

CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY

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S u m m a r y

The aim of most criminological theories (like the theories of most of the social sciences) is to explain and/or predict (e.g. criminality or criminal events) by the use of a few key indicators. These theories are, of course, scientifically important and help us to develop our thinking about crime. Among the many criminological theories that are, or have been, popular in recent years are social learning, disorganization, control, self-control, rational choice, routine activity, lifestyle, labeling, rationalization theory.

For the practitioner (e.g. administrator, CP-coordinator), however, these theories are of a limited value. Since individual theories reflect only a fraction of the reality the practitioner encounters in everyday life, and even the experts can't agree about what to do, why bother with a theory?

This paper is an attempt to present a framework where key concepts of important theories have been brought together in a model to facilitate the understanding of how theoretical concepts can be organized to form a coherent framework. In this framework, various crime prevention activities, their chains of implementation and their consequences can be analyzed and better understood by practitioners.

The merits, drawbacks and prospects of the situational and social crime prevention strategies are then discussed with reference to the work of the Brantinghams and Ekbloms "Proximal Circumstances" article.

Introduction

Over the last two hundred years, numerous theories have been presented as, if not the only, so at least the principal explanation of crime and/or criminality. Although these theories pinpointing one or a few factors are scientifically important, as they are falsifiable, yet their usefulness for the practitioner interested in the control and prevention of crime is limited, since only parts of the reality faced by the administrator are covered. The crime prevention practitioner needs a conceptual framework in which important key elements of disparate theories can be brought together and integrated in a model to facilitate the planning of crime prevention initiatives and increase the understanding of:

- a) Where in the causal chain from societal and individual background factors, to the criminal opportunity, and the after-effects that a specific crime prevention initiative is directed and how long is the chain of implementation?
- b) If it is reasonable to assume that the plan will work, and

- c) How changes in the society will affect the type, number and distribution of criminal events.

In this paper I will outline such a model. I have attempted to integrate what I consider to be key concepts of interesting theories of crime and criminality, beginning with theories of society and human nature and ending with the decision-making of individual offenders (figure 1). The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how one (of several possible) such integration can be construed. I will also briefly discuss the implications of the model for crime prevention.

Societal organization

The basic assumption of the model is that macro-level societal factors such as economic and political system, religious life and degree of industrialisation and urbanisation, predetermine three important aspects influencing human behaviour. First, underlying societal factors strongly influence biological and social characteristics of the population such as the age structure, the number and survival rate of children and the social desirability of having children of a certain sex. It also determines the parenting and childraising practices and associated features. Second, the type and kind of media coverage of different events are given as well as what type and kind of individuals are exposed to coverage of particular news and views. Third, the degree of communitarism of neighbourhoods, of extended families and between individuals and institutions.

Communitarism

“The more weakened the groups to which (the individual) belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interest” (Durkheim: Suicide, quoted in Hirschi 1974 p. 16). In society today, the concept of group must include the social structures of the area of residence.

“Communitarism is a condition of societies. In communitarian societies individuals are densely enmeshed in interdependencies which have the special qualities of mutual help and trust. The interdependencies have symbolic significance in the culture or group loyalties, which take precedence over individual interests. The interdependencies also have symbolic significance as attachments which invoke personal obligation to others in a community of concern, rather than simply interdependencies of convenience as between a bank and a small depositor”. (Braithwaite 1984 p. 100) Braithwaite describes communitarism as a condition of societies, which seems to be rather static in a given society and differ only between societies. In this model, however, the degree of communitarism differs not only between societies but also between communities. Communities are seen as subject to variations caused by differences in government presence and policies in different neighbourhoods (e.g. social service and policing practices). With this adaptation the concept of communitarism is included in the model:

The level of communitarism influences and is influenced by individual social learning processes and the population characteristics of a community.

Media influence

The influence of media (such as papyrus rolls, television or Internet) can be understood in terms of the faith or *credibility* placed in a specific type, agent or publisher by consumers, the differential *exposure* to news and views in individuals and communities, the *social importance* which is closely linked to the total measure of *media supply potential*. For reasons of simplicity I will restrict the examples to the medium television. The same basic assumptions can be transposed to any kind of media.

