
A CRIME PREVENTION EXTENSION SERVICE

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Abstract: This paper proposes a Crime Prevention Extension Service to bring situational prevention and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design into more widespread practice. Each extension service should be operated by a university in cooperation with local organizations and public agencies. Assistance would mainly be in the form of advice for preventing crime at low cost in local settings.

INTRODUCTION

Crime prevention is one of those areas in which the public is more ignorant than it realizes. Many people think that turning on the lights at night when they are away will scare away burglars, and are quite unaware that burglars have other ways to recognize their absence. Many people use walls around their backyards to provide privacy and a feeling of security, not realizing that these very walls hide the process of illegal entry and make the intruder's job easier. Merchants are often uninformed about the substantial research on preventing crime against convenience stores and small markets.

Attempting to overcome such ignorance and misinformation provides quite a challenge to those interested in crime prevention. Public information campaigns are always a possibility, but information overload is so extreme in our society that it is difficult to spread necessary information, especially when that information involves details not readily communicated via the mass media. Private consultants provide a more personalized

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means for disseminating experience and research, yet not all such consultants are themselves up to date on crime prevention research. Moreover, most victims or potential victims of crime cannot readily afford private consultants, or do not have the incentive to hire them unless crime victimization occurs at very high levels. Finally, those who offer crime prevention services with the greatest vigor are often selling hardware or guard service at high cost, having no incentive to explain to people low-cost or zero-cost methods for reducing crime vulnerability.

What is needed is a new source of customized information—an agency which provides citizens and organizations with advice on how to lower crime risk at minimal cost, and provides guidance for putting the advice into action. Such a source must be very familiar with crime prevention research findings, as well as the basic principles of situational prevention and crime prevention through environmental design. Moreover, such a source must become part of an ongoing, organized process—not simply the product of a forward-looking individual who might retire or move at any time.

The Agricultural Model

In 1914, the U.S. Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act (7 U.S.C. 341 et seq.) establishing the Cooperative Extension System. This nationwide tripartite educational network includes the Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the state extension staff at all land-grant universities, and the county extension staff in nearly all of the nation's 3,150 counties. The Extension Service plays the coordinating role for the system. Its mission from the outset was to put agricultural research into action by providing instruction and practical demonstration to the population. Its mission has since broadened to a wider variety of subjects, such as nutrition and waste management (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1993). In practical terms, the Cooperative Extension System serves to communicate the knowledge gathered by agricultural science and make it available to working farmers. A variety of educational programs operate under the Extension Service umbrella, including distribution of pamphlets, personalized advice, visits to farmers, etc. The service also keeps agricultural scientists in contact with working farmers, assisting them in understanding problems such as how to maximize yields, deal with plant diseases and so forth. Without the Extension Service, the working farmer would not have the time or training to obtain this scientific information.

Medical Model

University medical schools long ago learned that clinical experience required clinical material, namely, sick people. Medical schools took pains to affiliate with large city hospitals, where they could help diagnose and cure many of these people, while learning as much as possible about their conditions. This helped train students and provide knowledge for medical staff. Surprisingly, many of the social sciences have forgotten this lesson. Criminology, too, needs to link up with practical problems and try to help solve them. This will keep criminology from continuing to play a highly abstract role. Becoming more practical through solving problems for real people can help make crime theory better, too. The recent development of more tangible and more practical theories of crime, along with crime prevention ideas which work, offer a new chance for clinical criminology to develop (Felson, 1994). Both the medical and agricultural models point in the same direction: organizing new settings in which criminologists can solve problems. University criminologists should be the most interested in such creativity, especially since universities are supposed to be centers for innovation.

