

## Chapter 5

---

# Situational measures and mechanisms

### Background

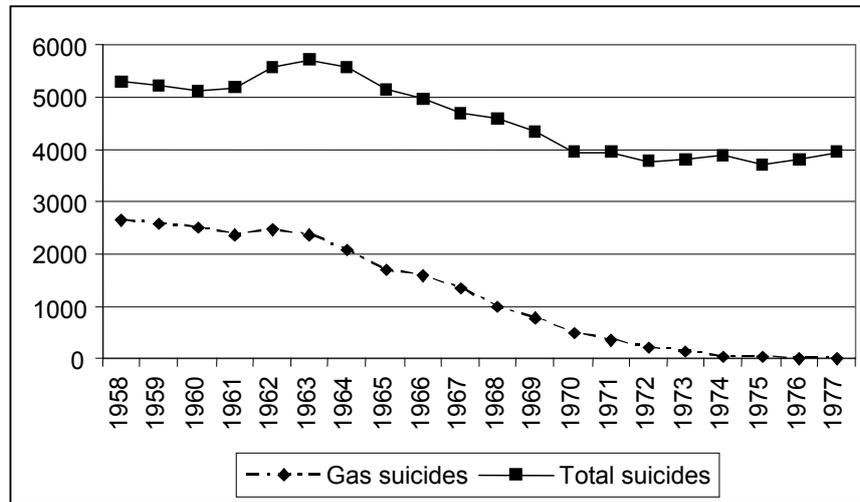
Some underlying sources of criminality are deemed to lie in social structure, genetic make-up, and unhappy childhood experience. Offenders are disposed to commit crime because they have had the misfortune to be born in disadvantaged social conditions, because they have suffered neglect, or because they exhibit an abnormal psychological make-up. Much of the preventive work described in Chapters 3 and 4 attempts to address these so-called 'root causes'. Situational crime prevention is very different. Its focus is on modifying the immediate conditions in which crimes are committed. It is not concerned much with criminality and its psycho-social origins. It is concerned rather with pre-empting crime events by removing or reducing opportunities for them. In so far as it is concerned with criminality and its sources, as we shall see, it highlights the ways in which opportunity for crime may foster criminality.

Most of us recognise that opportunity plays a large part in shaping behaviour. Smoking, over-eating, and borrowing large sums of money are all in part a function of opportunity and all can bring pathological consequences, respectively lung cancer, obesity and bankruptcy. A way of reducing the unwanted behaviour is

to remove opportunities: creating fewer places where people can smoke, reducing the supply of fatty food in schools, and requiring more stringent credit-checks on those wishing to take out loans. In no case is the behaviour made impossible. In no case is the basic disposition changed. But in all cases opportunity-reduction is believed to change behaviour. Moreover, in all cases the prior provision of ready opportunity has also fostered the unwanted behaviour. Cheap and readily-available cigarettes, chocolate and credit encourage their use. Situational crime prevention attaches significance to opportunity in just the same way.

Clarke and Mayhew (1988) show how a specific change in opportunity produced a large and sustained fall in the number of suicides in Britain. They trace the number of suicides in Britain from 1958 to 1977 and the number committed using domestic gas. Figure 5.1 shows the results. They are striking. What happened over that period is that the composition of the gas supply changed. Highly toxic coal was replaced by non-toxic natural gas. Of course, this did not mean that suicide was no longer possible at all. There are plenty of alternative methods of taking one's own life. Only rarely will some specific individual, perhaps because of a disability, be incapable of taking their own life other than through using the domestic gas supply. The change in the gas supply, however, removed one especially convenient, painless and non-disfiguring means of doing so that many chose to use. The removal of this method was sufficient to lead to a substantial reduction in the total number of suicides. Although some may have switched methods the figures strongly suggest that many did not do so. A side-effect of changing the composition of the gas piped to homes for heating and cooking was a reduction in the opportunity for suicide and a real reduction in the number of suicides. Decisions to commit suicide are not taken lightly. Even here, however, the removal of one opportunity (of many others that are available) produced a substantial drop in overall numbers. Clarke and Mayhew suggest that the same will be true of crime, where it can be presumed that the actions reflect less deep-rooted motives.

In practice, most of us do adopt opportunity-reducing crime prevention measures in our everyday lives. We lock our houses and cars. We put our money in banks or building societies. We take care not to leave valuables on tables on trains or in cafes when we go to the lavatory. We walk on the better-lit side of the street. We avoid carrying large sums of cash. We take our more valuable jewellery off when out and about in public places. We give a wide berth to those



**Figure 5.1** Trends in suicides in England and Wales 1958–77

who look threatening. We may remove our phone numbers from the telephone directory if we fear obscene calls. We avoid parts of town we believe to be especially dangerous. We walk or drive our children to school. We may travel in pairs at night. We may choose to sit on the lower deck of the bus. We take care to use secure payment arrangements when we buy goods over the internet, or we avoid such purchases altogether. Those believing themselves to be at higher risk take even more precautions. Smith (2004) has catalogued the very wide range of measures routinely taken by cab-drivers to reduce their risks of injury or financial loss. These include, for example, installation of safety shields, the screening of passengers, use of central door locks, avoiding pick-ups in dark places, asking for pre-payment of fares, limiting the amount of cash held in the cab, and use of an inside release for the boot/trunk.

### Definition

Situational crime prevention attempts systematically to find ways of reducing crime problems by reducing or removing opportunities, in particular where existing efforts do not appear to be adequate. Ronald Clarke, the main architect of the situational approach to

## Crime Prevention

crime prevention, provides a formal definition, where he states that:

Situational crime prevention comprises opportunity-reducing measures that (1) are directed at highly specific forms of crime; (2) involve the management, design or manipulation of the immediate environment in as systematic and permanent way as possible; (3) make crime more difficult and risky, or less rewarding and excusable as judged by a wide range of offenders. (Clarke 1997: 4)

Each of the elements mentioned is important. (1) Situational crime prevention promises no panacea. The measures are targeted at some specific sub-set of crimes. Thus, for example, rather than focusing on all crime, or all property crime, or all shop theft, for example, it might focus on the theft of racks of high-value fashion garments in clothes stores, the idea being to find some sub-set that is sufficiently homogenous to be amenable to manipulation of the immediate situation in ways that lessen opportunity. (2) The measures put in place relate to the immediate environment rather than to a distant or underlying cause and they are designed in ways that provide for sustained effects. Thus, for example, rather than attempting to detect and remove a particular offender or gang of offenders stealing the clothes, situational crime prevention would try to identify measures that would produce a sustained impact, such as dye tags or use of hangers put on racks in alternate directions or the positioning of goods most likely to be stolen near to the pay station. (3) The main way the measures produce their effects is by increasing cost or effort in relation to the rewards. Armfuls of clothes are more difficult to remove quickly if hangers are hung on racks in alternate directions. Rewards from taking only one garment are reduced and the risks of being caught are greater if more time is taken to gather together several. If the removal of dye tags leads the clothes to be stained their value is reduced and likewise the rewards from taking them. Dye tags and placement of hangers in alternate directions would not make the theft of clothes impossible. Indeed, few situational measures make the crimes targeted impossible. Success is achieved if a wide range of offenders find the balance of effort, risk and reward sufficiently altered that they decide not to commit the offence.

## Theory

The idea that focusing on reduction in opportunity could comprise a promising general approach to the prevention of crime was first laid out systematically in a Home Office Research Study, *Crime as Opportunity*, in 1976 (Mayhew *et al.* 1976). This drew together a range of previous research in which opportunity had been 'acknowledged in passing' (1986: 4), including a reference to research in Birmingham finding that incidents of self-gassing dropped from 87 in 1962 to twelve in 1970 as the toxic content of the gas supply fell, which explained almost entirely the reduction in overall rates of suicide in that city over the period. Mayhew *et al.* refer to the 'power of opportunity in determining behaviour' (1986: 6) and the variety of ways in which it may do so. They classify opportunities into those relating to people and those to objects. People's opportunities to commit crime vary by their age, sex and lifestyle. As potential victims, people generate variations in opportunity for offenders. People's opportunities for crime can, the authors say, also be affected by 'patterns of daily activity' that follow from 'forms of social organisation' (1976: 6). In regard to 'properties of objects' they refer to the 'abundance of goods', 'environmental opportunities' and 'physical security'. They also refer to 'surveillance and supervision'.

