Problems and Pitfalls in Crime Prevention

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That prevention is better than cure is a rather trite but nevertheless important axiom. It may be tempting, therefore, for those individuals, governments and groups charged with the responsibility of crime prevention to rush into any program that boasts a 'preventative' approach. This paper is designed to alert those engaged in crime prevention policy-making, planning, implementation and evaluation, that traps and pitfalls exist for the hasty and the unwary. It will, furthermore, suggest strategies that may be employed to avoid them.

First, there is a need to identify and examine a number of areas where there are potential difficulties for crime prevention administrators. To overcome these hazards, they should be equipped with:

- an understanding of the nature of their task;
- appropriate information;
- an understanding of the dynamics of the implementation process; and
- access to sound evaluative techniques and interpretation models.

An Understanding of the Nature of the Task

Crime prevention administrators must first consider the context in which the debate about crime prevention occurs. 'Crime' is a term which is capable of wide interpretation. It is used in political rhetoric in such a way as to presume that its definition is settled and clear, that it is uniformly policed, that it is consistently prosecuted and that it is systematically punished. Popular public and political dialogue also tends to suggest that the production of crime information is unproblematic and that the sources through which the
information is channeled are reliable and complete. These assumptions, however, are essentially flawed (Chibnall 1977, 1979; Ericson 1981, 1982).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of informed debate in the public and political 'law and order' chatter, and thus the inadequacies of these assumptions rarely emerge. A short description of the progression of criminological thought during the last hundred years may assist us to determine why this more 'popular' view of crime and criminals persists in Australia today.

We can find its roots in the late nineteenth century French 'positivist' philosophy. The father of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim presented his view of the social world as being made up of physical entities. Thus, to determine the realities of the criminal justice system, he focused his attention upon its protagonists, that is, the people who carried on the illegal behaviour, the police who apprehended them, the courts which tried them and the prisons that held them. Durkheim was not concerned about the significance of how law was organised. He insisted upon a purely legalistic view of criminal conduct.

Twentieth century American sociologist Edwin Sutherland sought to expand the parameters of this approach to criminology to include antisocial behaviours in the so-called white-collar arena. His method has been referred to as a 'socio-legal approach' (Hagan 1986, p. 44). Sutherland, however, retained the positivists' emphasis upon using formal, legal definitions to define criminality. According to both of these views, the law provides a reliable guide to any society's consensus on what is and is not deviant or criminal behaviour. Crime, on this view, '... [is] a series of more or less isolated and unpredictable events committed by a minority of undersocialised or otherwise maladjusted individuals-in short, [it is] a harmful minority activity' (Hogg 1988, p. 25). The police apply the law in apprehending deviants, the Crown Law Department applies the law in prosecuting them, and the courts apply the law when sentencing them. The 1992 Queensland election campaign was rife with similar rhetoric. This 'legalist' view, however, if not totally ill-conceived, is rather limited and narrow.

During the last two decades there have been a number of interesting developments in criminological thought. There has been further work in the 'Marxist' vein (Gordon 1971; Quinney 1974, 1977), and the emergence of the sociology of deviance or so-called 'new criminology' (Taylor, Walton & Young 1973). We have also witnessed the birth of what has become known as 'critical legal theory' (Carlen 1980; Kennedy & Klare 1984; Silbey & Sarat 1987; Kelman 1987; Fraser 1989). What these latter-day perspectives have in common, generally, is that crime is not an objective reality, as Durkheim or Sutherland would have viewed it. Rather it is determined more by issues of politics, knowledge and power, and the struggle by various political and social forces to gain and support order, to resist order and to guarantee order than by settled and revered notions of what 'crime' is (Hogg 1983, p. 10; Egger & Findlay 1988, p. 222; Shearing 1989, p. 176).

Concomitantly, the process of criminalisation is not a necessary precondition to social cohesion and control, but merely one among several modes of control (Carlen 1980, p. 17). The criminal process, for example, rarely deals with some matters that give our society great cause for alarm, for example, the excesses of corporate entrepreneurs, industrial pollution and industrial accidents (Wilson, Walker & Mukherjee 1986). Indeed, research indicates that many more deaths may be
caused by inadequate occupational health and safety precautions than by the more traditional forms of violence such as murder and manslaughter (Braithwaite & Grabosky 1985; Wilson 1987, p. 13; Ellis 1988, p. 134).