These factors are interrelated. When the media supply potential is virtually unlimited (as in cable TV) the relative credibility (of e.g. a television news anchor) is diminished due to competing and noncoherent priorities attributed to different news and differences in casting policy. A recent study of the crime content in the three major Swedish television news programmes shows that one network showed more than 3 times the amount of crime reaching the viewers of the programme showing the least crime (3.1, 4.1 and 9.4 % of total news airtime respectively) (Johnson 1995)

The number of people exposed to a particular media is dependent on a combination of media supply potential and personal or peer or primary group preferences. The social importance of media reflects the degree in which media output is a focal concern in everyday life.

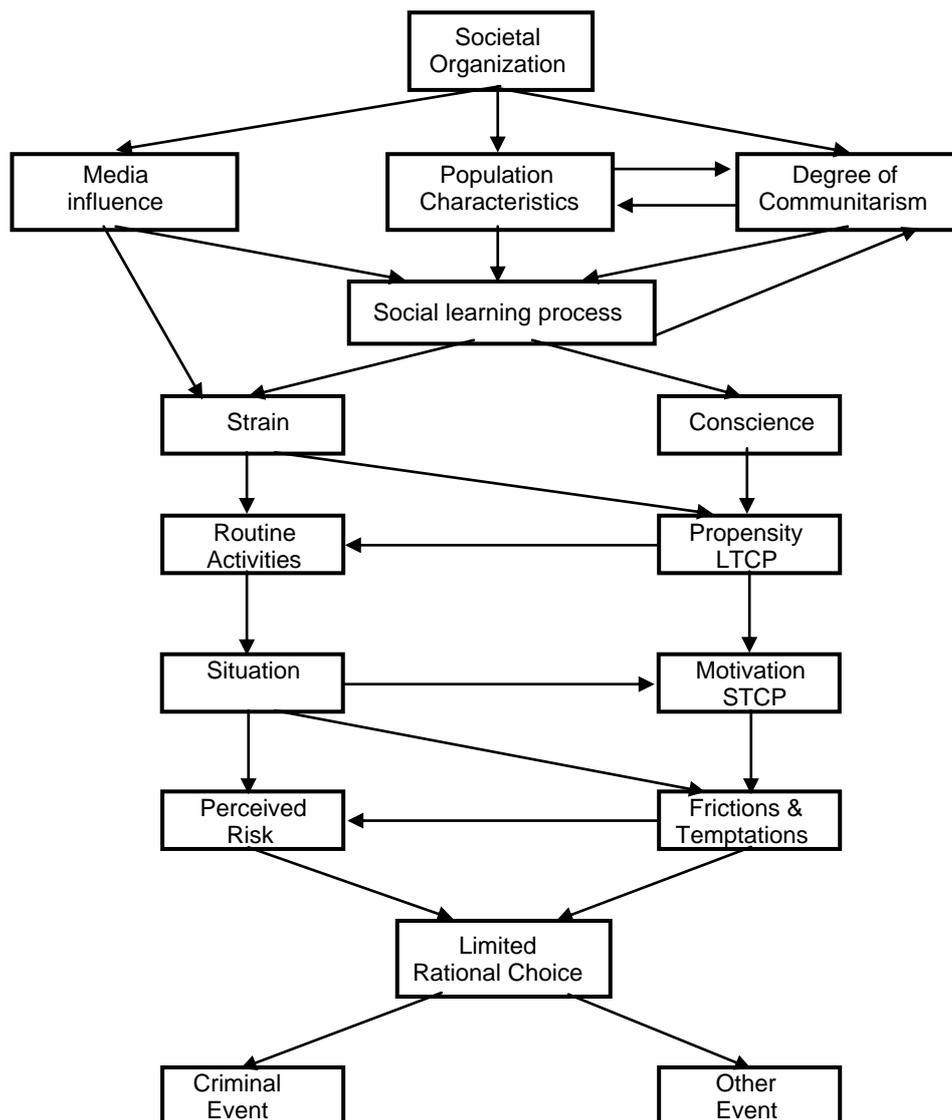
In Sweden, with two television channels in the early 1980s yesterday's TV was a natural subject for discussion, e.g. around the coffee table at work, which gave broadcast consumption a social value. Today, a massive increase in media supply potential has diminished the social importance of watching television since only a minority is likely to have seen the same programs, there is no common ground for discussion. At the same time as credibility and social importance, and exposure to particular television channels is diminishing, exposure (in daily viewed minutes per capita) to television in general has increased 33.6 % from 104 minutes in the fiscal year 1982/83 when two channels were operating, parallel with a massive increase in radio and television media supply potential to 139 minutes in 1994 when 60 % have cable. (figures from Westrell, personal com.)