*Crime as Opportunity* gave a couple of worked examples: it provided an account of the effects of putting steering column locks in cars on car theft and of the effects of supervision on vandalism on buses.

Steering column locks were fitted to all new cars in England from January 1971. Mayhew *et al.* examined the change in numbers of thefts and unauthorised takings in the Metropolitan Police District in 1969 and 1973, as shown in Table 5.1. The data suggest no change overall but a substantial fall in the number and proportion of the new and a corresponding increase in the number of older vehicles taken. The authors conclude that the introduction of the steering column locks may have led to some displacement from newer to older vehicles.

With regard to vandalism on buses Mayhew *et al.* report a study in Manchester finding that it varied substantially by level of supervision. Upper decks had higher levels of vandalism than lower decks, and buses with conductors as well as drivers had lower levels of vandalism than buses operated by only one person. In regard to the top deck the rear seats of single-operated buses suffered

**Table 5.1** Steering wheel locks and car thefts in London

	1969	1973
All cars taken	917	918
New cars taken	192	47
Old cars taken	725	871
% new cars	20.9	5.1

Note: Adapted from Mayhew *et al.* (1976) where a distinction is made between cars stolen and those taken without the owner’s consent, a distinction that was hard to make in practice then and no longer made now. The figures have been combined in this table.

more than twenty times as much damage as the front seat of two-person operated buses. Similarly on one-person operated buses the upper deck had more than twenty times as many incidents as on the lower deck. This level of difference, the authors find, could not be explained by variations in passenger types using the upper and lower decks of buses.

*Crime as Opportunity* concludes with an argument that opportunity-reduction comprises a promising new approach to crime prevention but one that then required a stronger research basis. The authors say:

Finally, it is hoped that this report has begun to illustrate that physical prevention is not simply a matter of intensive policing and crude security, but that it can, in imaginative and unobtrusive ways, utilise technological and architectural expertise to protect vulnerable property from theft and vandalism, curtail the means of committing crime (for instance by restricting the availability of dangerous weapons), and take advantage of the natural supervision of the environment by ordinary individuals. Hopefully, it has illustrated too that if physical prevention implies a different form of ‘social engineering’ from that of social prevention, it does not necessarily involve a greater degree of behavioural control. These are small beginnings, however . . . There is also a need to test the notion of ‘general’ displacement (i.e. the displacement of one type of criminal activity to disparate forms of crime), though this may prove . . . elusive . . . Thereafter perhaps, the most pressing need will be for

research which will allow the importance of opportunity relative to other factors in criminal behaviour, to be more precisely determined. Only then will it be clear whether opportunity merits as central a place in criminological explanation as it is given in the title of this report. (Mayhew *et al.* 1976: 30)

The thirty years since the publication of *Crime as Opportunity* have seen a substantial (and continuing) elaboration of the theory, a range of policy and practice drawn from it and a great deal of critical commentary all of which we come to in due course. This section gives an account of the theoretical developments building on the ideas floated in *Crime as Opportunity* as well as related ideas with which the general approach has subsequently been associated. The critical commentary is addressed towards the end of the chapter.

In practice situational crime prevention measures have a very long history indeed, even if the theory is quite recent, just as natural selection went on before Darwin! And the parallels are significant. Both human beings and other animal species have pretty much always used situational measures to try to avoid risks of predation, or what we humans now often define as crime. Think, for example, of hedgehogs' spines; squirrels' buried acorns; skunks' smelly squirts; squids' inky squirts; ptarmigans' seasonal plumage colour change; chastity belts and castle moats.

#### *The mechanisms at work in situational crime prevention*

This chapter has stressed that situational crime prevention focuses on the near causes of crime – the situation facing the prospective offender. Other approaches tend to stress the distant causes – the social and individual sources of criminality that dispose some to commit crime. But what is it about the immediate situation that leads the potential offender to commit or not to commit a crime? Another way of putting this is to ask, 'what are the underlying mechanisms through which situations (and changes in situations) affect levels of crime?'

In answer to this question Cornish and Clarke have articulated a theory of action underpinning crime commission choices (Cornish and Clarke 1986, 2003, 2008). This, in turn, has suggested a growing repertoire of techniques of opportunity reducing measures that might be put into place.

Clarke and Cornish's theory of action is a very weak version of

rational choice. By 'weak' I do not mean that the theory is weak but that the rationality deemed to be used by offenders is very limited. It is emphatically not assumed that individuals weigh all options carefully in advance of each act before deciding what would be best for them. Equally it is not assumed that individuals value the maximisation of material utilities above all else in deciding what to do. Rather, rational choice as construed by Cornish and Clarke takes action to be purposive in relation to expected utilities and assumes that those contemplating crime take some account of risk, effort and potential reward in their criminal conduct. Cornish and Clarke also assume that those who make decisions as they commit crimes could have done otherwise. In other words, their behaviour is not mechanically driven by external factors. If these 'rational choice' assumptions are granted it follows that it may be possible to modify the conditions for choices in ways that will lead to changes in action among some who would otherwise choose to commit a particular offence. If we further assume for a moment that those who might come to commit a crime vary in the utility they attach to its potential yield then any change in the balance of risk, effort and reward will produce preventive benefits at the margin. That is, that fraction of potential offenders for whom the situation would previously just have led to expected benefits exceeding expected costs (in terms of risk and effort) will not commit the crime because of the reduced balance of expected benefits to costs.

The form of rational choice theory used by Cornish and Clarke says nothing about ends. They are a matter of taste, 'de gustibus non est disputandum.' Money, thrills, sex, or death, for example, may all be preferred ends. Patterns of choices will, however, change if the balance of cost, effort and reward is altered. In relation to suicide some evidently would prefer death over life in their circumstances. But even here it was found that changes in the balance of cost, effort and reward affected decisions about whether or not to proceed. The effort and risk of self-gassing at home is small and the immediate reward relative to expected pain high. The potential pain and disfigurement brought about by other forms of suicide is much higher, and more effort is required. It appears that removing opportunities for self-gassing as a method of suicide is enough to produce a substantial fall in the total number of people choosing to kill themselves.

In a few cases, of course, the changes wrought by situational measures may effectively make certain specific crimes no longer

realistically possible. If safes can no longer be cracked then efforts to do so yield no potential utility and the crime stops, at least till someone figures out a new way to crack them. If football supporters of one team are effectively kept apart, however much they might wish to attack the supporters of an opposing team they will be unable to do so, again until they contrive some alternative way of encountering them face to face. For the most part, though, situational measures do not make crimes impossible. They change the expected balance of cost, effort and benefit at the margins.

Cornish and Clarke emphasise that the commission of crimes generally involves a series of actions, where decisions have to be taken at each point. Derek Cornish (1994) uses the term 'crime script' to capture the sequence of decision points involved as crime events unfold. Crimes may be inhibited if at any part of the sequence of stages in the script the risk, effort and reward balance tips such that the would-be offender decides not to proceed with the offence. Table 5.2 shows an example, given by Cornish (1994), relating to theft of motor vehicles for joy-riding, which offers the prospect of emotional utility. The scene/function categories – preparation, entry, pre-condition, instrumental pre-condition, instrumental initiation, instrumental actualisation, doing, post-condition, and exit – are quite generic. The script actions are specific to joy-riding. The failure explanations show how the potential offence may be disrupted.

Much of Cornish's example emphasises ways in which the potential for a crime event is thwarted by making it more or less impossible. If the car park closes, if no vehicle is available, if a particular vehicle is impregnable, and if the car park cannot be left then the specific crime can no longer occur. But scripts can also be disrupted if the action seems to be more risky, difficult or less rewarding: if the preferred car is not available the next best offers insufficient prospective reward; if drivers return then the perceived risk becomes too great; if the scaffold tube is not to hand it is too much effort to go back for it or find a substitute.