There have also been developments in what has become known as 'left realism'. 'Left realists' have recognised that the more radical criminological perspectives are somewhat limited in their ability to propose solutions and to engage in the important task of crime prevention. Realists express the view that crime cannot merely be defined out of existence, as proponents of the sociology of deviance may have led their readers to believe. Society, say left realists, must deal with the fact that antisocial conduct exists, appears to be burgeoning—perhaps it is even understated—and that it disproportionately affects those on the margins of society, those who are caught in the poverty trap, and those who wind up in a vicious circle of non-cooperation with police (Hogg 1988, p. 28). Realists claim that it is rather foolish, if not irresponsible, to ignore serious law-breaking merely by taking refuge in the belief that crime statistics are social constructions or that the crime 'problem' is open to conjecture. Thus, realists have a foot in both camps; they acknowledge the value of critical legal thought but, at the same time, recognise that antisocial conduct exists and that it must be addressed in crime prevention initiatives. These initiatives have concentrated their attention less upon 'criminals' themselves and more upon the modes of criminal law enforcement, the social organisation of particular criminal activities and illegal markets, the forums in which we discuss these issues, and the very terms which we use. The realist contribution, then, is to avoid legalistic approaches, and to apply broader 'critical' legal approaches more locally and with greater specificity, for example, within certain geographical areas (Lea, Jones, Woodhouse & Young 1988).

The criminological development of the 1970s and 1980s have thus been rich with new insights. Notwithstanding the level of disagreement between the various schools of thought, a sound conclusion has been reached: that comfortable and dated assumptions about identifiable criminal individuals and groups as law-breakers are no longer useful. Why all of this is mentioned is to highlight the paucity of informed public debate and responsible comment on this subject from these perspectives. The general public, on matters of this nature, remain, for the most part, oblivious to the developments of the last twenty years. It is most unfortunate that public opinion—if the polls and the mass media are any guide to these matters—and to a very great extent our politicians, do not appear to be breaking out of the 'legalist' criminological legacy left to us by, amongst others, Durkheim and Sutherland.

The tenacity of legalist (or mainstream) solutions is, however, quite understandable. At least two reasons can be identified—having to do with the media and political realities—why they have such force.

The media present a legalist view

The media have an entrenched position as information-providers on matters to do with law and order. Theirs is a view which rarely strays from the mainstream. Production and organisation pressures lead to simplification and dramatisation of law and order issues quite independently of any bias (Reiner 1985, p. 141) particularly in the use of statistics. As recently as 24 May 1991,
the *Adelaide News* headline was 'Crime Rate Soars' and the opening paragraph spoke of 'shocking statistics leaked from the SA Police Department'. The interpretation of statistics is, for the most part, overly simplistic. Blandly pointing to the rise in 'crime rates' ignores a number of fundamental statistical issues. What were the sources of the data? If they were police-generated, is it not relevant to suggest that reporting practices may have had an influence on the figures? For example, have there been any changes in reporting methods, computerisation or police campaigns or strategies? How do police figures compare with the results of victimisation surveys? Do police statistics record the number of offences or offenders, and how may the differences in definition and interpretation differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and from time to time? Finally, were these data placed in the context of long-term trends? These questions are rarely addressed.

There are, furthermore, commercial interests which drive the media and their clients (Cohen 1973, p. 16; Grabosky 1977, p. 174; Chibnall 1977, p. 145; Van Dijk 1979; Brown 1987, p. 275; Sarre 1989, p. 11). The News in Adelaide ran a series on crime prevention during May and June 1991 laced liberally with advertisements for security services, burglar alarm installation and insurance. There is little doubt that security services, insurance companies and indeed the *Adelaide News* all generate profits for themselves through providing crime stories which fuel both the need for security systems, and the need for vindication that measures undertaken to enhance security have been worthwhile. In such a climate one could easily witness a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The same forces which make for the increase in crime fuel a moral panic about crime. That is, the real fear about crime is intimately related to the moral hysteria about crime. It not only provides for a rational kernel for alarm, but its genesis lies at the same source; and the mass media serve and exaggerate such public fears. The demand for crime news is great; the media reporting of crime and policing foments and exaggerates this appetite . . . Thus, at precisely the time when there is the greatest need for a rational approach to crime, the greatest level of irrationality occurs . . . (Lea & Young 1984, pp. 263-4) (emphasis added).

This is not to suggest, of course, that the debate about law and order is capable of being consistently rational or totally dispassionate. Clearly, however, the debate must be tempered by those who speak rationally rather than irrationally. The media must lead the way in this endeavour. At the moment they appear more inclined, generally, to seeking out conflict than they are to seeking balanced and careful responses to difficult questions.

**Mainstream approaches are politically more saleable**

It is clear that there is a political advantage to be gained by 'selling' the law and order issue in simplistic terms, to engage in what is referred to as 'symbolic politics' (Casper & Brereton 1984, p. 124; Chan 1987, p. 225). A self-serving cycle thus begins:

Governments which can be said to be unable to control important social and economic processes are always electorally vulnerable. This is true whether the government can reasonably be expected to be in control or not. No one is likely to forgive a government for rising crime rates even if they can be
shown to result from rapid population growth, poor urban development or an increase in households with portable electrical goods. Influential people, with less than honourable motives, can always be found to respond to rising crime rates by saying that the government has lost control of the streets. The effect of such comments, made at the right time, can be electric. Governments of every colour can be driven to pour millions of dollars into law enforcement just to defeat a growing perception that crime is, in some sense, out of control. This problem is not unique to Australia. Concern about crime and punishment in most Western countries is locked into an unremitting cycle of panic and complacency (Weatherburn & Devery 1991, pp. 23-4).