THE CRIME PREVENTION EXTENSION SERVICE

This paper proposes a Crime Prevention Extension Service along the same lines as the agricultural model discussed above. Since crime is disproportionately a metropolitan problem, a Crime Prevention Extension Service should begin in a metropolitan areas in conjunction with metropolitan universities. Perhaps most importantly, a Crime Prevention Extension Service should be linked to a criminology or criminal justice department, yet it should be administered with a clear mandate to assist people in the community to prevent crime. Within the university, the service may also foster ties to academic departments of business, architecture, hotel management, parks administration, hospital administration and other departments that train people in practical industries with crime problems, so long as practical crime prevention remains the central focus. In time, the agricultural extension service itself might join in carrying crime prevention ideas to rural areas and clinical information back to criminologists.

It is essential that the Crime Prevention Extension Service not be distracted by the usual "soft" types of crime prevention: public relations

for police departments, "officer friendly" programs to meet with school children, lecturing people on the need for more education or social programs, demanding heavier punishments after people are caught, etc. These methods are soft because they are designed to meet, with very little thought, the political demands of angry people rather than to encourage true crime prevention based upon knowledge or experience. Rather, a Crime Prevention Extension Service must focus upon specific problem solving in specific settings, perhaps expanding to the design of nearby environments.

The most central focus of these efforts should be private businesspeople, especially those in small businesses. These are the heart and core of crime production and prevention. Small shop owners facing shoplifting, bars dealing with fights and drunkenness, small factories concerned with danger in the parking lots, companies trying to prevent graffiti, vandalism, and break-ins—all of these would be served by a Crime Prevention Extension Service. However, such a service should not be limited to businesses; it should also include churches, neighborhood associations, condominium associations, block clubs, downtown associations, and those organizations whose efforts can prevent crime against themselves, their customers, or others in the vicinity. In addition, services can be provided to municipal governments, zoning boards and others in the planning process: park administrations; schools; or additional public and quasi-public agencies. Finally, a Crime Prevention Extension Service should be available to individuals and families seeking crime prevention advice for microenvironmental problems.

Financial Basis

Crime prevention has externalities for neighborhoods and society. For that reason, it is desirable for citizens and groups to prevent crime even when the direct savings are small. A vandalism incident worth only \$ 100 leads youths and communities to trouble valued far more than that, and may feed drug habits with further damage later to individuals and society. In addition, letting crime occur and trying to catch people afterward is a very costly and uncertain process. Moreover, good crime prevention ideas planted among the public can spread beyond those offered these ideas directly, and can lead to other good ideas. For these reasons, a few hours of basic crime prevention consultation should be provided free to any business, organization or individual. A sliding scale of fees would then

cover additional consultations. Public speakers would be provided for free to discuss prevention of many types, again avoiding the common "officer friendly" and "lock-'em-up" simplicity. Remaining funds must be provided by public sources as a basic public service which, at very low cost can reduce crime in practical ways.

Initiating the Crime Prevention Extension Service

The Crime Prevention Extension Service depends upon the presence of experts who can train other experts and who are good at communicating with non-experts. This, in turn, requires a marriage of several persons:

- (1) A researcher-expert in crime prevention.
- (2) A very strong research coordinator/trainer, who is also versed in crime prevention.
- (3) A small staff of articulate persons from diverse industrial, business and public agency backgrounds, who have widespread contacts and strong entrepreneurial abilities.

Initiating something from scratch is always difficult. New employees do not yet know quite what to do. while those to be served do not yet know that someone is there to serve them or what questions to ask. Like giving a party to which nobody comes, it is easy to imagine starting a Crime Prevention Extension Service to which nobody applies for help. Moreover, it is difficult to train a pool of employees when those served want immediate answers. Therefore, initiation of such a service depends upon a substantial training period, involvement of trainees in research projects to enhance their substantive training on crime prevention, mixing together persons of diverse crime prevention experience, and, finally opening shop. Once this is done, the staff would need to use contacts and entrepreneurship to introduce crime prevention services to businesses and others. The burden would be upon these innovators to find out what crime concerns lead directly to contact, what prevention ideas are comprehensible, which of these are adapted in fact, and so forth.

