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PART 1

THEORY

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# CRIME PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IN AUSTRALIA

# Introduction

Crime prevention has a long history in Australia, and in other parts of the world. In all societies, people have tried to protect themselves and those close to them from assaults and other abuses. Every time someone locks the door to their house or their car, they practise a form of prevention. Most parents want their children to learn to be law abiding and not spend any period of their lives in prison. In this country, at least, most succeed. Only a small minority of young people become recidivist offenders. In a functioning society, crime prevention is part of everyday life. While prevention can be all-pervasive at the grassroots, it is oddly neglected in mass media and political discourses. When politicians, talkback radio hosts and newspaper editorialists pontificate about crime and possible remedies, it is comparatively rare for them to mention prevention. Overwhelmingly, emphasis is on policing, sentencing and other 'law and order' responses.

One aim of this book is to understand, and explore ways to overcome, this apparent conspiracy of silence. At various times over the last four decades governments in Australia and other Western countries have 'rediscovered' crime prevention and committed resources to its development and implementation. Many jurisdictions still have schemes in place. Despite these efforts, prevention and community safety remain background tasks, as far as the mass media and government crime policy are concerned. Police and other criminal justice reactions to crime continue to command the lion's share of attention and budget allocations.

Throughout this volume, we focus on arguing that prevention is 'do-able'; that it works, and that it can be far more cost effective than criminal justice responses. We will show how prevention theory, properly applied, not only reduces offending but can help make cities, towns, suburbs, streets, shopping centres and homes more liveable. We also argue that principles of prevention can be applied to emerging problems that face society, such as terrorism and environmental threats.

However, we also acknowledge that ensuring prevention captures the public imagination will require more than building the evidence base through identifying 'what works'. One of the key arguments of this book is that there is a political dimension to the development and implementation of strategies. Making crime prevention 'work' in political contexts entails more than ensuring that it is practically effective. It must also succeed at the symbolic – or, as Freiberg (2001) terms it, 'affective' – level (also see Ekblom 2010). Law and order dominates policy and media discourses and helps political parties garner votes because of the powerful messages that the apprehension, trial, punishment and other associated shaming of offenders conveys. Durkheim (1912) argued that punishment rituals redefine and reinforce a society's 'collective consciousness': the shared values and rules that help bind its members together. Crime prevention policy makers and practitioners

in Australia have tended to gloss over the symbolic dimensions, treating prevention as purely an instrumental task. We try to rectify this deficiency, and discuss ways prevention programs and practices might both feed into and help reshape the ways governments and communities respond to crime.

# The realities of crime prevention policy and practice in Australia and abroad

When examining Australian experience it is important to locate it in an international context (see chapter 6). As a number of researchers (e.g. Crawford 1997; Hughes 1998; Sutton 1997; Homel 2005, 2009a, 2009b) have made clear, Australia was not the first country to endeavour to introduce crime prevention to the policy mix. Attempts by Australian state and commonwealth governments to develop and implement prevention strategies in the late 1980s and 1990s were inspired by, and drew upon, experience in the US, the UK, and France, the Netherlands and other parts of Europe during the early 1970s and 1980s.

As highlighted by Homel (2009, 2010), there are a number of consistent features that characterise modern crime prevention initiatives. These are based upon the experiences of many jurisdictions and can provide guidance for future policy developments in this area (see, for instance, the Victorian Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 2012). The common programmatic features include:

- centrally developed and driven policies
- a commitment to evidence-based approaches (the professed commitment does not always equal reality, though – see chapters 5 and 6)
- strategies built upon multi-agency or partnership approaches (e.g. whole-of-government/whole-of-community approaches)
- emphases upon local delivery (e.g. via local government – see Case study 1.1)
- crime prevention/community safety plans (also see Case study 1.1 and chapter 6)
- a mix of social and environmental prevention (see chapter 3 and 4).

