
Introduction

by

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The impetus for this volume of *Crime Prevention Studies* grew from our many lunchroom discussions about the relevance, or otherwise, of situational crime prevention for understanding and preventing sexual offenses against children. Our common ground had been established years before. We had both, at different times and in different jurisdictions, worked as prison psychologists. However, our professional and academic careers had taken us on rather different paths. One of us (Stephen Smallbone) had maintained a keen interest in the clinical forensic assessment and treatment of offenders, particularly adolescent and adult sexual offenders. The other (Richard Wortley) had turned his attention away from offender rehabilitation and towards situational crime prevention theory and application. While we ourselves managed to resist any temptation to polarize our discussions, we were aware that our fields of work were in many ways in opposition to one another. Indeed, within the conceptual bases of these fields of work lie fundamental disagreements about how best to understand and prevent crime - the pathological versus the ordinary; the criminal versus the crime; enduring dispositions versus immediate situations; offender rehabilitation versus primary prevention.

We were also aware that, outside our lunchroom, a much broader public and political debate about sexual offenses against children was raging. In Australia, as elsewhere, we have seen an extraordinary succession of legislative and policy reforms exclusively targeting child-sex offenders. In the last few years, we have seen campaigns to increase public awareness and reporting rates, the formation of special police taskforces, changes to rules of evidence, increased penalties and sentences, the establishment of a national offender register, reviews of community notification laws, implementation of wide-reaching employment screening programs, major investments in specialized sex offender treatment programs, a tightening of parole policies, the introduction of preventive detention legislation, and so on. All of these, of course, are designed to intervene only after sexual offenses against children have already occurred. Very little attention has been given to how these offenses might be prevented from occurring in the first place. No attention at all, it seems to us, has been given to the design and organization of physical and social environments so that the potential for these offenses to occur might be minimized.

Meanwhile, back in the lunchroom, we pondered the lack of scholarly exchange between sexual offender researchers and situational crime prevention researchers. To date neither of these fields has paid much attention to situational aspects of sexual offending against children, nor have they paid much attention to one another. Sexual offender researchers have concentrated on individual-level explanations and, perhaps in part to avoid controversies about moral responsibility, have tended to ignore the influence of immediate circumstances on specific offense incidents. Where situational factors have been considered, these have tended to be construed in offender-centered terms (e.g., a state of anxiety or anger, without reference to specific eliciting conditions). Sexual offenses against children are by definition interpersonal offenses, and typically occur in private places in circumstances where the offender and victim already know one another. Situational crime prevention researchers have, by contrast, tended to concentrate on property offenses that are committed in public places by offenders who do not know their victim. It may therefore be unsurprising that the reach of situational prevention has until now not extended to sexual offenses against children.

Our discussion led to a decision to invite prominent researchers from the sexual offender field and from the situational crime prevention field to consider, from their own perspectives, how situational crime prevention principles might be applied to sexual offenses against children. We wanted

to define situational prevention broadly to include strategies ranging from primary prevention through to relapse prevention with persistent offenders. We hoped that this might result in a convergence of established expertise, and of new ideas, on the problem at hand. The aim of this volume, then, is to examine the situational bases of sexual offenses against children and, from this examination, to suggest situational strategies that might prevent these offenses.

This is, as far as we are aware, the first systematic attempt to apply a situational crime prevention rationale to understanding sexual offenses against children. We have attempted, therefore, to cover a wide variety of perspectives in order to establish some conceptual and empirical foundations.¹ The volume begins with two chapters that approach the problem from more or less opposite directions. In chapter 2, we (Wortley & Smallbone) set out a framework for applying situational prevention principles to understanding and preventing sexual offenses against children. We argue that a situational perspective involves a fundamental (and sometimes surprisingly difficult) shift in focus from the child-sex *offender*' to the child-sex *offense* - to the questions of how, when, where and why these offenses take place. In chapter 3, Bill Marshall, Cieris Serran and Liam Marshall provide an overview, from a clinical perspective, of dispositional and situational factors in child molestation. They remind us of the importance of understanding situational factors in terms of person-situation interactions, and they highlight one of the key challenges for situational prevention in this area - how to intervene in homes and other private places, where most sexual offenses against children occur, without diminishing the quality of trust between children and adults upon which our society so fundamentally relies.

