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0521804183 - Situational Prison Control: Crime Prevention in Correctional Institutions

Richard Wortley

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## Situational Prison Control

This book examines the control of problem behaviour in prison from a situational crime prevention perspective. Following the success of situational crime prevention in community settings, Richard Wortley argues that the same principles can be used to help reduce the levels of assault, rape, self-harm, drug use, escape and collective violence in our prison systems. This pioneering new study proposes a two-stage model of situational prevention that moves beyond traditional opportunity-reduction: it attempts to reconcile the contradictory urges to control prison disorder by 'tightening-up' and hardening the prison environment on the one hand, and 'loosening-off' and normalising it on the other. Combining a comprehensive synthesis and evaluation of existing research with original investigation and ground-breaking conclusions, *Situational Prison Control* will be of great interest to academics and practitioners both in the areas of corrections and crime prevention more generally.

RICHARD WORTLEY is Head of the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Griffith University, Brisbane. He was a prison psychologist in the New South Wales prison system for nine years, and since taking up a university position has taught and researched in the areas of corrections and crime prevention. Recent articles have appeared in *Law and Human Behaviour*, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *Crime Prevention Studies* and *Studies on Crime and Crime Prevention*. He is currently National Chair of the Australian College of Forensic Psychologists.

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*School of Criminology and Criminal Justice  
Griffith University Brisbane Australia*



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**DEDICATION**

To my parents, who always knew the value of education.

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## Foreword

Years ago, I was employed by the Home Office as the research officer for a group of training schools for delinquents in the West of England. These were mostly small, open establishments with (for those days) a relatively liberal regime. One of the greatest headaches for staff was a high rate of absconding and I was asked to undertake a study of the problem. As a newly graduated clinical psychologist, my focus was on the personal characteristics and family circumstances of the boys who ran away. I hoped to identify particular kinds of boys who were more prone to abscond and who could be given the necessary care or treatment to avert this response.

Several years and numerous studies later I had to admit defeat. There seemed to be little that distinguished absconders from other boys. But at the same time I chanced upon some large differences between schools in their rates of absconding. These differences in absconding could not be accounted for by differences in populations admitted, but seemed to be the result of differences in the school environment. I argued that schools were likely to vary considerably in pressures and opportunities to abscond. Thus, staff probably differed in how successfully they dealt with bullying or worries about home, both of which could provide the motive for absconding. Schools also varied in their security, their layout and their geographical position, all of which mediated opportunities to abscond.

A job change took me away from the training schools and I never did undertake the study of school environments that I recommended. Instead, I went on to apply the insights gained from the study of absconding in developing the situational prevention model, largely concerned with reducing

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opportunities for crime. But I always regretted being unable to continue my work on absconding and bring it to some practical conclusion. I therefore turned with much anticipation to the manuscript of this book by Richard Wortley. Would he reach the same conclusions that I (and others studying juvenile institutions for the Home Office) had reached about the power of the institutional environment to mould the behaviour of inmates? Would he argue that situational changes to prison environments could substantially reduce the incidence of specific problem behaviours? Could situational prevention really contribute to a more secure, trouble-free environment for both prisoners and staff? After all, the prison is the very epitome of institutional control. If situational prevention did have something additional to offer in prisons, how much more might it have to offer elsewhere!

In fact, this book shows clearly how focusing on specific control problems in the prison environment, and studying the related situational contingencies, can yield a host of suggestions for reducing the problems and associated harms. As such, it is an important contribution to the literature on correctional management, but it is much more than this. It is also a highly sophisticated and up-to-date discussion, grounded in a thorough knowledge of social and clinical psychology, of the determinants of problem behaviours and the respective roles of situational and dispositional characteristics.

For me, the book's greatest value, however, lies in its discussion of situational 'precipitators' of crime and other misconduct. For example, Dr Wortley holds that restrictions on prisoners, 'tightening-up', could precipitate some of the behaviours that prison administrators seek to avoid. Situational prevention in prisons must therefore not merely reduce opportunities for undesirable behaviour, but must also reduce precipitators of such behaviour – sometimes by 'loosening-off'. More generally, he argues that situational prevention has neglected precipitators of crime and, by focusing on opportunities, has narrowed our understanding of the situational determinants of crime and has failed to exploit the full range of situational interventions.

Dr Wortley seeks to remedy these limitations by developing a classification of situational interventions to address crime precipitators, which parallels the existing classification of interventions to reduce crime opportunities. While I doubt that precipitators are as important as opportunities, they unquestionably play a role in crime and misconduct (as I found in my study of absconding). I also agree with Richard Wortley that they should be given

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more attention in situational prevention projects. For this and other reasons, I believe that his analysis of situational control in prisons makes as great a contribution to the literature on situational crime prevention as it does to that on correctional management. Few books can succeed on so many levels.

Ronald V. Clarke  
Rutgers University

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