In early presentations of typologies of techniques of crime prevention, as shown in Table 5.3, Clarke (1992, 1995) referred to measures as if they had a direct effect on criminal behaviour. Even if they did not make the crime impossible they somehow acted directly on the potential offender by changing at the margin the cost-risk-benefit equation for that person. By 1997 there were changes both in examples and in major and minor headings (Clarke 1997: 18). Most importantly the three major headings: 'increasing

Crime Prevention

**Table 5.2** Script for temporary use of stolen vehicle for driving fast for fun

Scene/function	Script action	Failure explanation
1 Preparation	Gather tools	Forget scaffold tube
2 Entry	Enter car park	Car park closed
3 Pre-condition	Loiter unobtrusively	Noticed by security
4 Instrumental pre-condition	Select vehicle	No Vauxhall Astra GTEs
5 Instrumental initiation	Approach vehicle	Driver returns
6. Instrumental actualisation	Break into vehicle	Vehicle impregnable
7. Doing	Take vehicle	Vehicle immobilised
8. Post-condition	Reverse out of bay	Crash into wall
9. Exit	Leave car park	Gates closed for night

Source: Cornish (1994: 164).

**Table 5.3** Twelve techniques of situational crime prevention

Increasing the effort	Increasing the risk	Reducing the reward
1 Target hardening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering locks</li> <li>Bandit screens</li> <li>Slug rejector device</li> </ul>	5 Entry/exit screening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baggage screening</li> <li>Automatic ticket gates</li> <li>Merchandise tags</li> </ul>	9 Target removal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removable car radio</li> <li>Exact change fares</li> <li>Phonecard</li> </ul>
2 Access control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fenced yards</li> <li>Entry phones</li> <li>ID badges</li> </ul>	6 Formal surveillance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Security guards</li> <li>Burglar alarms</li> <li>Speed cameras</li> </ul>	10 Identifying property <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Property marking</li> <li>Vehicle licensing</li> <li>Personal ID numbers for radios</li> </ul>
3 Deflecting offenders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tavern location</li> <li>Street closures</li> <li>Graffiti board</li> </ul>	7 Surveillance by employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Park attendants</li> <li>Pay phone location</li> <li>CCTV</li> </ul>	11 Removing inducements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graffiti cleaning</li> <li>Rapid repair</li> <li>'Bum-proof' bench</li> </ul>
4 Controlling facilitators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gun controls</li> <li>Credit card photo</li> <li>Caller-ID</li> </ul>	8 Natural surveillance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Street lighting</li> <li>Defensible space</li> <li>Neighbourhood watch</li> </ul>	12 Rule setting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customs declaration</li> <li>Income tax returns</li> <li>Hotel registration</li> </ul>

Source: Clarke (1995: 109).

the effort', 'increasing the risk' and 'reducing the reward' were replaced respectively with 'increasing perceived effort', 'increasing perceived risks' and 'reducing anticipated rewards'<sup>1</sup>. In each case the amended heading highlights potential offender definitions of the situation. It is no longer that measures directly impact on potential offenders either by making it no longer possible for the event to occur (whatever the offender thinks) or by directly affecting the cost-benefit situation for offenders. Rather, the mechanism is one of changing prospective offenders' definitions of the situation, in terms of the likely reward, risk and effort that would be involved in committing the crime.

More recently, in addition to risk, effort and reward, two other types of situational cue have been identified. One of these relates to the removal of excuses and the other to the reduction in provocation. The former relates to the perceived moral status of an act at the point of its commission. Lights flashing speed limits are a case in point. These encourage the person tempted to speed to think twice about doing so, and many slow down. The latter refers to feelings that stimulate criminal acts, which are liable to be activated in some situations. Systems for dealing efficiently and fairly with customers waiting for taxis late at night, for example, are less likely to lead to feelings of frustration and consequent violence than a free-for-all contest to grab them as they become available. These types of situational cue may, with some effort, be incorporated into a rational choice framework. We may, thus, suffer painful cognitive dissonance (a form of emotional discomfiture where we are faced with contradictory impulses) if we behave in ways we know to be morally culpable and hence we are less likely to engage in those acts if reminded that they are inconsistent with our underlying moral principles. Also, if we are not provoked then the action that we would otherwise take will become relatively less rewarding as a release for our pent-up frustration. Indeed, Cornish and Clarke continue to emphasise rational choice as the basis for mechanisms underlying the ways in which situational measures change behaviour, incorporating into their schema provocation reduction and excuse removal. Others would take a different view. Though still accepting that the immediate situation is crucial to actions taken they would be inclined to argue that calculation of utilities, even in the weak sense described by Cornish and Clarke, does not capture all the ways in which actions are influenced. Moral and emotional matters, of the sort described by 'excuse removal' and 'provocation reduction' are real causal mechanisms *sui generis*,

which operate alongside, but independently of, rational choice to influence behaviour (see Wortley 2001; Tilley 2004c).

Table 5.4 shows Cornish and Clarke's 25 techniques of crime prevention laid out under the five main headings, describing different ways in which situational measures may prevent crime: increase the effort, increase the risks, reduce the rewards, reduce provocations and remove excuses (Cornish and Clarke 2003).

Ekblom and Tilley (2000) have suggested that removing resources for crime comprises an important separate mechanism through which situational measures may prevent crime. Here the issue is not that of affecting offender choices, be they rational or otherwise, but of changing the offender's ability to commit particular crimes. Table 5.4 makes some reference to this, of course, in Box 5: 'Control tools/weapons'. Ekblom and Tilley, however, argue that those minded to offend need to have the wherewithal to commit their intended crime at the point when the offence is contemplated, and that this offender-related situational attribute can usefully be distinguished from other types of situational attribute which are independent of offender capacities. The kinds of measures Ekblom and Tilley discuss include encouraging householders to keep ladders under lock and key to reduce their availability to burglars; clearing bottles from the street, to prevent their use as missiles; the use of biometric identifiers, to incapacitate the use of weapons by criminals; and the use of variations in crime prevention technique, to require offenders to carry more tools to overcome the obstacles they may encounter and to slow down the rate at which they can learn how to overcome predictable obstacles to crime.

Laycock (1985, 1997) has emphasised publicity related situational crime prevention mechanisms. In a study of property marking and domestic burglary in three South Wales villages, she argues that the effects were brought about by publicity rather than by property marking *per se*. A very high take-up rate was achieved amidst many efforts to promote the scheme, including door-to-door calls by police as well as carefully orchestrated media hype. Local offenders became convinced of the efficacy of the measures and were thereby persuaded not to commit burglaries in spite of the fact that real risks to them were not increased. This is partly reflected in Clarke's reference to *perceived* risk, effort and reward.

Felson and Clarke (1998) argue that opportunity can produce criminality in various ways. It is not just that the predisposed criminal may or may not find an opportunity, which they use if it is available. Rather, opportunity may itself stimulate criminality.

This suggests that it is mistaken to divide the population into offenders and non-offenders, the latter of whom may be thwarted with situational measures and mechanisms. Rather citizens with no special disposition to commit crime may be prompted to commit offences by virtue of the opportunity. Opportunity thus provides a temptation mechanism which may draw non-offenders into crime. By providing opportunities we may thereby create criminals. Felson and Clarke refer, among others, to a classic study, now 80 years old, in support of this view. Hartshorne and May (1928) had shown that schoolchildren given the opportunity to cheat in tests, to lie about the cheating and to steal from the puzzles used did so in large numbers. Few resisted the temptations. The children may have been acting rationally in that their utilities were maximised in the situation created by the experiment, which permitted rule-infraction. It may also be that their behaviour was reinforced by being rewarded. Behaviour that is found rewarding tends to be repeated. Felson and Clarke also refer to 'van Dyke chains', named after Jan van Dyke who described them. The idea is that one crime leads to another, where one repairs one's loss from a crime by committing another to replace the good stolen. Bicycles are an example. Trivially, the process can be observed in a restaurant where those sitting at a table with a missing item, say a glass or piece of cutlery, will often take a replacement from an adjacent table leaving a gap there which, in turn, is filled by taking the missing item from the next table and so on.