In the process, at least two types of clinical research would be generated: research on adoption of innovations (that is, what gets people to innovate, if they do so at all); and research on the impact of these innovations upon crime victimization itself. The latter would and should include work on crime displacement.

A Fully-Developed Service

Ideally, a Crime Prevention Extension Service would become a national network, with outlets in every metropolitan area and sharing information with agricultural extension services to help reach nonmetropolitan areas. The central office would have experts in every major business, industrial and organizational sector facing crime problems, and these experts would feed information and suggestions as needed to field offices. The experts would also feed information to university criminologists on what research is needed, what new crimes are developing, and which theories do not seem to work. They would help keep the field agents up to date on new research knowledge about crime in general and specific prevention tactics.

Alternatively, a few states or regions with highly advanced state-funded extension services could develop such a system on their own, using meetings and publications to share information on a regional and national basis.

Concomitant with either regional or national systems development, there should be a shift of emphasis in crime research from offenders to situations, from intangible to tangible, from big science to small science, with thousands of flowers blooming in more specific ways.

This same point offers us a warning about large-scale systems of extension offices. If such offices are too centrally controlled, if they, in turn, squelch initiative and discovery, the entire idea could die of its own weight. The challenge then is to create networks of extension services, with some organizational methods for feeding expertise to the field, yet maintaining the free-flow of experience.

Experience and Science

Several types of experience would accrue for future use:

- (1) What types of small business, small factories, or facilities are most open to crime prevention innovation?
- (2) What types of occupations are most open to such innovation?
- (3) How can staff be hired and trained most effectively to impart such innovation to others?
- (4) Which types of innovation are resisted and which most easily accepted?
- (5) What combinations of communications serve best to accomplish innovations?

(6) When are people willing or unwilling to be served, interested or not interested?

(7) What roles can criminologists play in offering advice, training students, and linking criminology to various industrial and organizational fields?

(8) What information can be fed back into criminology, improving that field, and guiding it towards more practical knowledge in crime prevention (which, of course, can then be fed back out to the those served).

(9) To what extent can a Crime Prevention Extension Service serve as an effective conduit for information within and between industries and organizations to assist all in preventing crime?

Needless to say, many of these same topics can in time lead to systematic clinical research on crime prevention. Moreover, the experience and clinical research gathered in the context of a Crime Prevention Extension Service can inform basic criminology, a field that needs very much to get away from its highly abstract origins and return to the tangible study of how crime occurs and how it is prevented. Criminologists, including those in universities, need to gain new skills. They need to learn by experience how people and organizations prevent crime and can do so more effectively. They need to learn about how business and industry are organized, even how the public sectors operate in practice; this knowledge must be linked to tangible understandings of how offenders feed upon legal activities and carve their illegal niches. Criminologists also need to understand the profit motive, the practical organizational techniques, facility management, organizational dynamics, how to make change palatable, and the other skills for putting policy into practice. In the process, criminologists can provide themselves with more varied career opportunities, joining the security management departments of various companies, and providing more creative security services than selling alarms or guard services. Those criminologists who leave academic life to join business or government in non-security fields can become security-conscious managers who emphasize preventing crime in more natural ways than arresting people or hiring guards. Via the Crime Prevention Extension Service, criminologists can provide benefits to the community, while the community provides scientific and career benefits to criminology.

Public Agency Significance

Public agencies often manage facilities as if they are private. Thus, each school, although publicly owned, becomes private property for purposes of day-to-day management. Trespassers are defined by law and punished accordingly. Public schools thus can be served by a Crime Prevention Extension Service, as can public buildings. Public parks are not private in the same way, but they have rules (such as hours of usage and areas reserved for young children), as well as the need to design out crime (such as removing nooks and crannies which contribute to the risks of rape and mugging). Downtown areas have public streets which merit public access, but even these can be abused under law (such as by aggressive panhandlers or merchants blocking sidewalks).