In South Australia in 1991, the Leader of the Opposition stepped up the rhetoric on law and order to move us from 'complacency' mode into 'panic' mode. In May 1991 he cited statistics which indicated that crime is on the rise and blamed Parliamentarians for not having the courage to make penalties more severe. He spoke of plans to increase police presence in the community and expressed the opinion that police powers were inadequate. He presented a view of government neglect on law and order issues and spoke of the inadequacies of our juvenile justice system. He used cliches like 'bag of lollies', 'a pat on the shoulder', and the pseudo-proverbial 'judicial slap on the wrist' (Advertiser, 2 May 1991). This 'legalist' view misleads the public into thinking that there is a clear and logical consensus in our society about what conduct, which criminals and which activities ought to be made the subject of formal prosecution.

On this view, crime can be eradicated if we appoint more police, give them more powers, and mete out harsher punishments. As a corollary, this view leads the public into thinking that the responsibility for crime prevention rests with the police and the courts alone. Intriguingly, this position is more often espoused by those to the right of politics who claim, in these days of economic rationalism, that it is inappropriate for governments to be seen as the perennial benefactor. If the government dollar is limited, however, and the law and order resources are to be expanded, then it is clear that, on this view, social welfare spending would be severely curtailed.

Furthermore, when the debate reduces the discussion on law and order merely to questions of police power and punishment, other more 'critical' factors are pushed to the periphery. Police practices and prosecutorial discretion are virtually ignored. The criminogenic effects of the non-availability of affordable housing, inadequate transport, poor race relations and unemployment are perceived as merely tangential matters. While law and order is treated in trite legalistic terms, crime prevention packages which attempt to integrate into our society a broad range of services, attitudes and programs, and which eschew reactionary responses, tend to founder.

A task of those charged with the responsibility for crime prevention is to point out the limited value of comment couched in legalistic terms and premised upon a 'get tough' approach. Those who engage in the law and order debate with stock phrases and hackneyed metaphors in order to engage in political point-scoring over their rivals, and for the purpose of pandering to their electorates (whose attitudes to crime and justice, law and order have themselves been shaped by this very rhetoric), are worthy of scorn. Their contribution to the debate is not only ineffective but counter-productive.

The arguments of the 'law and order' lobby that our society has gone 'soft on crime' are also factually ill-conceived. The so-called 'new' law and order
approach has, in fact, been the mainstay of Australian political platforms for at least the last decade, and still crime rates appear to be rising. Generally speaking, during the 1980s statutory criminal penalties have gone up, not down. Australian prisons are now holding more people than ever before. Indeed, in the period from March 1988 to September 1990 there was an increase of 19.5 per cent to 13,668 inmates (Brown 1990, p. 239). Record non-parole periods are commonplace. Maximum penalties increase regularly, new offences continue to appear, and in at least three states Attorneys-General have been given the right to appeal against what they perceive to be inadequate sentences. The concept of mandatory minimum penalties is now commonplace.

In addition, police presence is increasing, and in South Australia we have the highest per capita numbers of police of any state in Australia (without any reason to suspect that we are therefore the most law-abiding or lawless). Changes to police powers affecting the questioning of suspects and the time in which questioning may occur have led some commentators to express their concerns (Sallmann & Willis 1984, p. 49). The unsworn statement has been abolished in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. Legislation at both state and federal level has been enacted to allow for the confiscation of criminal assets. In South Australia a victim can make a ‘victim impact’ statement to a sentencing judge. Therefore, the South Australian Opposition leader’s claims that ‘we need physically more police at the coal face . . . on the beat’, that ‘penalties are not tough enough’ and that ‘society now demands that something be done . . . ’(Advertiser, 2 May 1991, pp. 1-2), are more than a little trite and can be safely ignored.

The ‘law and order’ rhetoric persists also in the USA. In March 1990 two candidates ran a political election race in Texas on a ‘law and order’ platform. Both advertised their respective abilities to put offenders to death. In his television campaign, Governor Mark White-walking towards the camera past a number of two-metre high portraits of the men he had executed-claimed ‘But tough talk isn’t enough. Criminals know how to tangle up the courts and delay executions. To bring them to justice takes strength and dedication. Because if the governor flinches, they win. Only a governor can make executions happen. I did, and I will.’ His rival, Texas Attorney-General Jim Mattox, said, in his own television commercials, ‘As Attorney-General I’ve carried out thirty-two executions’ (Washington Post, 4 March 1990, A8).

The tough ‘new’ approach is thus anything but new (Sallmann 1986, p. 203). Similarly, it can hardly be said to have made much difference in crime prevention.

