

About fifty years ago, when I first began to take a serious interest in crime and punishment, I thought that prevention was better than cure. I have not wavered in my belief in crime prevention but I have grown more sceptical about the outcome.

A personal view of crime prevention

John Croft looks at the changing context of crime prevention in the UK.

I have problems about the concept of crime prevention - now variously called crime reduction and even community safety, although both these epithets mean something else. First, how can you stop an event that hasn't happened? The assumption is, of course, that the probability is that crimes will be committed, as night succeeds day - so one's approach is based on the calculation of risk. Secondly, situational crime prevention (which appears to have scored some successes) is based on a theory of human behaviour to which I cannot completely subscribe because it disregards the moral dimension (Croft 1998). Thirdly, although social crime prevention is an attractive proposition, this begs questions about cause and effect because many people survive adverse social circumstances without committing crimes; furthermore this line of attack demands multiple action over an extended period, coupled with rigorous evaluation, which is expensive even if cheaper than punishment. Fourthly, although there is sound advice contained in a recent Home Office publication (Home Office, 1998), the effort demanded to achieve an effective and integrated

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preventative strategy is considerable, and I wish I could be more confident in the ability of local agencies to deliver this.

Broadening the crime prevention remit

One tends to think of crime prevention in terms of 'ordinary' crime, what takes place in the local street, the local housing estate and so forth. One cannot ignore this but in the twenty first century an increasing threat is going to come from international crime - fraud, drugs, terrorism, environmental pollution - as a consequence of the globalisation of markets and communications. Some of these alarming world-wide manifestations have already begun to interpenetrate with local 'national' crime.

To meet both challenges (national and international) some interesting structural changes are taking place in the organisation of criminal justice and social control agencies. On the one hand, because of the high cost and relative failure of the criminal justice system to reduce crime, government is devolving greater responsibility onto local agencies and partnerships - for example in community safety initiatives and youth offending teams. On the other hand, as a counterbalance to this localisation (which also covers the

regionalisation of some services), there is a move, admittedly less rapid, in the other direction, namely towards centralisation. This is most notable in the police service with the establishment of the National Criminal Intelligence Service together with the involvement of the security services in addition to Customs and Excise.

Contradictory advice

At this point I should interpolate what seems to me a contradiction in the present Administration's intentions. In the splurge of publicity following the Comprehensive Spending Review, it was reported that, as regard the Home Office allocation, "The multi-million-pound initiative [was] to be concentrated on dealing with the social conditions that breed criminal behaviour, targeting criminals and crime 'hotspots' and working with offenders" (The Times, 1998). £250m would be dedicated to crime prevention strategy but £660m to the centralised prison service.

Guarding the guardians

Since these sums represent a three year projection, and not just one year's spend, one might have expected a more radical determination in favour of crime prevention as represented in the balance of



Penny Fraser

custodial as against non-custodial/crime reduction funding.

The extension, notwithstanding the preceding paragraph, of social control into the community - for example, through problem oriented policing (Maguire, 1998), and the exchange of fairly confidential information through and among multi-agency partnerships - also has implications for the liberty of the subject. This tendency raises both theoretical and practical issues of the legitimacy in the eyes of the public of these fairly novel institutions and procedures, and ultimately of accountability: who exactly is to guard the guardians? At the opposite end of the criminal justice spectrum punitive segregation still seems the order of the day and equally raises much the same qualms. There is, therefore, in my opinion, a need for some over-arching advice - independent of politics - in the form of a commission - to address these and related questions which lie at the heart of the administration of criminal justice and the penal system (Blom-Cooper and McConville, 1998).

To sum up, what is going on has - it appears to me - less to do with crime prevention or the reformation of offenders and more to do with fundamental changes in social and political structure. If, as I believe, we are witnessing a reconstruction of the nature of civil society (Faulkner, 1998), its principles and values, it is fascinating to watch events unfold but this process may explain some of my scepticism about the outcome as far as the successful prevention of crime is concerned. I hope I may be proven wrong.