(See also Sutton & Cherney 2002; Crawford 1997; Homel 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Shaw 2001, 2009.)

Given this commonality in how crime prevention has been designed and delivered by state and local government, it is not surprising there are also consistent problems that plague the implementation of crime prevention strategies (Clancy, Lee & Crofts 2012; Homel 2006, 2009; Homel & Homel 2012; Shaw 2009 – see

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chapter 5). However, when considering how countries have developed crime prevention programs and the lessons that might be learnt from these efforts, it is important to be mindful of broader pressures affecting governments and how they may influence the emphasis placed on any particular approach to strategy design and implementation.

It is no accident that in Western democracies crime prevention began to emerge as a distinct policy theme during the final third of the 20th century. This was when 'welfare' models of governance came under pressure, with central states urged to rein in taxation and public sector expenditure in order to ensure that national and regional economies could compete globally. Theorists such as Garland (2000, 2001) and O'Malley (1994) in fact see crime prevention as part of attempts by central authorities to divest themselves of direct social control roles, and shift more and more of the community safety burden to individuals and groups at the local level. Drawing on Foucault (1991), they see this trend towards individual and community 'responsibilisation' as characteristic of the indirect and dispersed ways power is exercised in the late-modern era.

It is true that, in most Western jurisdictions, a key factor prompting governments to explore crime prevention has been the hope that it will help curb escalating outlays on police, prisons and other criminal justice institutions. However, Garland and O'Malley go too far when they imply that there is no more to contemporary crime prevention than an attempt by the centre to back away from aspects of its protective role and compel individuals, organisations and communities to take greater responsibility for their own safety and security. We argue that such an account ignores the fact that, rather than crime prevention being something entirely new, the 'rediscovery' of crime prevention involves belated acknowledgment of an ongoing reality.

Part of this reality involves the realisation that crime prevention is about reforming and augmenting how agencies and groups go about their daily duties and routine activities (see chapter 2). It requires that governments and police alter and re-think how they have traditionally gone about addressing crime, and involves efforts to enhance the existing capacities of third parties – constituted of individuals, families, businesses and communities (who always have had a role in this sphere) – to operate and function in ways that preclude crime. This means that some sections of society are far more likely to benefit from prevention than others. Australian data consistently reveals disproportionately high rates of violence and other victimisation among the economically and socially disadvantaged, in particular many Indigenous communities. Governments that genuinely want these groups to be more effective in prevention need to find ways to ensure that they are not deprived of the material and cultural resources and skills they need to make their lives more secure and their communities more liveable. At various points in this book we argue that this requires reassessment of the classic neo-liberal doctrine that competitive market forces invariably generate the best social outcomes.

# Crime prevention as an alternative to law and order

Law and order attracts people because it seems to tackle crime at its most direct and obvious source, the offender. In chapter 2 we point out, however, that factors contributing to the occurrence of any single offence are multiple and complex. One of the advantages of prevention policy is that it moves beyond a fixation with deviants and deviance and begins to address all the contributing elements. This is why, as criminologists, we are convinced that governments would be well advised to spend more of their resources on prevention. However, our commitment is based on more than technical assessment. Democratic societies that devote excessive resources to the 'tough on crime' approach risk more than wasting money. They also risk damaging the social fabric.

In our view, law and order's domination of contemporary policy and media discourses threatens a 21st century equivalent of the 'tragedy of the commons' fable: the tendency for 'rational' choices made by individuals in isolation to combine to destroy an invaluable and irreplaceable collective resource (Hardin 1968). In the crime policy case, however, the collective resource is social as well as physical. In many parts of the world there is a growing tendency for citizens to live in gated communities (Atkinson & Blandy 2005), work in secured office blocks and find leisure and recreation in similarly controlled and patrolled enclaves (Davis 1990); while their governments rely more and more on aggressive policing tactics to maintain order in what remains of the public domain. For individuals exposed to the benefits and disciplines of the market and with access to economic and other resources, physical segregation from – and lack of tolerance for – potentially disruptive 'outsiders' might well seem a rational choice. For some members of the stigmatised and excluded 'communities of fate' generated by such choices, however, an equally rational response may be to strike out through crime and other predatory behaviour (Jordan 1996; Wilkinson 2005). The burgeoning of private security and increased emphasis on law and order in market-based democracies characterised by significant levels of inequality can lead, therefore, to heightened levels both of unease and fear (Atkinson 2006, p. 180; Low 2003) and of crime itself (see chapter 8).