On the Australian scene, David Brown discusses the effect of the promises of Michael Yabsley (New South Wales Minister for Corrective Services) to ‘put the value back in punishment’ and to put ‘truth’ into sentencing (Brown 1990, p. 239). At the same time that Royal Commissions and Law Reform Commissions are calling for imprisonment to be used as an option of last resort, says Brown, the effect of the new ‘truth’ regime in New South Wales has been to increase the prison population to record levels (including record levels of overcrowding), to set record numbers of prisoners on protection, and to set record levels of assaults, riots, disturbances, damage to prison property and deaths in custody. While there are record levels of expenditures and intensification of penal discipline, at the same time there has been a curtailing
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of educational programs (Brown 1990, p. 244). The symbolism of all of this is important, maintains Brown:

These changes in the distribution of powers and resources within the law and order area reflect, and seek to reproduce, a popular understanding of law and order in terms of an enhancement of the coercive power of the state. Moreover implicit in these developments is the decisive location of 'the crime problem' on the domain of the street, especially among youth. They are coupled with substantial cutbacks in social services in other areas, such as housing, childcare, public transport and education... Affirmation of the family and 'family values' becomes the vehicle for a particular construction of the problems of crime and violence, within which the issue of private violence within the family gives way to a focus on the problem of disorder, violence and crime which resides in the public realm. Violence, crime, homelessness and poverty all become the responsibility of the individual, who thereby becomes a fit subject for state discipline (Brown 1990, p. 245).

Thus, there persists in the public, media and political crime prevention rhetoric an emphasis upon the individual's guilt and responsibility and the agencies of the state which must intervene to correct the individuals who misbehave. There is much less emphasis on the notion of collective or communal responsibility for crime. To allow these notions to be skewed in such a way is quite counter-productive to crime prevention (Pashukanis 1978, p. 177; Carlen 1980, p. 18). Crime prevention policy-makers would do well to remember it.

Appropriate Information

Those who embark upon crime prevention projects must avail themselves of all relevant information on the subject. The following areas may be used as a starting point for further enquiry.

Programs, ideas and projects from other jurisdictions

Information on the experiences of other jurisdictions which have undertaken crime prevention projects is essential. It can best be retrieved from communities which are not too dissimilar and where there has been some evidence, through evaluation studies, of success. This information is readily accessible from Europe (see HEUNI & Graham 1990), the USA (see United States of America 1969, 1987, 1989), and the UK (see Gladstone 1980), as well as Australia (see Geason & Wilson 1988, 1990; South Australia 1989b, 1990a, 1990b; Potas, Vining & Wilson 1990). There is information, for example, on a range of community-based crime prevention programs ranging from youth advisory centres, vocational training and business enterprises in the USA and The Netherlands (HEUNI & Graham 1990, pp. 33, 117), to schemes which have reduced vandalism in schools by providing financial incentives to student councils (Gladstone 1980, p. 38).

Caution ought to be exercised before administrators commit themselves to the implementation of 'foreign' programs, lest there be important differences in the characteristics of
the physical jurisdictions or crucial dissimilarities between the players involved in the implementation process. For example, North American initiatives are often implemented in social
situations vastly different from our own. The racial composition of many American states, their policing organisation (based upon cities and towns rather than states), judicial structure and their sheer numbers are factors which have to be considered in determining whether to adopt any of their projects.

'Situational' versus 'social' crime prevention

There are two general schools of thought emerging from crime prevention literature. At stake is the emphasis to be placed upon the competing claims to funds and project time made by those who favour 'situational' as opposed to 'social' crime prevention. Commentators have concluded that certain situational crime prevention measures can have a noticeable crime-reducing effect (Clarke 1983), for example, better lighting in certain neighbourhoods, better transport serving late night entertainment and better vandal-resistant property. By the same token, under certain circumstances, considerable changes in social behaviour can be achieved by the more 'social' processes, such as racial awareness programs in schools, youth clubs and other community settings (Bottoms 1990, p. 9). The literature suggests that administrators adopt a balanced approach, that is, crime prevention ought to incorporate both situational and social aspects. One ought not to be neglected in favour of the other.

Unintended consequences

It is often the case that changes in policy bring about consequences which were not intended prior to the implementation of those changes. Policy-makers ought to seek appropriate information in order to guard against the emergence of these unintended consequences. In the field of crime prevention, a number of matters come immediately to mind.

Privatisation of crime prevention

Crime prevention journals regularly carry advertisements for security firms. Neighbourhood Watch booklets contain information on how best to secure one's home. The private security industry has reached a level now that its employees, on some estimates, outnumber 'public' police three to one. Private transit 'police' and private beach foreshore 'police' are now commonplace in Australia. All of this has occurred in what has been described as a 'quiet revolution' in policing (Shearing & Stenning 1983). There are, however, some difficulties with private solutions. They are available only to those who can afford them, and thus allow only those people with sufficient wealth the opportunity to retreat into private space (Freckelton & Selby 1988, pp. 233-4; Sutton 1991, p. 3). Questions of accountability then arise.