### *Side-effects*

*Crime as Opportunity* had raised the issue of displacement. In the case of suicide it was found that a reduction in opportunities for using the gas supply were associated with a substantial overall fall in numbers of incidents. If there was displacement to other methods there was relatively little of it. In the case of steering column locks fitted to new cars there appeared to be displacement to the theft of older cars. Interest in displacement has continued but has been complemented by work on its more positive counterpart side-effect: diffusion of benefits. 'Diffusion of benefits' refers to the crime prevention effects that may be brought about beyond the operational range of crime prevention measures.

Six types of displacement have been identified: place, target, time, crime-type, technique or offender, or there may be any mix of these

**Table 5.4** Twenty-five techniques of situational prevention

<b>Increase the effort</b>	<b>Increase the risks</b>	<b>Reduce the rewards</b>
<p>1 <i>Target harden</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Steering column locks and immobilisers</li> <li>▪ Anti-robbery screens</li> <li>▪ Tamper-proof packaging</li> </ul>	<p>6 <i>Extend guardianship</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taking routine precautions: go out in group at night, leave signs of occupancy, carry phone</li> <li>▪ 'Cocoon' neighbourhood watch</li> </ul>	<p>11 <i>Conceal targets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Off-street parking</li> <li>▪ Gender-neutral phone directories</li> <li>▪ Unmarked bullion trucks</li> </ul>
<p>2 <i>Control access</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Entry phones</li> <li>▪ Electronic card access</li> <li>▪ Baggage screening</li> </ul>	<p>7 <i>Assist natural surveillance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improve street lighting</li> <li>▪ Defensible space designs</li> <li>▪ Support whistleblowers</li> </ul>	<p>12 <i>Remove targets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Removable car radio</li> <li>▪ Women's refuges</li> <li>▪ Pre-paid cards for pa phones</li> </ul>
<p>3 <i>Screen exits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ticket needed for exit</li> <li>• Export documents</li> <li>• Electronic merchandise tags</li> </ul>	<p>8 <i>Reduce anonymity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Taxi driver IDs</li> <li>▪ 'How's my driving?' decals</li> <li>▪ School uniforms</li> </ul>	<p>13 <i>Identify property</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Property marking</li> <li>▪ Vehicle licensing and parts marking</li> <li>▪ Cattle branding</li> </ul>
<p>4 <i>Deflect offenders</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Street closures</li> <li>▪ Separate bathrooms for women</li> <li>▪ Disperse pubs</li> </ul>	<p>9 <i>Utilise place managers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CCTV for double-deck buses</li> <li>▪ Two clerks for convenience stores</li> <li>▪ Reward vigilance</li> </ul>	<p>14 <i>Disrupt markets</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Monitor pawn shops</li> <li>▪ Controls on classified ads</li> <li>▪ License street vendor</li> </ul>
<p>5 <i>Control tools/ weapons</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Smart' guns</li> <li>▪ Disabling stolen cell phones</li> <li>▪ Restrict spray paint sales for juveniles</li> </ul>	<p>10 <i>Strengthen formal surveillance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Red light cameras</li> <li>▪ Burglar alarms</li> <li>▪ Security guards</li> </ul>	<p>15 <i>Deny benefits</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ink merchandise tags</li> <li>▪ Graffiti cleaning</li> <li>▪ Speed humps</li> </ul>

<b>Reduce provocations</b>	<b>Remove excuses</b>
<p><i>16 Reduce frustrations and stress</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Efficient queues and polite service</li> <li>▪ Expanded seating</li> <li>▪ Soothing music/muted lights</li> </ul>	<p><i>21 Set rules</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rental agreements</li> <li>▪ Harassment codes</li> <li>▪ Hotel registration</li> </ul>
<p><i>17 Avoid disputes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Separate enclosures for rival fans</li> <li>▪ Reduce crowding in pubs</li> <li>▪ Fixed cab fares</li> </ul>	<p><i>22 Post instructions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'No Parking'</li> <li>▪ 'Private Property'</li> <li>▪ 'Extinguish camp fires'</li> </ul>
<p><i>18 Reduce emotional arousal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Controls on violent pornography</li> <li>▪ Enforce good behaviour on soccer field</li> <li>▪ Prohibit racial slurs</li> </ul>	<p><i>23 Alert conscience</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Roadside speed display boards</li> <li>▪ Signatures for customs declarations</li> <li>▪ 'Shoplifting is stealing'</li> </ul>
<p><i>19 Neutralise peer pressure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 'Idiots drink and drive'</li> <li>▪ 'It's OK to say No'</li> <li>▪ Disperse troublemakers at school</li> </ul>	<p><i>24 Assist compliance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Easy library checkout</li> <li>▪ Public lavatories</li> <li>▪ Litter bins</li> </ul>
<p><i>20 Discourage imitation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rapid repair of vandalism</li> <li>▪ V-chips in TVs</li> <li>▪ Censor details of modus operandi</li> </ul>	<p><i>25 Control drugs and alcohol</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Breathalysers in pubs</li> <li>▪ Server intervention</li> <li>▪ Alcohol-free events</li> </ul>

(Repetto 1976). That is, a thwarted crime of the same type may be committed elsewhere, or against another target, or using a different technique; or an entirely different type of offence may be committed by the same offender; or a different offender may commit the crime. Or there may be some mix of these, for example a different crime at a different place and time, using a different technique, may be committed. In practice there are complex measurement problems in capturing all forms of displacement that might occur. Detecting more distant displacement in terms of place and crime type as they spread across a wide area becomes more or less impossible. Most has been achieved in the measurement of more obvious forms of displacement, in terms of nearby places and similar crimes. These would appear to offer next-best choices for the offender. Empirical studies have generally concluded that fears of displacement have been exaggerated (Hesseling 1994). In some cases none has been detected, and complete displacement appears to be very rare within the limits of practical measurement. Clarke (2005) explains why displacement would seem unlikely in some cases. He refers to the use of slugs in the London underground in place of proper payment of fares. Slugs to replace 50 pence coins could be made easily by wrapping foil round 10 pence coins. When slugs also appeared for £1 coins local officials believed it was a function of displacement. Clarke suggests that this is unlikely. It is much more difficult to make a working slug for a £1 coin. To do so requires access to and use of metal working facilities. Moreover the underground stations where the two types of slug were found differed, suggesting different populations of offenders.

Diffusions of benefit have been quite widely found. An early example related to CCTV in car parks. Poyner (2002) found in a study at Surrey University that crimes were reduced not only at the three car parks that were covered but also at one nearby that was not covered. Since then many other examples have been found. Among the most interesting is referred to as an 'anticipatory benefit'. This is where crime drops occur before crime prevention measures become operational. Of course, this may sometimes be no more than a regression to the mean effect (the reversion in a local area to more normal rates following a spike, as explained Chapter 4). However Smith *et al.* (2002) find that it occurs frequently and may also result from publicity of the sort discussed by Laycock. News of a crime prevention initiative changes the perceptions offenders have of the risk and effort required and they adjust their behaviour accordingly. On quite a large scale Bowers and Johnson (2003b)

found this looking across 21 domestic burglary prevention projects funded through the British Crime Reduction Programme.

Displacement and diffusion of benefits effects can, of course, both happen at the same time. The net effect of a situational crime prevention initiative comprises the direct preventive effects plus the diffusion of benefits effects minus the displacement effects. Suggestions for the measurement of this are found in Bowers and Johnson (2003a).

Over time, offenders are liable to adapt to new challenges presented by situational measures. This needs to be distinguished from displacement and diffusion of benefits which occur in relation to specific crime events at a particular place and time. Adaptation takes place over the longer term. Paul Ekblom has written about an evolutionary 'arms race' in which those trying to prevent crime and those with an interest in committing it are pitted against one another (Ekblom 1997). In relation to car theft, for example, new locks have led to adaptations by offenders to overcome the new obstacles to crime. Eventually points are reached where adaptation becomes much more difficult or expensive. The immobiliser has proven a more significant obstacle to theft of vehicles than many previous techniques (Brown 2004). Offenders adapted more easily in learning to overcome steering column locks.