Crime prevention can help break this cycle. This is one reason why, throughout this book, we follow the Dutch researchers Van Dijk and de Waard and define crime prevention as:

> The total of all private initiatives and state policies, other than the enforcement
> of criminal law, aimed at the reduction of damage caused by acts defined as
> criminal by the state. (Van Dijk & de Waard 1991, p. 483)

Readers should be aware that in defining crime prevention this way we make a value judgment. Not all criminologists and policy makers accept our view that crime prevention should be treated as a conscious alternative to policies that emphasise the privatising of policing and other security and harsher criminal justice responses to crime. As noted, Garland and O'Malley's responsibilisation thesis assumes that prevention simply will complement increased punitiveness in late-modern states. At a more pragmatic level, researchers such as Ekblom (1994) and Weatherburn (2002) point out that the Van Dijk and de Waard approach ignores research evidence that arrest, imprisonment and other criminal justice based initiatives also deter and reduce offending.

A problem with these objections is that they fail to locate the renaissance of crime prevention and community safety policy in relevant historical, cultural and political contexts. As chapter 6 will point out, one of the key reasons governments in Western democracies, such as France and the Netherlands, began to develop relevant strategies during the 1980s – and Australian state governments began to emulate them – was concern about the economic and human costs of over-reliance on law and order. Policy makers who advocated crime prevention in these countries were not simply looking for forms of social control that would 'work' better in a pragmatic sense; they were striving to develop policies and programs that were more compatible with their ideals of a good society. Experience over the last three decades has shown, moreover, that once the vision faded, and governments in these and other countries began to treat crime prevention as a purely administrative challenge, even the most generously-funded programs lost impetus and direction (Hough 2006; Homel 2010).

It is possible for crime prevention to be deployed as an adjunct to law and order. Indeed, the Republic of Singapore has been pursuing just this approach since the mid-1960s (Quah 1992; Clammer 1997; Singh 2000). This includes, for example, punitive measures (e.g. caning) for a wide range of offences, such as vandalism and graffiti, and significant investment in social infrastructure, such as housing and education (Clammer 1997). Few would debate that Singapore's long-term strategy of combining major penalties and humiliations for those who break the law with high levels of state intervention to promote social integration has succeeded in producing an extremely law-abiding society. However, its citizens have paid a price for this success, not just in terms of individual rights and liberties but politically and culturally.

Our point, however, is that criminologists who want to assess prevention purely on an instrumental basis and ignore its expressive and political dimensions gloss over the fact that decisions relating to social control are critical for determining the quality of life any community enjoys (see also chapters 7 and 8). For high-crime areas in particular, commitment to crime prevention and community safety also involves recommitment to investing in physical infrastructure and social capital.

Throughout this book, relationships between prevention and other dimensions of social control policy are treated as more than technical. In advising on and devising ways for human behaviour to be restrained and redirected, it is not just appropriate but obligatory that researchers and policy makers always also consider the types of communities that might result (Hughes 2007). Singapore's elites have used both crime prevention and law and order to produce and sustain a society that is highly prosperous and consumerist, but at the same time distrustful of outsiders and with minimal tolerance even for comparatively minor deviance. We do not see such an approach as appropriate for other countries.

Our view is that when governments make prevention part of their crime control repertoire, they should avoid doing it in ways that simply try to suppress every symptom of difference, diversity, surprise and disorder. Our preference for defining prevention as a distinct alternative, rather than as a mere supplement, to law and order should be understood in this context.