Private solutions to crime may also increase the likelihood of the demise of more informal mechanisms of social control (Conklin 1975; Hogg 1988, p. 46). These trends may be quite counter-productive to the crime prevention movement if it is agreed that our societies should be attempting to foster a sense of community and common interest among people of different social classes and income levels, rather than to emphasise social separateness by deliberately creating the
greatest possible degree of residential segregation’ (Bottoms 1990, p. 19). The research and information on the subject of some of
the drawbacks of crime prevention by ‘privatisation’ ought to be read as a matter of priority.

**Private (vigilante) justice**

When crime prevention is described as being something which should be community-based, or when the formal agents of control are said to be unable to cope, some communities may be encouraged to undertake vigilante justice. Repeated references in the media to police under-staffing or ‘light’ sentences in the courts might entice some members of the community to ‘take the law into their own hands’. This is a trend which must be monitored and resisted. An article in the Guardian Weekly (5 May 1991) reported that in some South African townships an ad hoc ‘people’s court’ sentences offenders to (amongst other things) siwasho, a Zulu term for ‘cleansing medicine’. These extra-judicial beatings are ordered by street ‘committees’ and are carried out by groups of youths armed with sjamboks, or rhinoceros-hide whips.

While Australians are unlikely to resort to these measures, there are some disturbing trends. Private ownership of firearms is certainly not discouraged in Australia. Indeed, there are approximately 3.5 million firearms in Australia, or one for every four Australians (Australian National Committee on Violence 1990, p. 173). Ownership of a firearm is a factor, research has shown, which increases the danger-rather than safety-to the owners of those weapons (Van Dijk 1979, p. 10; Wallace 1986). In South Australia, a Bill to amend the *Criminal Law Consolidation* Act 1935 was introduced on 5 September 1990 by the Opposition spokesperson on legal affairs. It proposed that persons should be allowed to defend themselves or their property ‘from unjustifiable interference from another’ by the use of ‘such force as is reasonable in the circumstances as they actually exist, or as the person believes them to be’. The Act is, therefore, adding a subjective component to the current common law objective test of reasonable force, a move which poses difficulties for a systematic and democratic approach to crime prevention. It was passed into law on 12 December 1991.

**Discrimination and stigmatisation**

No matter how well-intentioned a crime prevention program may be, if its design includes the planning of activities or the provision of facilities specifically directed towards people ‘at risk’, there is always the possibility and the danger that the people thus identified will not only be unresponsive to their newly acquired stigma, but actively discriminated against in the future. A program designed to provide outdoor activities or sporting opportunities for ‘delinquent youth’, for example, may cast, for all time, aspersions upon the character of the persons selected for the activity. Indeed, the very act of labelling the activity ‘crime prevention’ at all may have the effect of stigmatising the participants.

At the other end of the spectrum, prevention methods which fall more heavily upon some sections of the community than others, for example, juvenile curfews, may have the same effect. When the curfew is broken, youths are apprehended by police and held in custody in a manner which can be likened to the arrest of a law breaker. In those circumstances there is
a great likelihood that the youths will in future tend to act out that deviance rather than be deterred from it (Wilkins 1965; Young 1971; Sim 1982).

Net-widening

Similarly, research has shown that ad hoc intervention into the lives of people ‘at risk’ of offending can, at times, result in undesirable increases in the number of people (and the range of behaviours) subject to state-sanctioned control—a process described as ‘net-widening’ (Alder & Polk 1985; Curran 1988, p. 366). The problem of public drunkenness provides an example. A crime prevention strategy may involve the removal, without arrest, of intoxicated persons from public places. Taking away one of the major disincentives for police intervention—the paperwork associated with arrest and prosecution—will make it more likely that intoxicated people will be taken into custody by police. Indeed, the decriminalisation of public drunkenness in 1984 in South Australia precipitated a significant rise in the frequency with which disadvantaged individuals, particularly Aborigines, were apprehended and held in police cells—albeit now for reasons of ‘welfare’ rather than public order (South Australia 1986). Potential crime prevention programs ought to be scrutinised for their possible net-widening effects.

Displacement

The research on this subject indicates that prevention initiatives which target certain types of crime in certain areas merely shifts the problem to other areas (Barr & Pease 1990). For example, the ‘hardening of targets’ in the banking industry appears to have given rise to a spate of robberies upon ‘softer’ targets such as convenience stores and late-night petrol stations. The success of a Neighbourhood Watch in one area may merely lead to increases in burglaries in another area. Any prevention program, therefore, must undertake evaluative research to gauge this effect.