Population Characteristics

Most people will agree that societal organization determines, to a great extent, the characteristics of the population. Not only in the society as a whole (e.g. number of children and age structure) but also, through segregation, affects the characteristics of the people that will live in the individual communities.

Tradition, religion, social service and pension benefits, and degree of labour-intense agriculture plays interrelated and important roles in explaining e.g. birth frequency, educational structure and other important differences in population character. In countries like India and China, the social desirability of children of a certain (e.g. male) sex combined with modern methods of fetus diagnosis, leads to a decrease in the birth rate of the less desired sex, which affects the population characteristics of those societies.

Figure 1. A Model Framework of Integrated Key Concepts of Criminological Theories



Social learning process

In its basic form Social learning theory stipulated that all behaviour is learned and that learning of social behaviours occurs through face-to-face interaction. Hence, the impact of the composition of the neighbourhood (population characteristics) is obvious. The neighbourhood level of communitarism is of crucial importance to the socialization process. Consider as an example life in a small town with a butcher, a grocer, small shops where you stay and chat for a while, and a limited number of people. Most people in such a town will know each other, at least by appearance, and will react to harmful behaviours exercised by others thus rendering a high level of informal social control. In such a community it is more likely that damages to the socialization process caused by deprived or outright dreadful home circumstances and/or parenting practice will be reduced through the social network, than in the impersonalized social and shopping environments of our great cities.

The social learning process affects, and is affected by, the level of communitarism in the community.

We now expand the concept of social learning process to include observational learning, and media influence. The point of departure is the fact that most behaviour is

learned by observation, often in absence of external reinforcements. "Humans have evolved an advanced capacity for observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills on the basis of information conveyed by modelling influences, indeed, virtually all learning phenomena resulting from direct experience can occur vicariously by observing people's behaviour and its consequences for them". (Bandura 1989 quoted in Hjelle & Ziegler 1992 p.337).

A long-lasting prejudice in theories of the behavioural sciences is that significant models (those from which behaviours, attitudes and motivations are most likely to be learned) are exclusively to be found among family and friends. As any parent knows, this is not true. In the 'Canadian Peer Study' schoolchildren were asked to write the names of their friends. As the pupils behaviour was monitored, the study showed that the pupils were much more likely to model their behaviours after persons they unilaterally rated as friends, than after persons who they rated and were rated by as friends. (McCord, personal com.) It is obvious that a one-sided friendship (from A to B) must be much stronger to last for any duration of time than a reciprocal one. Thus, idols are indeed significant models. This is well known among the market/advertisement psychologists and can be expressed thus: "Models who appear high in competence, who are alleged experts, or who are celebrities or superstars are likely to command greater attention than models who lack these attributes. Advertisers of everything from footwear to feminine products capitalize on this idea, utilizing television personalities, athletic superstars, and financial wizards to hawk their products. Other variables that are especially important at this stage are the observer's own, pre-existing capabilities and motives". /.../ "Essentially, any set of characteristics that causes a model to be perceived as intrinsically rewarding for prolonged periods of time increases the probability of more careful attention to the model, and, consequently, the probability of modelling". (Hjelle & Ziegler 1992 p. 345).