# Chapter themes and outline

In the field of crime prevention there has been much debate about whether it would be better to focus on environmental – or as Clarke (1997) terms it 'situational' – or social prevention. Situational prevention, which in essence focuses on reducing opportunities for crime rather than trying to change the disposition to offend, has long been criticised by advocates of social prevention as 'commodified control' (Garland 2001, p. 200), more likely to simply displace crime than eliminate it (Halsey 2001). After reading our summary of relevant approaches and frameworks in chapter 2 and our more detailed assessment of various schools in chapters 3 and 4, we hope readers will realise that taking sides in this debate is neither necessary nor helpful. 'Common-sense' assumptions that social prevention schemes are more likely to generate outcomes that are consistent with ideals of social justice simply are not supported by the research evidence. In fact, unless carefully managed, even the best intended social programs are likely to have stigmatising and damaging effects (see chapter 3), while situational initiatives can be implemented in ways that avoid these problems and generate broad social benefits (chapter 4).

Throughout the book we use the general term 'environmental' to refer to any approach to prevention that focuses on modifying the physical environments in which offences can occur (e.g. by making targets less accessible or by improving guardianship – see chapters 2 and 4). However, we reserve the specific term 'environmental crime prevention' to refer to attempts to reduce offences against the environment (e.g. air or water pollution). As indicated in chapter 9, the principles reflected in crime prevention generally can also be applied to the specific area of environmental threats and harms.

A key theme of this book is that crime prevention is simply not a technical task. Hence a key emphasis in chapter 5, on implementation and evaluation, is that not only do we need to know whether a prevention strategy or program 'has worked' we also need to ask and answer a series of sub-questions, such as: 'Worked for whom?'; 'Worked in what circumstances and in relation to what problems?' and 'Worked in what ways?' Evidence-based approaches to crime prevention and community safety involve systematically unpacking and responding to each of these demands.

In deciding on ways to improve crime prevention and community safety, context is as important as technique. This is the principle informing chapter 6, which moves from crime prevention and community safety theory to politics and practice. We commence by reflecting on experience since the 1970s in the US, the UK and other European countries, and of course, Australia. Various lessons can be drawn from this history. One is the need for prevention to be implemented through local or regional plans rather than as discrete projects. Another is that to avoid problems such as program drift, large-scale crime prevention and community safety strategies require more than technical expertise. They also must be informed by a strong sense of vision and purpose, and must facilitate dialogue between central and local agencies about priorities and resource allocations. In the absence of such vision and dialogue, local implementation invariably becomes dogged by conflict and division.

Chapters 7 to 10 discuss ways our vision of inclusive crime prevention and community safety might translate into grassroots practice. The key is to embrace difference, spontaneity, the unexpected and the ambiguous rather than to reject every apparent symptom of disorder as 'threatening'. Chapter 7, on the social dynamics of public spaces (including cyberspace), focuses on ways these principles can revitalise how authorities and businesses respond to activities by people whose urge to use these environments in particular ways (e.g. through social networking, graffiti writing, skateboarding or simply 'hanging around') often makes them both the object of exclusion and criminal victimisation.

Chapter 8 analyses ways that notions of 'danger', 'disorder' and 'harm' are constructed at the local level, and how our preferred approaches to prevention and safety might help reconfigure these concepts. Consistent with our view that crime prevention should be treated as a distinct policy alternative to current tendencies to 'commodify' security services and promise tough 'law and order' responses to crime, this chapter gives comparatively little attention to private policing. However, it acknowledges that in shopping centres, entertainment precincts and other venues private sector based guards and other officers can help develop and implement programs that are consistent with crime prevention's emphasis on more inclusive social control (e.g. through acting as effective place-managers).

Chapter 9 aims to apply some of the principles outlined in this book to recent (but not necessarily new) threats that have gained attention within the public