John Croft CBE was formerly Head of the Home Office Research and Planning Unit and Chairman of the Criminological Scientific Council of the Council of Europe. He recently served as Chairman of the Commission on Community Safety for Bath and North East Somerset.

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In this article, I look briefly at the nature of the problem of youth crime in the UK and its causes before examining solutions and suggesting how we might implement them. I concentrate mainly on how we might prevent young people from offending in the first place and prevent occasional offenders from becoming more persistent.

Preventing youth crime

Jon Bright advocates a 'whole of Government' approach.

The problem

First, how big is the problem of youth crime? A few statistics demonstrate the nature of the problem we are grappling with. In the UK

- An estimated 7,000,000 offences are committed each year by young people, of which 19% are recorded by the police
- young people under 21 commit about half of all recorded crime at an estimated cost to society of £13 billion.
- about 17% of persistent offenders commit 60% of all crime
- 40% of crime takes place in 10% of areas
- young men are not growing out of crime as they reach their late teens and early 20's
- young people are the most frequent victims of crime.

The causes

The first and most obvious point to make is that there is no single cause of youth crime. However, research conducted over half a century in a number of countries has consistently identified factors in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood that increase the risk of a young person offending. These include poor parental supervision, child neglect, school failure, community disorganisation, criminal opportunities, friends involved in crime and poor employment prospects. The likelihood of later criminality increases when these factors cluster together in a young

person's background. Those children and young people who experience these factors at their most extreme are at greatest risk of becoming persistent offenders.

Yet, as is well known, many young people growing up in unpromising circumstances do not drift into crime. Just as there are factors which increase the risk of young people offending, so there are those which protect them from it. Many of the most significant protective factors (eg. good parenting) are often the opposites of risk factors (eg. poor parental supervision) and are introduced when preventive action to reduce risk factors is taken. Measures such as family support, school improvement, intensive youth projects and mentoring can prevent offending by encouraging high standards of behaviour, creating opportunities, helping young people acquire the skills to make use of those opportunities and recognising their achievements.

As a result, young people come to feel more attached to their family, school and community and develop the internal controls that steer them away from offending. In addition to reducing offending, this approach has been shown to reduce drug misuse, anti social behaviour and school age pregnancy.

The solutions

Many still think that enforcement is the only answer to youth crime and that nothing else really works. I think that there are eight approaches that should be promoted. I am pleased to say that most of these are being advanced vigorously by the Government.

Improving parenting. Preventing child neglect and ensuring children grow up with a sense of responsibility is largely a matter for parents. Some parents need assistance. Parenting programmes can improve parenting and improve children's behaviour and performance in school.

Preventing school failure. Pupils who fail in school, behave disruptively, truant or are excluded are more likely to offend than those who achieve in school. Quality pre school education, family literacy projects, mentoring and supported learning programmes, measures to return excluded pupils to mainstream education and a more flexible curriculum can help reduce school failure.



Refocusing youth work. Youth work has an important role to play in reducing delinquent lifestyles amongst the young. After school, weekend and holiday activity projects can prevent anti social behaviour and minor crime. Outreach youth work and more focused preventive projects have been shown to work with those who offend more frequently. Youth services should be located in priority areas, targeting hard to reach young people and making prevention a key objective.

Preparing young people for work. Helping young people find and retain employment is an important means of keeping them out of crime. There is a need for high quality training programmes for low achievers, outreach initiatives to engage at risk youth and projects to motivate and support young people. Attaching young people to volunteer adult mentors for a time limited period is a means of providing them with this support.

Tackling drug misuse. A proportion of acquisitive crime is committed by users of hard drugs. There is also concern about alcohol misuse amongst the young. Enforcement alone can have little impact. Many of the preventive measures listed above may be expected to help reduce drug misuse. More specific preventive measures include peer led drug education, tighter restrictions on the marketing of alcoholic drinks to young people and services for drug misusers.