In 1986 Bandura showed that when our attention is directed to a model, positive incentives do not enhance observational learning. "This is supported by research showing that children who watched a model on television in a room sarkened to minimize distractions later displayed the same amount of imitative learning regardless of whether they were told in advance that such imitations would be rewarded or were given no prior incentives to learn the modelled performances". (Hjelle 8c Ziegler 1992 p. 347.)

Key factors in determining media impact on the individual social learning process are; apart from that individual's social circumstances, the exposure to different media content, the degree of credibility he or she attributes to it, and the social importance of the received information content in the contemporary culture. A Massive media supply potential tends to increase exposure to favoured types of media content, while, at the same time diminishing its credibility and social importance in particular beyond the immediate group of peers.

The characteristics of the population and the degree of communitarism, in combination with the media influence causes differences in the statistical distribution of outcomes of the social learning process.

Conscience, aspirations and lifestyle preferences are one important result of the social learning process.

Conscience

In this model, conscience is defined as a set of internalized values in which the individual truly believes. To their nature they can be pro-social, asocial or anti-social, or anything in-between. The question we pass on to the Propensity box is as Hirschi put it: "Why does a man violate the rules in which he believes?" It is not "Why do men differ in their beliefs about what constitutes good and desirable conduct" (1974 p. 23).

Conscience is regarded as a direct result, determined by the social learning process, with no interference other than those stemming from biological differences in the capacity or functioning of the nervous system.

Strain

Strain can be defined as the discrepancy between individual goals and desires in life and his or her perceived prospects of reaching these goals in a lawful manner.

Since the mid 1800s when books of fiction began to be increasingly available to members of the middle and lower classes, and in particular with the television revolution during the last generation, images and models of carefree life, as well as deviant lifestyles, have become available to the general public like in no other time in history. This causes a general raise of aspirations in the population, some more realistic, some less. It also displays criminal role models and rationalizations for criminal conduct, thus suggesting alternative lifestyle and (criminal) career opportunities. There is no such thing as 'universal success goals', but individual success goals tend to move in one general direction.

"The increased stress on achievement norms inflate the expectations and aspirations of the lower-class adolescent. At the same time, it limits the career opportunities available to him, demanding levels of education in which he experiences special disadvantages in attaining. In addition, he finds that the career possibilities for which he is qualified have become excessively competitive, so that discriminatory criteria are covertly applied. Under such conditions he is inclined to locate the source of his troubles in the social system rather than in his own shortcomings. His sense of injustice encourages him to withdraw sentiments attributing legitimacy to the dominant social order and to search for a more efficient means to achieve his aspirations". (Cloward & Ohlin 1960 p. 1121),

When individual success goals are not met, there are two possible alternatives. Either failure is attributed to oneself, and goals modified to become more realistic or e.g. education improved, or the failure is attributed to society which results in the individual questioning the legitimacy of system thereby reducing his sentiment.

"The democratic ideology of equality of opportunity creates constant pressure for formal criteria of evaluation that are universalistic rather than particularistic, achieved rather than ascribed; that is, for a structure of opportunities that are available to all on an open competitive basis rather than the proprietary right of a select and group and that are achieved by one's own effort rather than acquired by the mere fact of birth into a particular race, religion, social class or family". (ibid p. 119)

"Yet there are often significant discrepancies between the criteria which *should* and those which *do* control social evaluations. Even in a democratic society, for example, where the dominant ideology stresses criteria based on social equality, talent, skill, knowledge, and achievement, many competitive selections and judgements take account of such nonuniversalistic criteria as race, religion, family prestige, wealth, social class, and personal friendship". (ibid p. 115)

The level of strain a person perceives has effects on his choice of routine activities and lifestyle as well as on his long-term crime potential or propensity.

Long-Term Crime Potential or Propensity

Propensity, or LTCP, is a combination of the degree of self-control that the individual is able to exercise, and, his or her readiness to utilize rationalization techniques for self-justification of criminal behaviour.

Individual LTCP is the grand total of a person's conscience and the strain under which he or she lives. An individual propensity to commit crimes does change over time but is relatively stable in relation to others of the same age.

Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990) ascribe stable individual differences in criminal behaviour to self-control (p. 87). They mention six elements of self-control, of which four are either irrelevant or subcomponents to the two remaining, that low self-control facilitates *immediate* and *simple* gratification of needs and desires.

Rationalization techniques are self-justifications for breaking the rule that "is based on what is essentially an unrecognized extension of defences to crimes, in the form of

justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large". (Sykes & Matza 1957 p.666)

Rationalization precedes deviant behaviour, thus making it possible. A person with a low level of self-control and a high readiness to apply neutralization techniques will have a very high LTCP. However, we should note that this box of the model presupposes that "If the deviant is committed to a value system different from that of conventional society, there is, within the context of the theory, (this box) nothing to explain". (Hirschi, 1974 p. 23.)

Routine Activities versus Lifestyle

Routine activity is influenced by the level of strain, and in part by the LTCP. The level of self-control plays an important part in explaining what kind of activities a person, regardless of lifestyle, is likely to carry out.

Routine activity is defined as any activity repeated with some regularity. Driving a car is a routine activity; being involved in a car crash is not. Usual routine activities are working, sleeping, watching television, and dining out, etc. The reason for including what some would label a 'non-activity', sleeping in the concept is it being the best example of the observation that "The assumption, widely shared, is that a person can be simply too busy doing conventional things to find time to engage in deviant behaviour". (Hirschi 1974 p. 22)

In contrast, lifestyle is a set of personal preferences that effect the qualitative content of routine activities, home furnishing style etc. Going to the cinema is a routine activity, as opposed to the choice of what to wear, film to see, or who to go with, which are expressions of lifestyle. An individual involved in a lifestyle that also attracts crime-prone individuals is more exposed to crime opportunities than other individuals, and therefore more likely to commit crimes as well as to be victimized by others.

Routine activity and lifestyle strongly influence the creation of situations in which the individual finds herself/himself.

Situation

The lifestyle and routine activities of the individual have a strong impact on the situations in which the individual finds himself. This model's concept of situation has been strongly influenced by Ekblom (1994).

A situation consists of a) a place, b) the presence or absence of at least one potential offender and a crime target (object or person), and c) of modulators.

The environment of a place consists of two main components, the logistic (physical) environment that facilitates or obstructs the perpetrator's ability to commit a crime or modulator's ability to alter the event, and factors in the (psychological/emotional) environment that affect the motivation of perpetrator or modulators.

The crime target is described in terms of its desirability and/or provocability. If the target can defend itself (e.g. by hitting back or in case of a car, by being equipped with an alarm) that aspect of the target is considered to be a modulator. Modulators are persons or objects that influence the environment, the target or the potential perpetrator in a way affecting the probability of a criminal event.

Particulars of the situation influences motivation, the perceived level of frictions and temptations, and, the perceived risk of punishment and/or detection.

Short-Term Crime Potential or Motivation

Motivation, or STCP, is the result of interaction between the baseline LTCP, the cognitive cues in a particular situation, and, the present mood, presence or absence of intoxication and other short-term conditions affecting the current emotional state of the individual.

The current motivational state is an important factor influencing the individual's perception and interpretation of the frictions and temptations of life.

Frictions and Temptations

The perception of frictions and temptations is closely linked to the current motivational state (STCP) and to the particulars of a situation.

Frictions are situations causing feelings of wrath or anger towards a person or an object such as symbols for something the person dislikes (e.g. election posters or symbols for a 'hostile' football team). A temptation can be defined as a potential crime target that is attractive to the potential perpetrator.

Changes in emotional and cognitive states caused by sudden bursts of desire or anger affect the perception of risk and the decision-making process.

Perceptions of Risk and Deterrence

The individual's perception of the risk for detection and/or severity of punishment is determined by the particulars of the situation, the emotional and cognitive state caused by his perceptions of friction and temptation combined with Stafford & Warr's concept of experiences of punishment and punishment avoidance. (Stafford & Warr 1993) Such experiences can be personal (direct) or indirect, that is, through the experiences of others about which the decision-maker has some knowledge. The experiences are not only about punishment, but also about successful strategies to avoid punishment and/or detection.