### *Related theories of crime and crime prevention*

There are important sister theories to situational crime prevention. These are concerned likewise to explain crime event patterns rather than criminality and they have been found useful in informing crime prevention, even though they were mostly not developed with crime prevention as the central focus quite as was the case with situational crime prevention. The following provides quite an extended account of routine activities theory which has a high level of generality and has also been highly influential in crime prevention practice. Other related approaches can be dealt with only briefly.

### **Routine activity theory**

Routine activity theory was developed in the US by Laurence Cohen and Marcus Felson and presented in a major, much-cited article on American crime trends in 1979 (Cohen and Felson 1979). The theory has since been substantially elaborated and applied further by Felson (2002). It has had a major impact on criminological thinking

## Crime Prevention

as well as informing crime prevention initiatives. Though emerging at much the same time as *Crime as Opportunity*, the origins of routine activity theory were independent of the British work. There were no cross references in the 1970s between the work on either side of the Atlantic.

According to routine activity theory, as it was originally formulated, for a direct contact predatory offence to take place three conditions must converge in space and time:

- A likely offender – someone liable to commit a crime;
- A suitable target – a person or thing that the likely offender will focus on; and
- Absence of a capable guardian – someone who is able to protect the target.

Put this way the theory might seem to suggest, implausibly, that classes of likely offender, suitable target and capable guardian can be clearly marked out from one another. In fact, of course there are more and less likely offenders, more and less suitable targets and more or less capable guardians. Moreover, *guardian capability* may be less important than *guardianship credibility*. A conscientious, fit, trained, and intelligent body-guard, for example, may provide pretty capable guardianship and make some crimes in practice very hard to commit. However, at least at some points in time and in some places, poorly functioning and dummy closed-circuit television appears to have had sufficient credibility, while no real capability, to provide adequate guardianship so far as many potential offenders go.

Less elegantly, but more accurately, routine activity theory may be restated in the following way: direct contact predatory crime requires the convergence in space and time of:

- A sufficiently likely offender;
- A suitable enough target; and
- Absence of sufficiently credible guardianship.

Later refinements to routine activity theory have added presence or absence of an 'intimate handler' to the conditions relevant to criminal acts (Felson 1986). An intimate handler is some significant other in front of whom a likely offender will be reluctant to commit

a crime. A disapproving mother, for example, may comprise an intimate handler whose presence in conditions otherwise conducive to a criminal act will avert its commission because of her influence on the likely offender. The mother's role is different from that of the credible guardian in that she does not prevent the crime by protecting the suitable target but rather by disapproving the behaviour of the potential offender who is concerned with her good opinion. Intimate handlers may, of course, also provoke criminal action where undertaking it is deemed by the offender to increase the regard in which they are held. Peer groups members are liable to play this role where they egg on one of their number to behave criminally.

At first sight routine activity theory can seem banal, even tautologous. Is it not obvious, almost as a matter of definition, that the three conditions are needed for most predatory crimes to take place, and that intimate handlers may also be significant? Perhaps, but the real payoff comes when the implications are spun out for explaining crime patterns. Many of the post-war crime patterns in western countries can be understood quite simply in terms of changes in supply, distribution and movement of relatively suitable targets, relatively likely offenders and relatively plausible guardians. For example, the mass production and consumption of easily transportable, desirable consumer durables has provided an ample, continuously replenished, supply and wide availability of crime targets for which there is a ready stolen goods market. The increased participation of women in the paid labour market, as well as reductions in the size of families, have reduced the level of credible guardianship in many homes. Decreases in domestic chores for young people and reductions in levels of shared family activity have freed young people, who are those most likely to commit and be targets of criminal activity, to spend time together away from the guardianship and intimate handling that are furnished by parents in and around the home.

There is an old Slovenian proverb that has it that 'even the bishop is tempted by the open strongbox'. Rightly or wrongly, this suggests that few if any pass a point in the scale of offender likelihood where no crime would ever be contemplated. Gabor (1994) provides a host of evidence to substantiate the spirit of the Slovenian proverb. This rather general potentiality for involvement in criminal acts may explain why proponents of routine activities theory have tended to concentrate on target suitability and guardianship in their discussions of prevention. And it is the supply, distribution

and movement of suitable targets and credible guardianship that provides patterns of opportunity for crime.

There is, though, a further refinement to routine activity theory that is relevant to opportunity, which helps us get a little further in understanding what makes for a likely offender. This relates to the capabilities of the potential offender, which were mentioned earlier in this chapter (Ekblom and Tilley 2000). Some crimes require little or nothing by way of specific capability. The bishop faced by the open strongbox, requires no special tools or abilities. Some container to carry or to conceal the swag is all that might be needed. But other actions require capabilities of one sort or another, in order that the offender disposed to commit a crime is able to do so. One of the main reasons homicide rates are so much higher in the US than in England and Wales has to do with the much readier availability of firearms in the US, which substantially increases the capability for one person to murder another. It was the piping of toxic domestic gas to households that had supplied potentially suicidal folk in England and Wales with the ready wherewithal to take their own lives. The motor car provides both a target for and a useful resource improving the capability to commit many offences. Thus, to sufficiently likely offenders, suitable enough targets, absence of sufficiently credible guardian and absence of sufficiently significant and censorious handler, we need to add adequate capabilities as conditions enabling a predatory crime to take place. Moreover the supply, distribution and movement of all five will determine the patterns of convergence across space and time and hence the crime patterns generated. Furthermore, except for the disposition of the potential offender (what they would like to do or to get) they are all matters of contingent opportunity. At least in principle, policies and practices orientated to modifying these are possible and this is the point at which the theory meets situational crime prevention.

### **Spatial and environmental theories of crime**

C. Ray Jeffery (1971) believed that the environment determines behaviour, including that which is criminal. Influenced by the behavioural psychology of B.F. Skinner, Jeffery took the view that the consequences of actions cause their repetition or non-repetition. If the environment were to be designed in ways that pre-empted (or were less conducive to) criminal actions that would be reinforced when successful, then there would be fewer crimes. Instead of weak

rational choice as the major mechanisms lying behind choices to commit crime, Jeffery stressed the reinforcement of behaviour as the key determinant of crime. The environment offers opportunities and reinforcements that could be modified to reduce crime. It is to C. Ray Jeffery that we owe the term Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). In practice that term is now used more widely to describe efforts to design and redesign buildings and neighbourhoods in ways that will reduce opportunity without necessarily embracing Jeffery's underlying psychological theory. Some of the the police specialists in crime prevention mentioned in Chapter 2, notably Crime Prevention Design Advisers, deliver advice rooted in CPTED.

It was Oscar Newman (1972) who coined the CPTED-related and popularly used phrase 'defensible space'. Fostering defensible space comprises a means of controlling crime. Increasing defensible space involves improving territoriality (the ways in which building design may encourage a proprietary and hence protective orientation to areas which residents identify as theirs); surveillance (the scope buildings offer for watching over the relevant areas); image (the avoidance of stigma being attached to the development); and environment (safe nearby areas). Alice Coleman (1990) followed this up with a 'design disadvantage index' which provided a metric for features of the design of housing that would encourage crime. The creation of defensible space comprises a means of increasing difficulty and risk for prospective offenders.

Crime pattern theory is most associated with the work of Paul and Patricia Brantingham (1981, 1984, 2008). It describes and explains the geographical distribution of crime. It does so by looking at routine activities and at the 'awareness spaces' that prospective offenders have. Crimes will be distributed according to the supply of suitable targets within the awareness spaces of those minded to offend. Routine movements take people between their main zones of activity, typically home, school, work and recreation ('nodes'). Their awareness spaces will relate to the routes between these and the surrounding areas ('paths'). These awareness spaces will include some places that provide suitable targets for crime. Known 'edges' lying at the fringes of particular land uses will tend to suffer high rates of crime, in offering spaces where strangers are not recognised. The routines of prospective offenders will provide some likely times for crime, as well as locations for it. Crime will, thus, tend to be concentrated in times and places that lie within offender awareness spaces, where there are ample targets for crime. In addition, offenders

will tend, they suggest, to avoid committing crimes in places close to home where they risk being recognised.