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Reducing nuisance and disorder. Young peoples' behaviour can cause a great deal of distress. In some neighbourhoods and public spaces such as parks and shopping malls, vandalism, noise, drunkenness, rowdiness can create a climate of fear and disorder. Targeted youth work measures should go some way to reducing the problem. Other measures include problem oriented policing; neighbourhood mediation services; inter generational initiatives which bring young and old together; and reconciling the interests of young and adult users of neighbourhoods and public spaces through imaginative approaches to its design and management.

Making crime more difficult risky and less rewarding by improving the security, design, policing and management of these locations where young people most commonly offend or behave anti-socially - neighbourhoods, malls, town centres or schools. The priority should be those locations which are repeatedly victimised. Examples include measures to prevent shop theft; providing free security to low income victims of domestic burglary; problem oriented policing; improving management; and making the resale of stolen property more difficult.

Preventing repeat offending by instilling a sense of responsibility in young offenders, making restoration to their victims and reintegrating them into their community

so they do not offend again. This involves targeting prevention on those most likely to re-offend and ensuring that community sentences are intensive, rigorous and effective by including education, mentoring and training options. Programmes to prevent repeat offending should be intensive enough to make a difference.

Targeting

A word of warning. So-called preventive approaches will not prevent anything unless we take note of the following:

First, target those most likely to offend. Concentrate services in both high crime neighbourhoods and in schools in other areas at a level proportionate to the problem. Ensure those most at risk are encouraged to use them.

Second, do enough to make a difference. The dosage of intensity of intervention is one of the critical factors determining success.

Third, recognise that combinations of measures are more effective than single approaches. Projects that work best are often those which combine situational crime prevention with measures to support families, occupy young people constructively and help those at risk make the transition from adolescence to adulthood successfully.

Finally, be rigorous. Problems should be assessed carefully, and preventive action based on what the research evidence suggests will work best. It should not be assumed that criminality will be reduced automatically as a result of setting up youth or family support projects. When it is done well, there is evidence that preventive approaches can be cost effective. The most striking evidence of this is a 1996 report from the Rand Corporation suggesting that certain types of family and school based programmes are a significantly more cost effective way of preventing serious crime than imprisonment.

The 'what works' agenda is increasingly understood and accepted. The problem we face now is how to implement it.

Implementation

Until recently, prevention has been largely an afterthought in criminal justice policy in the UK. Within the criminal justice system, it still remains a low status specialism involving a direct spend of less than one half of one per cent of the budget. Four events signal what I hope will be a major change.

The first is the duty on local authorities and the police in the Crime and Disorder Act to prepare community safety plans with clear, publicised targets and also within the Act, the reform of the Youth Justice System to reduce re-offending by known young people. The second is the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review and the requirement that each Department incorporates prevention in its policies as a means of achieving *greater value for money*. The third is the announcement of the New Deal for Communities programme which will have a heavy emphasis on 'people regeneration' and prevention rather than the tendency to concentrate exclusively on physical renewal of deprived communities. And fourthly, the government's proposed 'crime reduction strategy' for which £250 million has been earmarked over the next three years. This will actually constitute a series of experiments, allowing different approaches to be developed and tested but on a relatively limited scale. All this may be the start of a more concerted effort to create a 'culture of prevention' in which we apply 'what works' more systematically and make prevention a core feature of governance.

