

## Situational Crime Prevention

1. Situational crime prevention is explained by the following:
  - a. “Situational prevention comprises opportunity-reducing measures that
    - i. are directed at highly specific forms of crime,
    - ii. involve the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in as systematic and permanent way as possible,
    - iii. make crime more difficult and risky, or less rewarding and excusable as judged by a wide range of offenders” (Clarke, R. (1997) **Situational Crime Prevention – Successful Case Studies**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Harrow and Heston, New York).
2. “Why is the **emphasis now shifting to situational crime prevention and away from the social reform programmes** that used to dominate the field? Because unlike earlier efforts to build social prevention programmes, job creation schemes, and community regeneration, **the new situational methods do not appear to benefit the undeserving poor, to imply a social critique, or to disturb market freedoms**. Their **implementation can proceed outside of a politics of solidarity** and collective sacrifice, and in the absence of redistributive welfare programmes. **Their growing appeal rests on the fact that they can be distributed through the market as customised commodities, rather than delivered by state agencies”** (Garland, D. (2001) **The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, page 200).
3. Theories underpinning situational crime prevention include:
  - a. Rational Choice Offender - Rational choice offenders weigh up the costs and benefits of committing a crime – if the opportunity exists, if there is a low chance of detection and the rewards are great, then an offence is likely to be committed.
  - b. Routine Activities Theory - “Our central empirical argument is that the changing structure of modern American society may have contributed to declines in the tempo of primary group activity within households by removing people from home and from their relatives in the context of performing their daily tasks. This in turn appears to have contributed to more frequent convergence of criminogenic circumstances within communities” (Felson, M. and Cohen, L. E. (1980) ‘Human Ecology and Crime: A Routine Activity Approach’, Human Ecology, Vol. 8, No. 4, page 397).
  - c. “We consider three macro social indicators which we believe may have affected the annual crime rates for the United States as a whole”:
    - i. Proportion of young people
    - ii. Proportion of people living alone
    - iii. Weight of consumer goods (Felson and Cohen, 1980, page 400)
  - d. Crime Pattern Theory – crime concentrates in areas familiar to offenders through their routine activities. This means that activity nodes are likely to present greater opportunities for offending. This perspective maps the movement of people and considers how opportunities for crime are detected through our movement patterns.
4. Situational crime prevention adopts an action research methodology:
  - a. Collection of data about the nature and dimensions of the specific crime problem;
  - b. Analysis of the situational conditions that permit or facilitate the commission of crimes in question;
  - c. Systematic study of possible means of blocking opportunities for these particular crimes, including analysis of costs;

- d. Implementation of the most promising, feasible and economic measures;
- e. Monitoring the results and dissemination of experience (Clarke, R. (1997) **Situational Crime Prevention – Successful Case Studies**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Harrow and Heston, New York).

5. Twenty-five opportunity reducing techniques to prevent crime include the following:

Increase the Effort	Increase the Risks	Reduce the Rewards	Reduce Provocations	Remove Excuses
Target harden	Extend guardianship	Conceal targets	Reduce frustration and stress	Set rules
Control access to facilitators	Assist natural surveillance	Remove targets	Avoid disputes	Post instructions
Screen exits	Reduce anonymity	Identify property	Reduce emotional arousal	Alert conscience
Deflect offenders	Utilise place managers	Disrupt markets	Reduce peer pressure	Assist compliance
Control tools / weapons	Strengthen formal surveillance	Deny benefits	Discourage imitation	Control drugs and alcohol

Source: Cornish, D. B. and Clarke, R. V. (2003) 'Opportunities, precipitators and criminal decisions: A reply to Wortley's critique of situational crime prevention', in Smith, M. and Cornish, D. B. (eds) **Theory for Situational Crime Prevention**, Crime Prevention Studies, Vol. 16, Criminal Justice Press, Monsey, New York.

6. Various criticisms have been directed at situational crime prevention and associated theories. Some of these criticisms include:

- a. "After more than a century of social scientific research that complicated and refined the understanding of criminal offending; after a mass of evidence has been accumulated to show that criminal acts are typically embedded in, and produced by, definite social and psychological relations; rational choice analyses have, abruptly and without ceremony, swept aside all such complexity and empirical findings. With the certainty of armchair philosophers and economic modellers they insist that crime is, after all, simply a matter of individual choice – or anyway can be treated as if it were. It would be wrong to say that rational choice criminology had caused the shift towards harsher sentencing laws and a greater use of deterrent threats. But it is certainly plausible to argue that this kind of reasoning has functioned to legitimate these tougher policies and give them a gloss of respectability. Penal policy, like welfare assistance to the poor, has rediscovered market discipline and purity of coercive disincentives" (Garland, D. (2001) **The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, page 130).
- b. Hogg and Brown argue that situational crime prevention:
  - i. suggests a fatalism about dealing with more fundamental social and individual factors affecting crime levels
  - ii. is a defensive strategy with little relevance to certain crimes or to high crime communities
  - iii. can result in the displacement of crime (Hogg, R. and Brown, D. (1998) **Rethinking Law and Order**, Federation Press, Annandale, pages 189-190)
- c. Katz and others highlight limitations with the rational choice offender model. Katz argues that there are a host of motivations for offending, other than material gain (Katz, J. (1988) **Seductions of Crime**, Basic Books, New York). It is also argued that the rational offender model is undermined in recent advances in neuroscience - "the available evidence ... indicates that the adolescent brain is under relatively constant change. In the frontal cortex, gray matter increases with the onset of puberty. It

will decline throughout the rest of adolescence and into adulthood ... Adolescents, moreover, may not fully realise the social consequences of their behaviours, nor may they understand completely how their negative or unpredictable attitudes and emotional outbursts affect those around them ... Unlike rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of any action, adolescents may, under certain circumstances, simply act without regard to the costs" (Wright, J.P.; Tibbetts, S.G. and Daigle, L. E. (2008) **Criminals in the Making: Criminality Across the Life Course**, Sage, Los Angeles, pages 245-249).

7. Critics often argue that crime prevention efforts merely displace crime. This generally relates to geographical displacement, which involves crime moving from one location to another. Despite these claims, it has been generally established that displacement of crime does not accompany all crime prevention interventions. For example, one study by Hesselning (1994) found "no evidence of displacement in 22 of the studies he examined; in the remaining 33 studies, he found some evidence of displacement, but in no case was there as much crime displaced as prevented" (cited in Clarke, R. V. (2008) 'Situational Crime Prevention', in Wortley, R. and Mazerolle, L. (eds) **Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis**, Willan Publishing, Devon, page 188). In contrast, there is increasing evidence that rather than displacing crime, preventive measures might actually result in a 'diffusion of benefits', which is the reduction in crime beyond the immediate focus of measures introduced.