The Brantinghams also suggest that some places may act as crime attractors, some as crime generators and some as both (Brantingham and Brantingham 1995). Crime generators are those places with opportunities for crime that many, including some who happen to be offenders, will encounter. Crime attractors are those places with known suitable targets for crime which are visited by offenders with crime in mind. Shopping malls act as generators and attractors. Hodgkinson and Tilley (2007) suggest that places with a large supply of victims unaware of potential risk, such as major transport hubs, act as attractors for personal crime. The affinities between crime pattern theory and routine activity theory are obvious. Crime pattern theory has been used not only to inform the targeting of preventive efforts but has also been developed for the geographical profiling of prolific offenders whose likely routine activities can be gauged from the distribution of their offences.

### **Broken windows**

'Broken windows' theory, as formulated by Wilson and Kelling (1982), has enjoyed a great deal of press coverage. Much policy and practice has been put in place in its name, though not always quite as intended by its authors. Broken windows is avowedly not a manifesto for 'zero-tolerance' policing as has sometimes been assumed, although it is not difficult to see how and why it has come to be interpreted that way where there have been calls for get tough policing policies. The key tenet of broken windows is that if small signs of disorder are allowed to build up, a permissive environment for antisocial behaviour may seem to develop. A point may be reached at which crime may spiral out of control, when no-one seems to care about it and where marginal increases are no longer noticed. It then becomes very difficult to recover the situation. Lessening obvious signs of disorder is one step in recovering a sense of order. The rapid removal of graffiti was pioneered in the New York subway system. Those producing it were deprived of the pleasure that came from seeing their work on display: carriages were removed as soon as graffiti reappeared on those that had been cleaned. Eventually the whole stock was clean and the appearance of new graffiti tailed off. The mechanism was the situational one of *reduced reward*. This,

though, formed part of a strategy to remove those general signs of disorder that were deemed, according to broken windows theory, to foster high levels of crime in some places.

### **Links to other crime prevention approaches**

There are points at which situational crime prevention meets those approaches discussed in previous chapters, albeit that its distinctive focus is on crime events and the immediate precursors to them. One example relates to incapacitation. It clearly works by making crime outside prison more difficult for those who are incarcerated. But there are other examples too.

Tillyer and Kennedy (2008) have argued that 'focused deterrence' complements situational crime prevention by embedding various situational crime prevention mechanisms, albeit that it is offender-based. Focused deterrence was the approach adopted in the Boston Gun Project discussed in Chapter 2, which was concerned with serious gang-related youth violence. Focused deterrence involves identifying the key individuals generating a specific crime problem so that they could be targeted by criminal justice agencies on the basis of what is known about their general criminal conduct. That they are then open to targeting on the basis of what is known of their behaviour is then advertised directly to them, stressing the real increased chances of sanction they face if they or their associates misbehave in the ways specified. *Real and perceived risk* is thereby increased. Then, the rationales that offenders characteristically give for the criminal behaviour in question are undermined by challenging face-to-face the 'narratives' they use to justify their acts in the company of significant others from the community, as well as formal agency members. Offenders are thereby confronted with the implausibility of their rationalisations for what they do, and with the disapproval of those about whose opinions they care deeply. This comprises *excuse removal*. The key individuals who go through this process have an interest in discouraging the targeted behaviour of their associates, as they will not want to draw attention from the police, who they know to have evidence that could convict them. This comprises *reward and provocation reduction*. *Effort is increased* to the extent to which the conditions created make it more difficult to recruit co-offenders to commit the specified crimes because of the increased risk that they know they face. The meetings also include offers of help in exiting the criminal lifestyle in which offenders

## Crime Prevention

are immersed, by *offering resources* and also *removing excuses* for committing crime for lack of alternative opportunities.

Crime prevention that focuses on trajectories and turning points may also complement situational crime prevention. It is less concerned with root causes than the emergence of situations in individuals' biographies where the opportunities for crime may widen. Changing schools, moving house, family breakdown, entering or leaving local authority care facilities, and forming or leaving a partnership, for example, all affect the risk, effort, reward, provocation and availability of excuses and resources for committing crime. New places, new peer groups, new family members, and new routines create changed opportunity structures that may take some people away from crime careers and steer others towards them. Preventive interventions by schools, social services and probation services which target these points in individuals' lives are not necessarily addressing 'root causes' of criminality, if by this we mean individual and social pathologies. Rather, they may produce their positive effects to the extent to which they reduce or remove what might otherwise furnish new opportunities for crime for those whose circumstances change.

### **Methodology/practice**

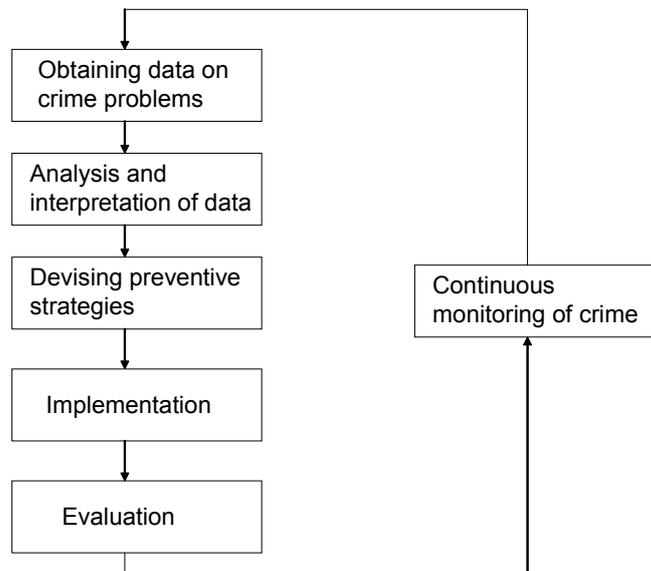
The standard methodology for responsive situational crime prevention is action research. Clarke (2005) describes five stages:

- Collection of data about the nature of the specific crime problem;
- Analysis of the situational conditions permitting or facilitating the commission of the crimes;
- Systematic study of possible means to block opportunities, including their costs;
- Implementation of the most promising in terms of feasibility and costs;
- Monitoring results and dissemination of experience.

This action research approach is embraced in problem-oriented policing (POP) (Goldstein 1979, 1990), which often uses a SARA

process to describe what is undertaken (Eck and Spelman 1987). SARA refers to Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment, the first three of which clearly have affinities with Clarke's first three bullet points and the last of which combines Clarke's final two points. Ekblom (1988) provides a neat diagram (Figure 5.2) which has the benefit of showing feedback, a process which often occurs throughout the course of action research problem-solving.

POP<sup>2</sup> has provided an important vehicle for delivering situational crime prevention. This has included collaboration between the major figures developing each of them: Ronald Clarke and Herman Goldstein (Clarke and Goldstein 2003a, 2003b). POP stresses the importance of identifying recurrent problems, critiquing existing responses and working out what might otherwise be done to address them, assessing effectiveness rigorously, and then disseminating lessons learned. In principle POP allows for any ethical approach to reducing crime, but it has particular affinities with situational crime prevention. This is in part because of the similar action research methodology and in part because situational crime prevention has provided a suite of practical mechanisms that can be activated when

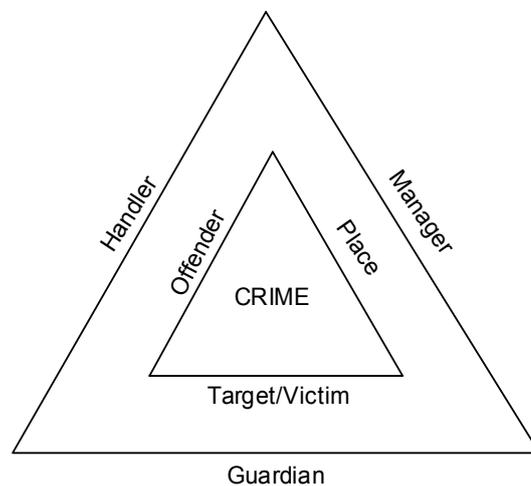


**Figure 5.2** Ekblom's preventive process

the police are faced with persistent crime problems which have been found unresponsive to conventional police patrol and enforcement strategies.