The national level

The experience of these four initiatives should in due course lead to a genuinely national crime reduction strategy. This would be led by the Home Office and would involve staff on secondment from other Government Departments and some outsiders. It should be overseen by a Ministerial Group. Its job would be to:

- coordinate 'whole of Government' policies on prevention
- provide guidance on legislation, standards, training
- encourage and support a focus on outcomes and impact
- secure resources for local strategies
- provide technical assistance and support
- oversee implementation

- monitor progress and assess impact

Securing a 'whole of Government' response will be important to achieving and sustaining a reduction in crime. The matrix below lists eight preventive approaches and the Departments that could contribute to each (I also include the Police and Local Government). There are three main tasks for each Department:

- The first is to ensure that prevention routinely informs policy development to avoid legislation which could be unintentionally criminogenic
- The second is to identify specific ways in which it might impact on crime and disorder and to work up strategies with outcome targets
- The third is to incorporate crime prevention objectives in mainstream programmes

In England, the 10 Regional Government Offices makes the delivery of a 'Whole of Government' approach a more practical possibility. The Home Office representative is there to ensure that community safety is high on local agendas. Regional offices can identify their own priorities and targets which reflect local conditions. issue region-specific guidance and make an impact through

the programmes that they deliver. A 'whole of Government' strategy would create the conditions for more successful crime prevention at a local level.

The local level

At a local level, local partnerships have been given statutory responsibility for preparing an annual community safety plan. This will require them to set and achieve outcome targets. Youth crime is likely to be a priority in many areas. To achieve these collectively owned targets, prevention will need to become a core objective of the mainstream work of individual agencies, particularly the police, local authority departments, housing bodies, schools and youth services. 'Mainstreaming prevention' is important for two reasons. First, we need to make prevention part of the routine day-to-day practice for all agencies to avoid at least some of the problems occurring in the first place. Second, we need to develop the capacity of individual agencies so they are better able to deliver the longer term, multi-agency strategies needed for the most serious problems. For this to happen, we must audit existing services to see if they are providing value for money in preventive terms. There are three aspects to this. First, assessing

whether existing projects and services are aligned with the partnership or authority's strategic objectives. Second, whether the project or service is achieving agreed outputs and outcomes. Third, whether the design, targeting and management of the service or project could be improved.

Conclusion

Is it all worth the effort? In the early 1990s, there were disturbances and riots in 13 neighbourhoods in the UK. A 1997 report found that all of these areas had benefited from government programmes, mainly focusing on their physical regeneration including security improvements. Insufficient was done, however, to address the education and employment prospects of those who are responsible for a high proportion of crime and disorder, namely young men. These regeneration strategies were clearly too limited in their focus to protect the estates from further crime and disorder. It is worth comparing this report on the riots and disturbances in 1991/2 with an earlier report by the same author on measures to regenerate 21 equally disadvantaged housing estates which did not riot. It seems that the principal factors which characterised estates which did not experience serious disorder was

the provision of 'long term, local and external support, many additional localised services and continuous active links between residents, locally-based service providers and the wider local authority'. The report adds that 'it was the lack of sensitivity to the problems and insufficient social and management infrastructure that led to the disturbances'. The New Deal for Communities will learn from this experience.

The problems of these areas will not be resolved solely by partnerships set up to reduce crime. Economic and anti poverty strategies are probably more important. However, well planned preventive measures can make a difference - sometimes a big difference - even in areas with multiple problems. They can reduce the impact of crime on victims, improve the life chances of young people and enhance the quality of life for everyone. The challenge facing us now is to invest in prevention before problems become too big to prevent.

Jon Bright is deputy head of the Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office on secondment from Crime Concern. This article is a shortened, amended version of a plenary talk given to the ISTD conference Building Safer Communities at the University of Keele in June this year.

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Preventive Approach	Home Office	DH	DfEE	DETR	DSS	DCMS	Police	Local Govt
Improving parenting	?	√	√		√		?	√
Preventing school failure	?	√	√			√		√
Refocusing youth work	?		√			√		√
Preparing young people for employment	√	√	√		√	√		√
Tackling drug misuse	√	√	√				√	√
Reducing nuisance and disorder	√		√	√			√	√
Making crime more difficult, risky and less rewarding	√	√	√	√			√	√
Preventing repeat offending	√	√		√	√		√	√

CODES FOR TABLE

DH = Department of Health

DfEE = Department for Education and Employment

DETR = Department of the Environment

DSS = Department of Social Security

DCMS = Department for Culture, Media and Sport