.*

The hazards in question may be single *events* - crimes or disturbances - or *chronic conditions* such as persistent criminal damage and other incivilities, or an atmosphere of intimidation and lawlessness. They may be real or perceived (in which case, enhancing a sense of safety must steer carefully between tackling the hazards, providing reassurance or helping people downgrade unrealistic worries). Community safety overlaps with a range of other local and national protective functions: controlling drug abuse and drug dealing, preventing racial harassment and tackling social exclusion, consumer protection and household safety, road safety, fire prevention, mental and public health. Some of the hazards covered in these spheres may share common causes with crime and disorder, and may be concentrated in the same individuals or locations. They may also be subject to common remedies (involving a similar mix of care, control, conflict resolution and collaboration). Local partnerships may therefore choose to address them together where appropriate, and ensure staff have common sets of competences. There will also be issues and initiatives that overlap with reducing social exclusion and creating sustainable communities. But the particular requirements of the current legislation focus on crime and disorder.

Competences for community safety

Promoting community safety involves developing the competences to:

- understand the hierarchy of human needs that are threatened by crime and disorder, and be aware of people's potential capacities to tackle those hazards themselves or cope with their consequences

- attempt to hold each of the hazards below tolerable levels on a sustainable basis and without undue adverse side effects on other aspects of social and economic life, such as privacy, liberty and aesthetically-pleasant environments, and without promoting inequity or exclusion
- empower the public individually and collectively to contribute in acceptable ways to socialisation of the young, informal social control of (convicted and potential) offenders and self-protection from crime and disorder
- help people cope with the crime and disorder they do experience, and to remedy the suffering, costs, restrictions and fear which their perceptions and experience of these engender
- bring people's perceived risk of crime more closely in line with objective risk (taking account of both the likelihood of the hazards and the severity of their consequences)

Community safety and crime control

Community safety overlaps with crime control, as defined here: common to both are protection from the hazards of crime, a focus on consequences and a strategic target-setting approach. The overlap is incomplete, because it would seem sensible to *exclude* from community safety hazards those crimes, and misbehaviours, whose victims are corporate and incapable of feeling fear (such as large banks victimised by fraud), or individual victims who are affected only remotely and in minor ways (such as by modest increases in retail prices passed on to customers from shoplifting). Where there are clear communal consequences some corporate victims could, however, be included under community safety - for example, theft or damage to a church or mosque, a corner shop or sub-post office. By the same token community safety goes *beyond* crime control in the explicit inclusion of fear reduction, and the retrospective, remedial components of victim support, compensation, and restitution.

The concept of community

Community safety tends towards a holistic view of crime and disorder problems, and solutions. Paradoxically, this requires an even *greater* clarity and professionalism, to understand what *exactly* the interventions are aiming to achieve and by what causal mechanisms they will do so. Without this, practical interventions often degenerate into superficial and ineffectual efforts with drifting objectives. The wide range of meanings of the term 'community' itself make this task more difficult. To act effectively, those who have strategic or operational involvement in community safety must be able to recognise how these meanings may differ.

Communities can cover particular *territories* (such as a neighbourhood), or comprise diffuse sets of *people with a common interest or sense of identity* (such as an ethnic minority grouping). The concept relates to community safety in several ways:

- A community itself (or its physical components such as high streets or community centres) can be a collective *target of crime* in receipt of crime reduction or broader safety initiatives. These initiatives may be narrowly focused, or holistic approaches tackling a range of clearly specified crime problems with linked causes and linked consequences.
- A community can be a *source of crime* meriting preventive action - simply by being composed of significant numbers of members with criminal predisposition and motives, or by the extra contribution of a criminal subculture. The crime can affect members of the same community or it can be 'exported' to other neighbourhoods or the town centre.
- A community can be a *setting* in which crime reduction interventions are planned and implemented, with a key ingredient being the assistance, participation and ownership of community members and organisations, eg in identifying problems and planning and implementing interventions.
- Community safety can exploit specific *community crime reduction mechanisms*, such as informal social control or support processes, in the intervention itself. It can also tackle *the social conditions*

which act at a community level to generate crime. Offenders, victims and other crime preventers may be linked by pre-existing community relationships (such as pupil-teacher, landlord-tenant, employer-employee, neighbours) which may be the source of conflict and/or offer the prospect of resolving it. Interventions may enhance the *general* capacity of a community to protect or control by developing social structures such as residents' associations, and/ or by improving trust among members. Interventions may also empower through provision of *specific* resources, such as a property marking tool-library or transport for young people to visit legitimate entertainment facilities.

In the community context in particular, those involved in the higher levels of police and local government will need to develop an awareness of policy choices and ethical issues such as distributive justice in sharing out scarce resources for crime reduction between individuals and between neighbourhoods, and considering the impacts of side-effects such as displacement.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to show how good practice in crime prevention, reduction and community safety depend on education, training and briefing brought to a focus through a clear conceptual framework. Efforts to develop this framework continue, as does the longer-term work to develop competences and define the underpinning knowledge and skills. Practitioners, and their managers and strategic planners, particularly need to be able to switch focus between the *offender* perspective of Criminal Justice (eg the risk of re-offending), the *criminal event* perspective - the primary viewpoint of crime reduction - and the *crime hazard/quality of life* perspective of community safety. It is here that the nascent Community Justice National Training Organisation is to play a key role.

Further reading

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