POP has made extensive use of the 'problem analysis triangle' as a means of analysing problems and working out options to address them (see Clarke and Eck 2003). In practice, as Figure 5.3 shows, two triangles have come to be used, the one embedded in the other. The inner triangle is used to identify conditions generating problems and the outer what might be done to remove or counteract them. The affinities with routine activity theory are obvious. The offender equates to the motivated offender, the place to the absence of capable guardianship, and the target/victim to the suitable target. The presence of suitable handling may act as a disincentive to the offender, the introduction of a place manager provides for surveillance increasing risk, and guardianship provides for reduced availability of the suitable target.

In addition to action research and its expression in problem-oriented policing, situational crime prevention is also used in efforts to design out crime before problems surface. Ken Pease has pointed out that it has often been necessary to 'retrofit' solutions to problems that could have been pre-empted with more effort at the design stage (Pease 1997).



**Figure 5.3** The problem analysis triangle (PAT)

Three broad areas of design have been identified: design of places, design of products and design of systems. Each may inadvertently create crime opportunities. Each can be configured to minimise them. Places vulnerable to crime where designs could reduce levels may include, for example, housing estates, city centres, shops, universities, schools or bars. Hot products, which could be designed to lessen the crime that would otherwise be expected, may include, for example, mobile phones, bicycles, credit cards, coins, bank notes, televisions or satellite navigation devices. Systems where crime may otherwise be produced may relate, for example, to returned goods in shops, queues for taxis, staff selection and deployment, and financial auditing. In all cases patterns of risk, effort, reward, excusability and provocation will be produced that will either foster or inhibit crime.

Barry Webb (2005) has shown how all three design domains have been relevant to vehicle crime. He shows that design of cars can reduce theft. Those with more security are stolen less. But people often neglect to activate the preventive measures, clearly reducing their impact. Where their operation is automatic, as with immobilisers activated when the ignition key is removed or with centralised locking, the effect increases substantially. Car parking design is also found to affect rates of vehicle crime. For example, unmanned car parks with pay and display, especially surface (non multi-storey) ones used by commuters, are most risky. Exit barriers control theft of but not theft from vehicles. CCTV has been retrofitted in many cases where car parks suffer high rates of crime but the effects appear to be short-lived where they depend on the impression, but not the reality, of increased risk to the offender. Webb also shows how the design of provisions for parking at home is strongly related to the risk of car theft. Those parking in communal bays compared to those parking on private driveways, in otherwise similar housing estates, had been found to suffer five times the rate of theft of cars (40 vs 8 per 1,000 households) and two and a half times the rate of theft from vehicles (39 vs 16 per 1,000 households). Housing estates can be better or worse designed to prevent vehicle crime. Webb finally shows how the vehicle registration and licensing system can be designed in ways that may either foster or inhibit theft of vehicles as well as other vehicle-related crimes. Alongside Smith and Laycock (Webb *et al.* 2004), he lists a range of system design modifications for Britain and the mechanisms through which these could reduce vehicle crime (Table 5.5). Webb *et al.* also note that the more robust registration

Crime Prevention

**Table 5.5** System redesign and vehicle crime

Measure	Mechanism	Expected outcome
Requirement for vehicle registration document to re-license	Increases difficulty in selling stolen vehicles	Reduced theft for financial gain
Keeper liability for vehicle until scrapped or registered by another	Increases difficulty in stealing and re-use vehicle identities	Reduced theft for financial gain
Harmonisation across EU	Helps identify stolen imported/exported vehicles, increasing risk	Reduced theft for financial gain
Increased enforcement through ANPR (automated number plate recognition)	Increases risk when driving stolen vehicle	Reduced theft for financial gain and temporary use
Real time linkage of various motor vehicle databases	Increases difficulty in stealing identity of scrapped vehicles	Reduced theft for financial gain
'Chips' in vehicles with roadside readers for checking	Increases risk when driving stolen vehicle	Reduced theft for financial gain and temporary use

Note: Adapted from Webb *et al.* (2004: 72).

arrangements in Germany are associated with a much lower rate of vehicle crime than in Britain.

Design-developments, in response to anticipated crime harvests that could be expected in the absence of forethought, clearly requires something other than the action research methodology used in problem-oriented policing, which is largely responsive to issues that have arisen. To be generalised such an approach would require a 'greening' of crime prevention, whereby it becomes a routine consideration when new developments are contemplated, be they to do with products, places or systems. Continuous scanning of developments is required where their potential to produce crime consequences is routine, with attendant thought about ways in which

preventive designs can be built in, maximising legitimate consumer use while thwarting would-be offenders and meeting other design desiderata (see Ekblom 2005).

### **Assessment**

Situational crime prevention came to be advocated as policy in the mid to late 1970s in response to the apparent failures – of the welfare state, of standard policing activities and of efforts at rehabilitation – to stem the then steadily increasing crime rates (Tilley 1993a). The environment was ripe for fresh thinking. The Home Office Research Unit was ideally placed to provide it. Opportunity theory promised a new means of addressing crime problems and the results of situational crime prevention initiatives suggested that it could be effective. The Home Office set up a Crime Prevention Unit in 1983 which was largely (though not exclusively) concerned to find opportunities to put in place situational measures to prevent crime. A series of initiatives followed alongside a programme of follow-on research within the Home Office, but elsewhere also, some of which has been discussed in this chapter. By now there is a very substantial number of studies showing that situational crime prevention can prevent crime. The most recent count identified more than 200 of them (Guerette 2008).

This has not meant that other approaches to the prevention of crime have been abandoned. Situational crime prevention has also been widely criticised on the following grounds:

- It merely displaces crime;
- It fails to address root causes of crime;
- It is guilty of victim-blaming;
- It leads to a fortress society;
- It is socially divisive;
- It threatens civil liberties.

These are important objections that deserve to be taken seriously, but for the most part relate less to situational crime prevention *per se* than to particular applications of it. Let us look briefly at each in turn.

## Crime Prevention

*Situational crime prevention merely displaces crime.* The evidence suggests that this is not the case. To the extent to which displacement processes take place as a matter of course, as offenders choose crimes, locations, methods for their offending, everyday situational crime prevention practices will of course affect the distribution of crime. This means that those better placed to use such measures as part of their everyday life may be diverting crimes towards those less able to do so. With regard to public policy, situational measures aimed at high-rate targets and places can be expected to produce a net reduction in crime but also will tend to redress a balance of displacement effects that have tended to advantage those most able and most likely to try reduce their own risks. In regard to property crime this latter group will include the better off who have both more to steal and more resources for self-protection. If their efforts produce displacement it may be to the worse off, who have less to steal but who also have fewer resources to devote to improvements in security. Public policies targeting the relatively poor suffering relatively high levels of crime could, however, be expected, insofar as they produce a displacement side-effect, to divert crime back towards the better off. In this way situational measures would become a vehicle for distributive justice. Displacement clearly matters, but its risks have been overstated. Diffusion of benefits appears to be a more common side-effect. Moreover, not all displacement is malign, although some of it, of course, can be. Public policies that may displace from less to more serious crimes and from the less vulnerable to the more vulnerable are clearly to be avoided, but this is not an argument against situational crime prevention, only against particular ways in which it might be applied.

*Situational crime prevention fails to address root causes of crime.* There are strong arguments that opportunity is one root cause of crime. Even if situational crime prevention does not deal with all root causes of crime, there is compelling evidence that crimes can be prevented without removing them. As previous chapters have shown it is very difficult to remove root individual and social causes of criminality. Moreover success tends to be achieved only in the long term and in the short term situational measures can reduce crime relatively quickly. This is not an argument against other forms of crime prevention, only that situational measures have an important part to play.