The individual's perception of risk is an important part of the decision-making process.

Decision-Making and the Concept of a Limited Rational Choice

The model stipulates that perceived risk of punishment and detection combined with perceived levels of temptations and frictions are powerful influences in the decision-making process.

Criminal as decision-maker are not an uncontroversial subject in the field of criminology. It is reasonable to assume that, "For example, an individual contemplating breaking into a warehouse will estimate the probability that he or she will be apprehended (e.g., as .25) the possible gains and punishments to be achieved, and the levels of satisfaction that will be gained from the break-in if he or she is not apprehended (e.g., the utility of gaining \$ 500) or is apprehended (e.g., the utility of gaining \$500 and receiving a \$ 700 fine) /.../ To continue our example, the individual would make the following calculation:

$$EU = .75 u(x^0 + \$ 500) + .25 u(x^0 + \$ 500 - \$ 700) \quad (9.1)$$

Where u is a function that converts dollars into levels of satisfaction, and x^0 is the individual's initial wealth. The individual will commit the criminal act if his or her expected

utility, as calculated above, is higher by doing so than by not doing so. (example from Lattimore & Witte 1986 who don't believe this either)?

This level of elaboration is, in view of our knowledge of crimes and criminals, unbelievable, yet the "assumption that rewards and punishments influence our choices between different courses of action underlies much economic, sociological, psychological, and legal thinking about human action". (Cornish & Clarke 1986 p. V.)

The notion of a reasoning criminal, who employs the same sorts of cognitive strategies when contemplating offending as he and the rest of us utilize in other respects, ought not to be strange.

The solution to the problem is the introduction of a concept of limited rational choice. "Rationality is not about meaning, but about instrumental achievement. (Niggli 1994 p. 85)

"From this it follows that applying RCT does not inevitably require a view of (individual) offenders as thoughtful and intellectually sophisticated..." (ibid p. 84).

When making choices people do not, generally, use all the information available to them. People tend to use information that is consistent with what they believe (cognitive dissonance theory), easy accessible and readily available.

I believe Niggli sums up the limited rational choice concept quite well as he writes, "Given the individual level and the 'limited' character of rational calculus, concrete, short-term factors should be more important in utility calculations than abstract, general factors. For the rationally acting individual therefore the severity of sanctions is meaningless if there is only a small risk of detection or capture, since the severity of sanctions does not really address the individual but rather applies to the general societal level. (ibid p.91 f).

The result of the limited rational choice process is the decision to commit a criminal act, or to choose another course of action.

Offender Awareness Space and Crime Occurrence

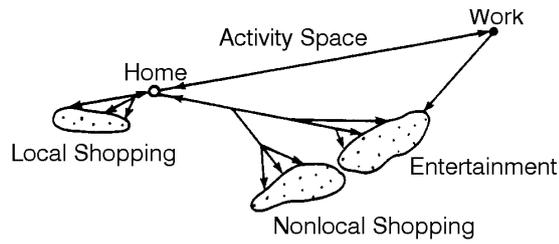
To commit a criminal act is a source of stress for the offender. There is (also in situations favourable to criminal outcomes) always an element of uncertainty (what if the public interferes, the police show up etc). Offenders will commit most of their crimes in areas that are well known to them in order to limit the risks and increase their personal safety (it's always good to know what's behind the next corner). The physical as well as psychological qualities of the area are important for the offenders feeling of security and control.

The areas about which most knowledge is available are those in which the potential offender spends most of his time, e.g. the present or former area of residence, work, shopping and entertainment areas which are visited often. These areas are called the Activity Space of the individual. (fig. a)

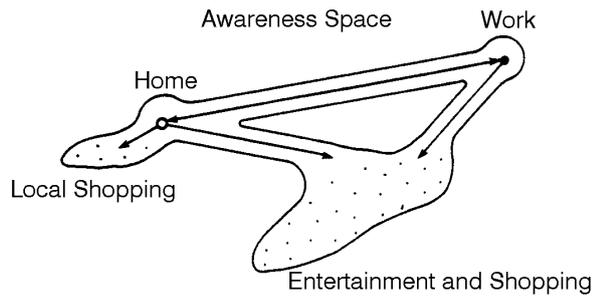
The concept of Awareness Space includes the individual's Activity Space and an area around and between the everyday Activity Space, which is well known to the individual and the area that is seen from the transit links (roads, buses) that are used for transportation between the areas of activity. (fig. b).