Community attitudes and prejudices

Those seeking to establish successful crime prevention strategies must seek to understand the nature of the community in which the prevention program is designed to operate, and to consult with that community in the formulation of goals (Lea et al. 1988). The impact of the multicultural society in which we live, and its growth, have been the subject of much debate, academic research and editorial-writing in recent years. Those engaged in the task of crime prevention must examine this research and its repercussions for prevention projects. Crime prevention programs should begin with a recognition of the existence, the malleability, and the diversity of inter-cultural perspectives (Hanvey 1979, p. 4). To cite two examples:

• There is a widespread belief that certain ethnic groups or religious congregations import their old political rivalries and criminal organisations into their Australian neighbourhoods. For example, the Gulf War in the early part of 1991 provided an
opportunity for a particularly xenophobic section of the Australian population to vilify the Arab and Muslim communities. Investigative journalist Bob Bottom is repeatedly reporting upon 'Mafia'-type activities, and
thereby unfairly and almost maliciously labelling the Australian-Italian community as crime-prone. The available evidence, on the contrary, suggests that the foreign born are not over-represented in criminal justice statistics, or if they are, it may be more for reasons of discriminatory policing practices than anything else.

Unvoiced assumptions are common in the criminal justice system. Among these is the belief in the immigrant criminal . . . [S]uch popular demonologies seem able to survive any amount of exorcism (Francis 1986, p. 149).

Those engaged in the crime prevention task may need to give attention to the number of difficulties that face the non-English speaking person where crime and law are concerned. In addition to community education programs (Australian Law Reform Commission 1991, p. 55), crime prevention initiatives could include alteration of the criminal law to accommodate minority cultural values (Kearney 1990, p. 9) and to accommodate unusual defences, for example, ignorance of law (Bird 1988, p. 426).

- There is a popular belief that Aboriginal Australians cause much of the crime that prevention schemes are designed to alleviate. Yet:

[a]lmost these patterns are a product of a failure to understand the values of the largely alien group with whom the police are required to deal (Australian Law Reform Commission 1978, p. 80).

Crime prevention projects must take into account the special needs and issues of Aboriginal Australians in a way which is not demeaning and which avoids paternalism. They could begin with a recognition of the place of British colonial legal fictions in Australia’s beginnings. They should acknowledge the findings of the National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody released on 9 May 1991 (Australia 1991), and examine why it is that many Aboriginal communities have criticised the report as a ‘white-wash’.

**An Understanding of the Dynamics of the Implementation Process**

Administrators of crime prevention projects (policy-makers and implementors alike) must seek to understand the political complexities in the process of implementation. Implementation theory has been a major topic of research in the UK and the USA since the early 1970s (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973), and in Australia too, although it tends to be piecemeal and narrowly focussed (Brown, Kramer & Quinn 1988, p. 298). The research has addressed problems with the translation of theory into practice. It seeks to determine why it is so often the case that the outcome of a policy differs from what was originally intended (Chan 1990, p. 59). Researchers have been concerned with the high number of projects which begin with lofty ideals, but end with administrative nightmares.
It is hard enough to design public policies and programs that look good on paper. It is harder still to formulate them in words and slogans that resonate pleasingly in the ears of political leaders and the constituencies to which they are responsive. And it is excruciatingly hard to implement them in a way that pleases anyone at all, including the supposed beneficiaries or clients . . . A single governmental strategy may involve the complex and interrelated activities of several levels of governmental bureaus (sic) and agencies, private organisations, professional associations, interest groups, and clientele populations. How can this profusion of activities be controlled and directed? This question is at the heart of what has come to be known . . . as the 'implementation problem' (Bardach 1977, p. 3).

Those responsible for crime prevention programs would do well to acquaint themselves with the literature on the dynamics of the implementation process and to consider and be alert to its implications. One could begin by making the following assumptions:

- that it is likely that a crime prevention program, or elements of it, will fail, or be found wanting. In other words, there are bound to be disappointments;

- that these disappointments or failures are likely to occur less because of any inherent ideological or theoretical weaknesses in the program itself and more because of breakdowns during its implementation;

and

- that these breakdowns will most likely be linked to the conflicting agendas, divergent organisational goals and political interests pushed by any groups (including implementors and policy-makers themselves) that have a stake in the program, even those groups that have a vested interest in its success not just in its failure (Chan 1987, p. 223). Agreement does not spell the end of self-righteousness and resentment.

One of our most consistent findings is the tendency for inter-agency conflicts and tensions to re-appear, in spite of cooperative efforts, reflecting the oppositions between state agencies at a deep structural level. We have also found consistent and persistent struggles between local authority departments over limited resources, power and prestige (Sampson, Stubbs, Smith, Pearson & Blagg 1988, p. 482 quoted in Bottoms 1990, p. 15).

With these assumptions in place, administrators should be ready to anticipate and address breakdowns when they first arise.

According to the British Home Office literature (Hope 1985, p. 39), the most common response by policy-makers, if something frustrates implementation, is to place the blame on the implementors themselves. They may suggest that implementors must have failed to heed the policy-maker's instructions, or that they have acted in an inefficient, uncoordinated or even subversive manner. Implementation of any policy will be improved, under this view, by increasing control over the implementors, and by improving the communication of policy objectives from policy-maker to implementor.
Conversely, implementors may respond to failure by levelling charges at policy-makers that programs were poorly conceived or left with insufficient funds, or that the policy-makers deliberately built obsolescence into the implementation phase to enable political objectives to be achieved without significant cost and without political opprobrium. The implementation process may be improved, on this approach, by placing greater accountability upon policy-makers.