*Situational crime prevention is guilty of victim-blaming.* Ultimately, of course, we assume that offenders are to be held to account (and hence 'blamed') for the crimes they commit. That said, it may be reasonable to expect others to accept some responsibility where their designs of place, product or system predictably put them (and third parties) at unnecessarily high risk. It may, thus, be that some victims do share responsibility for the crimes they suffer. If shops sell goods in ways that facilitate shop theft then it is far from clear that they are free from blame. The rest of us bear the costs of processing the offenders through the criminal justice system. Moreover if the easy crimes committed in supermarkets inculcate criminality there are further social costs for which the shops might reasonably be expected to take some responsibility. Much situational crime prevention, however, does not involve any blaming at all. Caller-ID systems to deal with obscene phone calls, for example, do not allocate blame to the victim, nor do queuing arrangements designed to reduce anger and provocation. There is a risk, of course, that victims may feel that they are blamed when this is unjustified. The example often raised is that of young women wearing short skirts being blamed for the sexual harassment they experience. This does not invalidate situational crime prevention as a process, even if it suggests that some applications are mis-directed or that the measures which might be suggested would involve sacrificing more important principles such as the right to walk unmolested while being free to wear whatever clothes one wants. Issues of responsibility and competency in crime prevention are discussed further in the next chapter.

*Situational crime prevention leads to a fortress society.* Some physical security measures are ugly, but not all of them are visible, for example bank vaults. Many of those that are visible are innocuous, for example locked doors, and some that are visible and sometimes ugly can also be made attractive, for example decorative shutters. Not all situational measures involve security measures, for example the rapid removal of freshly applied graffiti. The selection of situational measures involves more than their technical efficacy. Aesthetic issues, among others, have also to be considered. That this is the case does not invalidate the situational approach to crime prevention.

## Crime Prevention

*Situational crime prevention is socially divisive in promoting selfishness and mistrust.* Although in practice children are at greatest risk from those they already know, 'stranger danger' attempts to protect children by reducing their availability to predatory adults. It does so by inculcating mistrust. For many parents the reduction in risk to their own children justifies the creation of mistrust, even though well-meaning individuals will be treated as if they were untrustworthy. The downside, in terms of situational crime prevention, is that adults come to fear that they could be defined as paedophiles if they speak to children they do not know: their potential as capable guardians of distressed children is, thus, weakened (Furedi and Bristow 2008). That sub-set of children in whom mistrust is not successfully inculcated face especially increased risk from predatory strangers if they are deprived of everyday strangers' solicitude. Concern for the welfare of strangers, be they children or adults, will clearly include their vulnerability to crime. One characteristic of a good society would seem, to many of us, to be that strangers intervene when others appear to be in difficulty. Offenders' expectations that passers-by will intervene, if they try to commit a crime, comprises a situational crime prevention measure that is compromised where safety and security are deemed purely private matters. In this way trust and social solidarity are required for some spontaneous situational crime prevention mechanisms to operate. If, for whatever reason, that trust in others which is needed for these mechanisms to operate is undermined, private means of protection may understandably be chosen. But this is not intrinsic to situational crime prevention. It may, though, be that mistrust (from whatever source) begets divisive forms of situational crime prevention. Moreover, once divisive situational crime prevention methods are in place mutual mistrust is reinforced as the social and physical distance between individuals and communities grows.

*Situational crime prevention threatens civil liberties.* The main recent source of this concern has been the proliferation of closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras in Britain. Substantial government funding has been made available for public space CCTV systems since the early 1990s. There have been technical improvements in the images captured, in their storage and in their retrieval. The collection of this material may certainly jeopardise rights to privacy. The concerns for privacy raised by CCTV extend to the use of biometrics more generally as a method of making people more identifiable and thereby making risks to them increase if they

behave criminally. Earlier concerns with privacy were expressed when tachographs were fitted in the cabs of lorries to check that drivers were not speeding or driving for such long periods that they became dangerously tired. Potential threats to privacy grow with increasingly powerful surveillance technologies (Royal Academy of Engineering 2007). In particular circumstances some sacrifice in privacy may be warranted, as argued by Newburn and Hayman (2002) in relation to CCTV in police custody suites. There are clearly trade-offs where crime risks are reduced but at the expense of civil liberties. This neither means that those technologies may never be justified nor, of course does it comprise a general argument against situational crime prevention, much of which does not involve threats to civil liberties at all. For example the provision of separate lavatories for men and women increases, rather than decreases, privacy.

## Conclusion

It is clear that situational crime prevention can produce falls in crime. It is equally clear that it does not do so by providing a few silver bullets that will cut all crime at a stroke. Situational crime prevention requires tailored identification of measures that are relevant to particular subsets of offences that are sufficiently alike. With regard to existing crime problems, therefore, situational crime prevention offers a painstaking piecemeal approach. With regard to the pre-emption of future crime problems, situational crime prevention provides a set of principles that could help prevent crime problems surfacing and the need then to look for retrofit solutions. The range of measures and mechanisms included within situational crime prevention is wide. All relate to the immediate conditions that face the prospective offender, but these conditions are diverse and may be altered in ways relevant to crime commission in many different ways. The choice of situational measure is partly a matter of cost and efficacy, of course, but normative considerations are also important.

Situational crime prevention lacks the ideological pull of other approaches. It lacks the punitiveness that is called for in much common-sense criminology. It also lacks the sympathy called for in other criminologies, which see offenders as victims of their biology or the disadvantaged social conditions they have endured. Situational crime prevention sees us all as potential offenders, even

## Crime Prevention

if the levels of our disposition vary. It also tends to explain a great deal of crime by reference to developments we generally welcome (such as increasing wealth and technological progress), rather than by invoking underlying social pathologies. This is a counterintuitive position. It does not endear the approach to politicians, the public or to many conventional criminologists. It does not, however, stop all from making routine use of situational crime prevention in their personal or political lives!

What situational crime prevention offers, which is rare indeed in the social sciences, is a cumulative research and practice programme that has been sustained for over 30 years.

### Exercises

- 1 List all the situational crime prevention measures you encounter one day when you go into town.
- 2 List all the situational (opportunity reducing) measures you take in a day to reduce your own crime risk or that of your family.
- 3 Using the lists of what you notice and what you do, which raise problems of civil liberties and which do not do so? Explain your answers.
- 4 Assuming that nothing you noticed was in place and that you (and others) took none of the precautions you listed, what do you think would happen to crime levels and patterns, and why?
- 5 Pretend you are a generalist criminal interested in acquisitive crime. List all the opportunities you notice. Which would you prioritise and why? What would need to have been different to put you off going through with the crime? Compare your findings with those of others.
- 6 Under what circumstances is situational crime prevention inequitable? What would make it more equitable?

### Further reading

Brief and accessible accounts of opportunity reducing approaches, by some of the leading authorities in the field, can be found in Wortley, R. and Mazerolle, L. (2008) *Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis*. Cullompton: Willan Publishing.

A step by step guide to working out what is needed and how to do and evaluate opportunity reducing approaches in the context of problem-oriented policing and partnership is Clarke, R. and Eck, J. (2003) *Become a Problem-Solving Crime Analyst: In 55 Small Steps*. London: Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science.

The Crime Prevention Studies series includes a large number of papers about theory, practice and policy in situational crime prevention. Early volumes can be accessed at [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org).

## Notes

- 1 *Crime as Opportunity* had recognised the need to sort out perceived and actual opportunity, saying, 'reconciling the objectively important component of opportunity with the subjectivist claim that, in the last resort, opportunities are only perceived opportunities, is a problem that remains to be tackled.' (Mayhew *et al.* 1976: 7). This continues to be a problem.
- 2 The term problem-oriented partnership is used more often now in Britain to reflect the significance and statutory basis of crime reduction partnerships (see Bullock *et al.* 2006). The methodology used is identical.