The offender is likely to commit his crimes within his Awareness Space but not too close to his home or other places where he might be recognized and subjected to formal or informal sanctions. The area should be well known to the offender but he/she should not be easily identified.

Microspatial Analysis of Crime



(a)

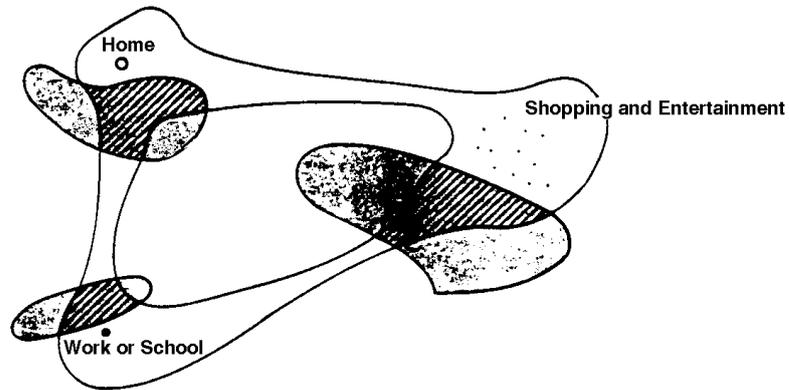


(b)

Figure 12-5.
Activity and Awareness
Space.

Figure from Brantingham & Brantingham 1984 p 353

Further, for a criminal event to occur the awareness space of the individual and criminal opportunities that are attractive to the potential offender must coincide at such a time and place where the offender is present.



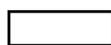
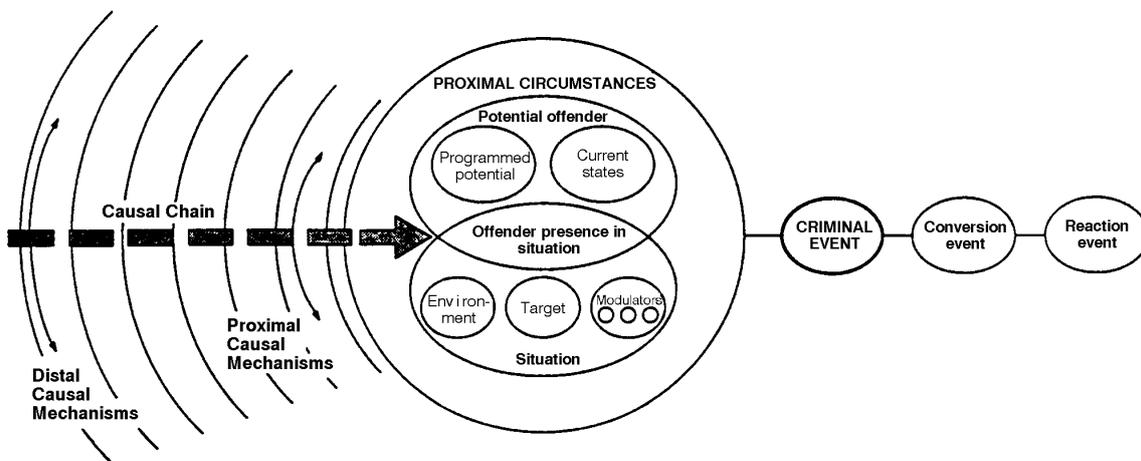
-  Awareness Space
-  Opportunities
-  Areas of Crime Occurrence

Figure 12-9. Intersection of opportunities with awareness space.

