Understanding situational crime prevention

Situational crime prevention is a primary prevention measure. This means that it is directed at stopping crime problems before they occur. Like other primary crime prevention measures, situational prevention tends to focus on reducing crime opportunities rather than on the characteristics of criminals or potential criminals.

Situational prevention seeks to reduce opportunities for specific categories of crime by increasing the associated risks and difficulties and reducing the rewards. It comprises three main elements:

» an articulated theoretical framework;
» a standard methodology for tackling specific crime problems; and
» a set of opportunity-reducing techniques.

The theoretical framework is derived from approaches that emphasise that crime and criminal involvement is often a function of the existence of a practical or attractive opportunity to commit a crime (for example, an unlocked car or open window). Common theoretical perspectives include the routine activity model, crime pattern analysis and rational choice. The standard methodology is a version of the action research paradigm in which researchers work with practitioners to analyse and define the problem, to identify and try out possible solutions, and evaluate and disseminate the results. The opportunity-reducing techniques range from simple target hardening to more sophisticated methods of deterring or discouraging offenders and reducing the attractiveness of specific crime targets.

Research into patterns of crime has established that crime events are not simply a function of where criminals live. These patterns also reflect the concentration of opportunities for crime:

» crime is much more likely to occur in certain places or “hot spots”;
» theft is highly concentrated on particular “hot products”; and
» some repeat victims are more likely to experience crime than other people.

Building on these understandings, Professor Ron Clarke from Rutgers University has proposed a classification of 25 situational prevention techniques arranged into five principal categories of action within an over-arching rational choice theory. The proposal assumes that offenders choose to commit specific crimes for the benefits they bring. These techniques are outlined in the table on the following page.

REFERENCES

### 25 Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase the effort</th>
<th>Increase the risks</th>
<th>Reduce the rewards</th>
<th>Reduce provocations</th>
<th>Remove excuses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Steering column locks and immobilisers</td>
<td>• Take routine precautions: go out in group at night, leave signs of occupancy, carry phone</td>
<td>• Off-street parking</td>
<td>• Efficient queues and polite service</td>
<td>• Rental agreements</td>
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<td>• Anti-robbery screens</td>
<td>• “Cocoon” neighbourhood watch</td>
<td>• Gender-neutral phone directories</td>
<td>• Expanded seating</td>
<td>• Harassment codes</td>
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<td>• Tamper-proof packaging</td>
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<td>• Unmarked bullion trucks</td>
<td>• Soothing music/ muted lights</td>
<td>• Hotel registration</td>
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<td>• Entry phones</td>
<td>• Improved street lighting</td>
<td>• Removable car radio</td>
<td>• Separate enclosures for rival soccer fans</td>
<td>• “No parking”</td>
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<td>• Electronic card access</td>
<td>• Defensible space design</td>
<td>• Women’s refuges</td>
<td>• Reduce crowding in pubs</td>
<td>• “Private property”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Baggage screening</td>
<td>• Support whistleblowers</td>
<td>• Pre-paid phone cards for pay phones</td>
<td>• Reduce crowding in pubs</td>
<td>• “Extinguish camp fires”</td>
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<td>• Ticket needed for exit</td>
<td>• Taxi driver IDs</td>
<td>• Property marking</td>
<td>• Controls on violent pornography</td>
<td>• Roadside speed display boards</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Export documents</td>
<td>• “How’s my driving?” decals</td>
<td>• Vehicle licensing and parts marking</td>
<td>• Enforce good behaviour on soccer field</td>
<td>• Signatures for customs declarations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Electronic merchandise tags</td>
<td>• School uniforms</td>
<td>• Cattle branding</td>
<td>• Prohibit racial slurs</td>
<td>• “Shoplifting is stealing”</td>
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<td>• Street closures</td>
<td>• CCTV for double-deck buses</td>
<td>• Monitor pawn shops</td>
<td>• “Idiots drink and drive”</td>
<td>• Easy library check-out</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Separate bathrooms for women</td>
<td>• Two clerks for convenience stores</td>
<td>• Controls on classified ads</td>
<td>• “It’s OK to say no”</td>
<td>• Public lavatories</td>
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<td>• Disperse pubs</td>
<td>• Reward vigilance</td>
<td>• License street vendors</td>
<td>• Disperse troublemakers at school</td>
<td>• Litter bins</td>
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<td>• “Smart” guns</td>
<td>• Red light cameras</td>
<td>• Ink merchandise tags</td>
<td>• Rapid repair of vandalism</td>
<td>• Breathalysers in pubs</td>
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<td>• Disabling stolen cell phones</td>
<td>• Burglar alarms</td>
<td>• Graffiti cleaning</td>
<td>• V-chips in TVs</td>
<td>• Server intervention</td>
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<td>• Restrict spray paint sales to juveniles</td>
<td>• Security guards</td>
<td>• Speed humps</td>
<td>• Censor details of modus operandi</td>
<td>• Alcohol-free events</td>
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