A major challenge facing crime prevention practitioners is preventing unwanted and unintended negative consequences of their actions. There are many examples of crime prevention programs and initiatives that have had detrimental and deleterious outcomes and consequences, despite their good intentions. The following examples highlight just some of the unintended consequences that have been associated with some forms of crime prevention.

Victim Blaming
Some efforts to prevent crime have resulted in victim blaming. Rather than focusing on deterring the offender, some crime prevention campaigns have advised ‘potential victims’ to modify their behaviour to avoid victimisation. Advice of this nature can promote fear and negatively impact upon the lives of the people targeted by these ‘educational’ campaigns.

Facilitating Offending
Some efforts to prevent crime have had the opposite effect of what was intended. Sadly, some crime prevention initiatives have made it easier to offend. For example, signs were installed in certain stations in the London Underground advising patrons that pickpockets were active in the area. What reaction would you have to a sign of this nature?

Displacement
It is often suggested that by implementing a crime prevention initiative in a particular area, crime will simply be displaced to an adjacent area. For example, the installation of closed circuit television (CCTV) in a pedestrian area might push crime to a neighbouring area without CCTV or improved access control measures (including swipe card access to the building, concierge security and swipe card operated elevators) in an apartment complex might result in greater targeting of less secure neighbouring apartment complexes. While the research evidence tends to suggest that (geographical) displacement is less of a problem than might be anticipated, it should no doubt be considered when a crime prevention initiative is being developed.

Fortress Mentality
Some forms of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) and situational crime prevention strategies can contribute to a fortress mentality. By installing fences, gates, locks, security cameras and other access control measures, people can become more fearful and less willing to venture outside of their safe cocoons.

The owner of this property has obviously taken significant measures to feel safe and to repel intruders. How this form of fortification influences perceptions of safety outside of this terrace house is an interesting question.

Exercise
1. These are just some of the unintended consequences of crime prevention initiatives. List other examples of unintended consequences of crime prevention programs and initiatives.

2. How can you anticipate negative unintended consequences of crime prevention when designing or developing a program or initiative?

3. How can you ensure that any evaluation of a crime prevention initiative or program is sensitive to capturing data on unintended consequences?

4. Are there positive unintended consequences that might also derive from particular crime prevention initiatives and programs?