Implications for Crime Prevention Strategy

“The criminal event is usually taken to be a single episode. However, in reality, it is far more like a dynamic process. There are two ways in which this aspect can be captured. First, the possibility that the offender, the target and the environment repeatedly combine to produce a succession of similar events, as with domestic disputes or racial harassment, should be allowed for. Second, even what for legal or administrative purposes may be regarded as a single event may have quite a complex structure. Cornish (1993) uses the concept of 'scripts' to describe the linked sequence of scenes through which a would-be offender has to navigate in order to successfully conclude the crime. Scripts are a kind of logistical map of the offence. For example 'ringing' (changing the identity of stolen motor vehicles to facilitate disposal) involves several stages, some of which may be crimes themselves: target selection> > theft> concealment> disguise> marketing> conversion or disposal. The pursuit of such specificity within the criminal event is useful in getting closer to causal mechanisms and opening up points of intervention. In many respects (as in the example) the script is peculiar to the type of crime, and cannot be used in classification of prevention. However, it is possible to identify more or less 'universal' scripts which describe the common scenes through which most offenders have to pass in order to reach their goal”. (Ekblom 1994 p 197 f)

Figure 1: The Paradigm of Proximal Circumstances



“There is, of course, an alternative set of scripts. Criminal events may end up as aborted or failed attempts; if completed they may lead on to discovery, detection, arrest, trial and punishment or treatment. These additional events may involve formal legal processes or their informal equivalents ranging from official cautioning to private acts of revenge”. (Ekblom 1994 p. 198)

Conclusions

When we consider the possible occurrence of criminal events as part of a sequence of interrelated circumstances it leads to two conclusions. First, preventive intervention that occurs early in the causal chain leading towards potential criminal events (e.g. Societal reforms, programs for troubled youth, social programs) will affect a large number of people and will, if they are effective, lead to long-term reduction of people's propensity to make criminal choices and thus to a reduction of the crime level. Second, preventive strategies working directly in proximity of the (possible) criminal event has a direct effect on the outcomes of situations that might lead to a criminal event. The places where, and the times when, criminal event are likely to occur are often well known to members of the public, police officers and researchers. A direct and immediate reduction of the quantity of crimes will be the result of successful intervention on such places.

The early (social) intervention strategies are difficult to implement; it is difficult to measure their effects. If the chosen social crime prevention strategies are effective, long-term decreases in the level of *criminality* in the future and through this to reduction of crime levels. The situational crime prevention strategies offer immediate and measurable reductions in the number of criminal events on selected locations.



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Nusikaltimų prevencija ir kriminologijos teorija

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SANTRAUKA

Daugumos kriminologijos teorijų (kaip ir kitų socialinių mokslų teorijų) tikslas – remiantis keliais esminiais rodikliais paaiškinti ir/arba nuspėti nusikalstamumo tendencijas ir pačius nusikaltimus. Šios teorijos, be abejonės, labai svarbios, kadangi jos padeda geriau suvokti nusikalstamumo reiškinių. Pastaraisiais metais populiariausios yra kriminologijos, socialinio mokslo, deorganizavimo, kontrolės, savikontrolės, racionalaus pasirinkimo, kasdienės veiklos, gyvenimo būdo, racionalizacijos teorijos.

Tačiau praktikui (pvz., administratoriui, nusikalstamumo prevencijos koordinatoriui) šios teorijos nėra labai vertingos. Iš tiesų, kam reikalinga teorija, jeigu individualūs požiūriai teatspindi mažą dalį tikrovės, su kuria kasdien susiduria praktikas, ir netgi ekspertai nesutaria dėl kovos su nusikaltimais strategijos.

Šiame straipsnyje bandoma pateikti pagrindines visų teorijų sąvokas. Jis padės praktikams susieti atskiras nusikaltimų prevencijos veiklas, jų įgyvendinimo būdus ir išanalizuoti bei geriau suvokti galimus padarinius.

Situacinės prevencijos ir socialinės nusikalstamumo prevencijos strategijų pranašumai, trūkumai ir perspektyvos aptariami analizuojant Brantinghamso ir Ekblomso straipsnį "Lemiamos aplinkybės".

