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.

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REFERENCES

1 Clarke, R. 1995, "Situational crime prevention", in M. Tonry & D. Farrington D (eds), Building a Safer Society: Strategic Approaches to Crime Prevention, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 91–150.

25 Techniques of Situational Crime Prevention

Increase the effort	Increase the risks	Reduce the rewards	Reduce provocations	Remove excuses
1. Target harden • Steering column locks and immobilisers • Anti-robbery screens • Tamper-proof packaging	*6. Extend guardianship* • Take routine precautions: go out in group at night, leave signs of occupancy, carry phone • "Cocoon" neighbourhood watch	*11. Conceal targets* • Off-street parking • Gender-neutral phone directories • Unmarked bullion trucks	*16. Reduced frustrations and stress* • Efficient queues and polite service • Expanded seating • Soothing music/ muted lights	*21. Set rules* • Rental agreements • Harassment codes • Hotel registration
2. Control access to facilities • Entry phones • Electronic card access • Baggage screening	*7. Assist natural surveillance* • Improved street lighting • Defensible space design • Support whistleblowers	*12. Remove targets* • Removable car radio • Women's refuges • Pre-paid phone cards for pay phones	*17. Avoid disputes* • Separate enclosures for rival soccer fans • Reduce crowding in pubs • Fixed cab fares	*22. Post instructions* • "No parking" • "Private property" • "Extinguish camp fires"
3. Screen exits • Ticket needed for exit • Export documents • Electronic merchandise tags	*8. Reduce anonymity* • Taxi driver IDs • "How's my driving?" decals • School uniforms	*13. Identify property* • Property marking • Vehicle licensing and parts marking • Cattle branding	*18. Reduce emotional arousal* • Controls on violent pornography • Enforce good behaviour on soccer field • Prohibit racial slurs	*23. Alert conscience* • Roadside speed display boards • Signatures for customs declarations • "Shoplifting is stealing"
4. Deflect offenders • Street closures • Separate bathrooms for women • Disperse pubs	*9. Utilise place managers* • CCTV for double-deck buses • Two clerks for convenience stores • Reward vigilance	*14. Disrupt markets* • Monitor pawn shops • Controls on classified ads • License street vendors	*19. Neutralise peer pressure* • "Idiots drink and drive" • "It's OK to say no" • Disperse troublemakers at school	*24. Assist compliance* • Easy library check-out • Public lavatories • Litter bins
5. Control tools/weapons • "Smart" guns • Disabling stolen cell phones • Restrict spray paint sales to juveniles	*10. Strengthen formal surveillance* • Red light cameras • Burglar alarms • Security guards	*15. Deny benefits* • Ink merchandise tags • Graffiti cleaning • Speed humps	*20. Discourage imitation* • Rapid repair of vandalism • V-chips in TVs • Censor details of modus operandi	*25. Control drugs and alcohol* • Breathalysers in pubs • Server intervention • Alcohol-free events