



# Crime reduction or prevention: Is there a difference?

“Crime reduction” and “crime prevention” are essentially the same things—combinations of actions designed to eliminate and/or minimise the occurrence of crime and the harm associated with it. There is no empirical basis for the use of one term over the other.

However, they do imply slightly different goals. For example, crime prevention is more likely to focus on the outright elimination of crime by preventing opportunities and conditions that enable crime to occur. A crime reduction strategy is likely to place greater emphasis on measures to contain and reduce existing crime problems. This could be likened to taking a risk-management approach based on an acceptance that it is not possible to eliminate all opportunities and conditions that facilitate crime.

A crime reduction measure may have a shorter timeframe than a prevention measure because its goals may be less ambitious and intervention more sharply defined. It might, therefore, be useful to think of crime reduction and crime prevention as terms that describe interim and final outcomes.

There is nothing to preclude a crime prevention strategy using risk-management tools or setting goals which acknowledge that not all crime will be eliminated in all circumstances. Similarly, a crime reduction measure may be designed to eliminate a certain form of crime, or at least its consequences.

A simple example of this can be found in the experience of *Operation Ceasefire*, which focused on crime among the city of Boston’s youth gangs in the late 1990s. Using a sophisticated problem analysis approach, the *Operation Ceasefire* team determined that youth gangs were responsible for a wide variety of crime in the area. They assessed the relative risk of all the crimes in which the youth gang members were involved and applied a strategy to eliminate the most harmful, namely gun homicides. In so doing, they

actively chose to reduce the attention provided to other crimes.

Should this be called a crime reduction or a crime prevention measure? The distinction is so minimal that it does not matter. The important thing is the outcome and the fact that once a major problem is contained or eliminated, it is easier to address the remaining problems.

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Providing crime prevention policy makers and practitioners with evidence-based resources and training to prevent and reduce crime.

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### NEED TO KNOW MORE?

- 1 Pease K. 2002, “Crime reduction”, in M. Maguire, R. Morgan & R. Reiner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 947–79.
- 2 Kennedy, D., Braga, A., Piehl, A. & Waring, E. 2001, *Reducing Gun Violence. The Boston Gun Project’s Operation Ceasefire*, National Institute of Justice (NCJ 188741), Washington DC.