Public agencies in many nations are more centrally controlled than in the U.S. This allows them to foster situational crime prevention projects more easily. Fewer minds have to be changed to initiate such a policy in these countries. In the U.S., on the other hand, size and decentralization impair policy change from the center. In such a country, a Crime Prevention Extension Service makes more sense. Various decentralized and independent actors with crime problems can seek assistance or be offered assistance by this service, without any orders or demands to comply. The service offers nothing more than suggestions. At first, only a few will adopt innovations; if they work, others will begin to catch on by their own choice. Thus, the proposed service is well attuned to the population and governmental structure of the U.S.

Police in the U.S. have a strong tradition of seeking to arrest criminals rather than to prevent crime before it happens. Crime prevention offices are found within police departments, but these offices are often linked to public relations. Thus, they have more of a political function than a serious crime prevention function. Moreover, their repertoire of crime prevention ideas is generally very narrow: lock your doors, buy an alarm, don't go out too late.

Change is occurring in more and more police departments. In particular, the concept of problem-oriented policing is spreading to many departments (Goldstein, 1990). This means seeking to direct police activity toward finding "the problem" and solving it, rather than arresting people without an overall strategy. For example, a drug house may be the source of many local crime problems; the police then focus upon closing that

house, drawing upon non-police public agencies in so doing. Although this is often a good idea, it is unfortunate that many police departments have a very limited repertoire of ideas for problem-oriented policing. Some departments only know the one idea just mentioned and do virtually nothing else. On the other hand, many police departments already provide some limited advice to citizens and businesses in how to prevent crime, and some of these departments have already broadened their repertoire significantly. Nonetheless, they are probably not attuned to the diverse needs of a variety of businesses and organizations, and thus cannot readily develop a full-service Crime Prevention Extension Service. Nor do police know enough about the diverse aspects of government and community development which feed into crime prevention.

Many police departments would initially have little interest in or respect for the proposed extension services, or would claim that they have always provided these services anyway, in time, as the repertoire of prevention ideas develops, and as police departments themselves broaden their repertoire, we could envision much greater cooperation and interchange between the Crime Prevention Extension Services and police agencies.

Use of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

We have neglected so far the issue of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). This approach is often more complicated than situational prevention, yet may serve to reduce a broader range of crimes in a broader swath of the environment. Moreover, CPTED is often put into practice before a building is built or a park is constructed, whereas situational prevention is often designed to solve a problem after it has emerged later. The distinction between these two approaches ought not to be exaggerated. For example, many crime prevention ideas presented in Clarke (1992) could be called either CPTED or situational prevention, according to taste. Nonetheless, CPTED may be more politically practical in more planning-oriented and governmentally centralized settings, such as British Columbia, Canada (see Brantingham and Brantingham, 1990). Yet CPTED has also been widely put to successful use in the U.S.

An extension service is not well suited to providing detailed designs to private groups. Such a service is better suited to giving simpler and more targeted crime prevention advice falling under the rubric of situational

prevention. However, this does not by any means rule out CPTED. A prevention officer can provide some starting ideas and advice along those lines and some pamphlets for developing that advice to fit the specific needs of each person or organization served. A prevention officer can take a look at blueprints or discuss design plans along CPTED lines, and offer suggestions for designing a new environment. Such an officer can also advise various actors in public and private sectors working on the same project about questions to ask (e.g., what path do school children take from home to school), and thus help apply the wisdom of CPTED to the practice of crime prevention. However, a few hours of free crime prevention consulting cannot result in furnishing the drawings themselves to those served. In time, we can envision the development of more private practitioners putting CPTED to detailed use and selling those services on the open market. If criminology and government move more in the suggested directions, that movement should help develop such a profession.

The symbiotic relationships between theory and fact, between basic knowledge and clinical practice, are basic to science itself. If criminology is to continue on its current road to recovery, the Crime Prevention Extension Service can play an Important role.

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