In chapter 4, Leonore Simon and Kristen Zgoba present new U.S. National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data on sexual offenses against children, and compare these to NIBRS data on several other personal offense types. Among other things, this work provides an important empirical foundation for population-wide targeting of prevention, legislation, and investigation. Conceptually, the work draws attention to important similarities and differences in the situational dimensions of sexual and other interpersonal offenses. In chapter 5, Keith Kaufman, Heather Mosher, Megan Carter and Laura Estes consider how the principles of situational crime prevention can be combined with knowledge of adolescent and adult sexual offender *modus operandi* to inform sexual abuse prevention policy and practice. This is a very detailed analysis, which takes

account both of the variations in sexual offender modus operandi and of the practical opportunities and constraints for primary prevention. We think sexual offender modus operandi research may be one of the keys to unlocking the potential of situational prevention of sexual offenses against children.

In chapter 6, Pierre Tremblay presents results of a qualitative study of interactions among "boy lovers," and between these men and the adolescent males with whom they seek sexual and emotional connection. Tremblay's dispassionate treatment of his subject matter offers some rare and incisive insights into the personal world of these men, and the "convergence settings" to which they and their victims are drawn. In chapter 7, Max Taylor and Ethel Quayle take us to the virtual world of the Internet. They have, we think, managed to convey a great deal of technical information about how the structure and organization of the Internet can facilitate the trade, distribution and production of child abuse images, in a readily accessible way. Among the many lessons that can be taken from this work is that the responsibility for preventing sexual offenses against children cannot be limited to criminal justice agencies. Their comments about corporate responsibilities in this regard are instructive.

Returning to a clinical theme, in chapter 8 Frank Lambrick and Bill Glaser outline some of the situational elements in sexual offenses committed by intellectually disabled persons. They argue that, as we might expect, intellectually disabled sexual offenders may be especially responsive to situational interventions designed to increase perceived risk and effort. On the other hand, these authors also point to ways in which sexual offenses by this offender group may unwittingly be facilitated by their carers, for example by placing them in residential settings that give them ready access to vulnerable others. In chapter 9, Lynne Eccleston and Tony Ward take issue with the concept of opportunity reduction. Rather than designing interventions to reduce offenders' exposure to criminogenic situations, they suggest that it may be more efficacious to design interventions that *increase* offenders' exposure to prosocial situations. In effect, their argument is to add to, rather than replace, the traditional clinical focus on restrictive risk-management procedures, by assisting blown sexual offenders to establish clear approach goals and ultimately to secure "primary human goods." Finally, in chapter 10, Benoit Leclerc, Julie Carpentier and Jean Proulx

present empirical data on the modus operandi of adult offenders, distinguishing between offenders who employ coercive strategies (e.g., threatening the child), manipulative strategies (e.g., bribing the child) and non-persuasive strategies (e.g., abusing a sleeping child). They argue that different modus operandi require the adoption of different prevention approaches.

We have found the task of assembling the chapters for this volume to be immensely rewarding, and it has helped us to clarify some of our own thoughts. We have also found the exercise to be a challenging one. While we have tried to provide editorial support and guidance, equally, we have tried not to be censorial. In the end, we have not always found ourselves to be in complete agreement with the other authors, nor even sometimes between ourselves. But then our aim was not so much to achieve consensus as it was to stimulate discussion and debate.

We would like to thank each of the authors for their contributions. In many cases we were asking them to move into unfamiliar territory and to consider new ways of thinking. We greatly appreciate their willingness to engage in this exercise and we believe that collectively they have made an important contribution to establishing some conceptual and empirical foundations for the situational prevention of sexual offenses against children.

NOTES

1. In common with other books on the topic of child sexual abuse, this volume deals only with male offenders. While there are cases of females who sexually abuse children, the overwhelming majority of offenders are male, and almost all available research in the area has been conducted on males.