

editorial

prevention

Rebecca Roberts and Enver Solomon put this issue in context.

Prevention rather than cure would seem to be an obvious and common sense approach to dealing with any problem and it is unsurprising that criminal justice and social policy has been driven by such an ideal. So called preventative approaches - from situational crime prevention to early intervention - have been pursued across a range of frontline services, from children, family and welfare provision to substance misuse and urban planning. Yet, as this issue of CJM illustrates, there is no consensus on what should be prevented and how best it is done. There is a wide range of political and ethical arguments, supported by different research agendas. The articles presented here provide a timely critical analysis of the current prevention agenda in its different guises.

For Labour, the early intervention Sure Start programme was hailed as one of its key prevention strategies, central to its 'tough on the causes of crime' approach. However, as Karen Clarke argues, the flagship programme has focused on a micro management approach to prevention that addresses individual behaviours on the assumption that they are key risk factors in determining future offending. The rationale for early intervention is founded on the premise that the causes of 'delinquency' are to be found in early years development. On similar lines, the UK government's latest initiative, the Nurse-Family Partnership pilots, based on an American programme, is outlined by Professor David Olds of the University of Colorado. Former YJB Chair, Rod Morgan, outlines recent departmental reforms and recommends that future early prevention work should include incentives for local authorities to invest in it alongside the introduction of disincentives for the police to criminalise children. Irvin Waller, drawing on his work on US policy, argues that 'regardless of socio-economic trends, those children growing up with more negative experiences... are more likely to become prolific offenders' and he puts forward a

number of suggestions on how to target those he identifies as 'at risk' of offending. There are, however, considerable ethical and practical limitations for risk-based early intervention strategies which are discussed in this issue of CJM by Ros Burnett. Barry Goldson provides a powerful critique of approaches that target young people which, he argues, have directly resulted in a 'bloated and obese' youth justice system.

Naomi Eisenstadt, the civil servant who led the Sure Start programme and now heads up the government's Social Exclusion Taskforce, gives a revealing interview reflecting her views on what has and hasn't worked. Former Conservative leader, Iain Duncan Smith, sets out sometimes controversial findings from the recent Breakthrough Britain Report, produced by the party's Social Justice Policy Group.

The establishment of Crime and Disorder Partnerships in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was seen by some to mark a decisive change in direction towards a holistic preventative model. Adam Crawford questions whether his optimistic appraisal of CDRPs in the pages of CJM in 1998 stands true today and concludes that 'enforcement-led solutions' now dominate. However, Daniel Gilling is less pessimistic. Whilst recognising the limitations of a criminal justice-led approach to prevention he argues that the local holistic model is still alive and kicking.

Great emphasis has been placed on the merits of situational crime prevention (SCP), particularly in the design and management of urban and town planning. Colin Rogers presents findings on the positive impact that 'alley-gating' has had on community perceptions of antisocial behaviour. He does, however, warn of an ever-growing thirst for further gates, razor wire and increasing spatial division. The social ramifications of such demands should be of interest to those involved in the development of social and crime policy. In his article Mike Hough explores

the use of Randomised Controlled Trials, warning that in the context of crime reduction, they can be used to 'fine-tune repressive strategies'.

Frank Warburton looks at current drug policy and questions the assertion that there is a direct link between drug use and offending. He argues that it is misguided to promote drug programmes for their capacity to reduce crime.

The government's latest criminal justice plan proposes a 'national focus to prevent opportunities for crime' (Home Office, 2007). Lisa Thompson argues that crime mapping techniques, increasingly being used by police forces across the country, are a vital crime prevention tool that should be central to any prevention strategy. However, situational crime prevention has its limitations, some of which are set out by Nick Groombridge in his assessment of the effectiveness of CCTV and Greta Squire's analysis of the use of panic rooms to tackle domestic violence. And in acknowledging the limitations of SCP to deal with 'conventional' crimes, Alvesalo and colleagues argue that situational approaches might be better suited to the prevention of corporate crime.

A spate of well publicised knife and gun-related deaths during the summer of 2007 has led to renewed calls from politicians for early intervention, making it, once again, a top political priority. However, as illustrated in this issue of CJM, critical thinking and debate is essential in successfully navigating the range of perspectives, research studies and policies currently on offer. In securing safer communities and protecting people from harm, a more wide-ranging debate on the merits of targeted intervention and the role of social and economic policy is required.

Rebecca Roberts is Research and Policy Associate and Enver Solomon Deputy Director of CCJS.