Researchers into the implementation process suggest that neither response is altogether appropriate. They suggest, alternatively, that administrators ought to view all participants in the implementation process as acting quite rationally, but in order to achieve personal and organisational goals in addition to the goals set for the strategy itself. In the context of crime prevention, implementation researchers would suggest that policy-makers and implementors avoid seeing the program as a set of objectives to be achieved but rather as a process where broad intentions gradually evolve into practice in accordance with personal and organisational pressures and resistances. In that situation, the possibility of ultimate failure will be reduced. In other words, policy implementation should be adaptive.

There is no amount of statutory specificity and top-down control that will prevent an implementation process from becoming a test of its own efficacy . . . What an organisation devoted to learning can do about implementation failure is to utilise it as a route to implementation success-successful exploration. Rather than seeking to make tractable eternally intractable social problems, or designing detailed problem-solving policies, a learning organisation must avoid an unquestioning, uninquiring myopic stance. It must analyse its policies for their informational yield. It should evaluate its implementation of these policies, not against prospectively stated objectives alone, but in light of discoveries made during implementation . . . The learning society views the implementer (sic) as a source of new information. On this basis, a case can be made for the reconceptualising of implementation as an exploratory rather than an unquestioning, instrumental, and even subservient type of behaviour (Browne & Wildavsky 1984, pp. 254-6).

In other words, administrators faced with difficulties during the implementation phase will best deal with these inevitable barriers by:

- planning the implementation in light of anticipated political and organisational pressures, recognising not how things ought to work, but how they do work, asking the following questions:
  
  (i) Do different agencies have different amounts of power in inter-agency crime prevention forums, and does it matter?
  
  (ii) How much autonomy is it necessary for each agency to lose for the sake of the collective good, and are they willing to lose it?
  
  (iii) To what extent is it right to recognise that different agencies (such as the police and social work departments) have different assigned functions, and that these functions will necessarily limit the extent to which cooperation between agencies may properly (and ethically) extend? (Bottoms 1990, p. 16, emphasis in the
original);
• requiring as little management as possible,
• writing a scenario, that is 'an imaginative construction of future sequences of actions-
consequent conditions-actions-consequent conditions, being prepared to modify and
adjust, that is, to see the process as one of learning about the process of implementation
itself. It is inventing a plausible story about 'what will happen if' or, more precisely,
inventing several such stories' (Bardach 1977, p. 254),
• consulting as widely as possible at every stage of a project;
• involving interest groups in the development of policy so that they perceive themselves
as having a stake in its successful implementation;
• learning from the process of implementation about how better to plan and to direct
similar projects in the future. In other words, implementation need not necessarily be an
end result but a process of exploring and testing hypotheses.

With these ideas in mind, the implementation phase of crime prevention projects ought to
be far less daunting and far more productive.

Sound Evaluative Techniques and Interpretation Models

Crime prevention administrators will need to plan for evaluation of their projects. The
determination of whether implemented programs work (and why and how they work) is essential.
Not only does evaluation assist in future planning and in making modifications to existing projects
but also it may well be one of the future prerequisites of government funding for crime prevention
strategies.

Only brave commercial entrepreneurs release new products on the market without having
undertaken evaluative market research in their design and implementation. Yet few crime
prevention projects in Australia, if not elsewhere, effectively incorporate ongoing evaluative
research. Many crime prevention initiatives, often accompanied by the expenditure of large
amounts of public money, are set in train without any endeavour on the part of their designers to
gauge their likely effect, nor their effectiveness once in operation (Sarre 1991, p. 272).

There are many reasons why evaluation is not carried out as a matter of course. For example:

• administrators very often fail to identify their goals prior to commencing a project, and
may neglect to specify the different ways they plan to achieve them. Evaluation is then
perceived to be too difficult to carry out even for those with expertise;
• it is extremely difficult to define the terms of analysis. Terms such as 'project
effectiveness', 'policy success' and 'program failure' are ambiguous and problematic;
• evaluation does sometimes produce disappointing results which are unwelcome to governments and sponsoring organisations.

Indeed, sometimes the very same people who at one time demand evidence of prima facie effectiveness before embarking on a scheme, will at a later date resist the negative conclusions of methodologically rigorous research’ (Bottoms 1990, p. 18);

• there is often a lack of information, a lack of access to techniques and data, a lack of funds (evaluation is usually costly), and a lack of faith that the process will reveal anything worthwhile.

Furthermore, the validity of many evaluations is questionable. There is a suspicion that applicants for grant money may ‘fudge’ findings to convince the funding agencies that they will be investing in a proven program, and would rather not undertake further evaluation which may dispel these findings. Funding agencies may also be to blame. It is not unlikely that they will want to hear that they are supporting a good product for reasons of pride and commercial kudos (Palumbo & Nachmias 1983, p. 67; Lurigio & Rosenbaum 1986, p. 23; Bottoms 1990, p. 17).

This is not to say that evaluations are always essentially flawed. Some evaluative research has produced a clearer picture of projects that have been implemented successfully in certain communities, under what conditions and why. Evaluations in the USA and Britain, for example, have researched the extent to which increasing the number or frequency of police foot or car patrols would have a crime reductive effect (Kelling Pate, Dieckman & Brown 1976; Clarke & Hough 1984). Evaluations in Australia, for example, monitored the effect of the decriminalisation of drunkenness (South Australia 1986; Brown 1987, p. 268-71) and the creation of a ‘civil’ offence for cannabis possession (South Australia 1989a). Evaluations of Neighbourhood Watch and ‘cocoon’ Neighbourhood Watch schemes have been able to highlight the strengths, difficulties and failings of these schemes (Mukherjee & Wilson 1987; Bottoms 1990, p. 11-15). The fact remains, however, that these types of evaluations have been the exceptions rather than the rule.

The success stories teach us something about the relevance of evaluation generally. Policymakers may well note that certain types of crime prevention initiatives will be more easily evaluated by empirical method than others. Specific initiatives concerning, for example, cannabis possession or theft are more amenable to a numerical style of evaluation. Other programs, seeking to reduce fear of violence, or to raise community consciousness concerning multicultural issues or police attitudes are far more difficult to evaluate (Sarre 1992).

To that end it may be worth having crime prevention administrators explore the range of literature on the subject of a new evaluation style, known as ‘learning evaluation’ or ‘open-ended’ evaluation. It is not unlike the notion of viewing the implementation process as a period of exploration. Learning evaluation is unlike the common ‘two-point, before-and-after’ research design.
which merely compares measured results with prospectively stated objectives (assuming that there were any). Indeed, the literature on the ‘two-point’ method is replete with warnings that such designs are ‘likely to produce misleading results’ (Casper & Brereton 1984, p. 122). Rather, ‘learning evaluation’ measures the quality of the discoveries that emerged during the implementation process, for example, how a project was able to unify a neighbourhood, how principles of accountability functioned, how a group was able to adapt when changes to the program were necessary, how net-widening may have been affected, or why one set of organisational interests came to dominate (Casper & Brereton 1984, p. 130).

Learning evaluation strives to unearth faulty assumptions, reshape misshapen policy designs, and continuously redefine goals in light of new information derived during implementation (Browne & Wildavsky 1984, pp. 255-6).

Moreover, it does not despair in inconsistent or ‘negative’ findings, but sees such findings as part of an ongoing learning experience. For example, ‘no effect’ research does not necessarily mean that the measures evaluated are wholly ineffective (Knutsson 1988). These measures may still work in social conditions other than those investigated by the evaluation, and the evaluators may be able to isolate those conditions for future reference.

The point to be made is that if crime prevention policy-makers adopt ‘learning’ evaluation, in addition to the more standard forms of evaluation, not only will the evaluative process become more accessible, but the ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ of the implementation process will become more readily capable of definition and available for interpretation. Crime prevention administrators will thus be less inclined to look for simple, quick-fix technical conclusions to complex social problems, and may design their programs more broadly.

Summary

• Those charged with the responsibility for crime prevention should have an understanding of their task in the terms of the wider law and order debate. In the 1970s and 1980s there have been new insights in criminology and the theories of crime control and law and order, yet there has been a dearth of public debate based upon anything but ‘hard-line’ responses. Typical of these responses is the call for increased penalties and greater police numbers and enhanced powers. Such limited vision can only be counter-productive to the crime prevention task.

• Political point-scoring and poor media reporting on law and order issues are both counter-productive to crime prevention.

• Access to information is essential for those engaged in crime prevention. Administrators should be aware of the availability of literature on the vast array of programs in operation, their strengths and weaknesses, unintended consequences and possible community attitudes and
prejudices before they embark upon any schemes.
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- Each jurisdiction should be encouraged to establish and fund a reliable database of crime statistics, for statistical collation and interpretation.

- Implementation research has provided us with information on how the process of implementation itself can be better understood and to enable us to employ strategies that predict and thus avoid or ameliorate implementation breakdown.

- Evaluation of crime prevention projects is the exception rather than the rule, and the reasons for this are many and varied. Policy-makers and administrators ought to be aware of the variety of issues facing evaluators and ought to be able to select the type of evaluation best suited to the task at hand. Adopting the concept of 'learning' evaluation—which incorporates the idea that a great deal can be discovered by program failure—may assist administrators in undertaking this essential task.

- Finally, what is required is an understanding that crime prevention is not a matter of applying technically-sound, quick-fix, simple solutions, but an integrated series of community-based activities, backed by adaptive implementation and appropriate evaluation. Thinking in these terms will allow crime prevention to remain as a government and community priority.

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