

Introduction

Crime and the fear of crime lower the quality of life for many Australians, particularly the elderly, those living in poorer areas, damaged by crimes such as arson and vandalism.

Crime is already costing the community thousands of millions of dollars per year in insurance company payouts, police courts and correctional costs, and the replacement of buildings and facilities caused by crimes such as arson and vandalism.

The gaols are overflowing, and backlogs plague the courts. In tough economic times, however, governments are unwilling or unable to respond to public concern about rising crime rates by constantly increasing police numbers, spending more money on the courts, passing harsher laws and increasing penalties, or building new gaols. And insurance companies are refusing to insure those who do not take some responsibility for protecting their own property.

The lesson is clear: it is too expensive to wait till crimes are committed; crime must be prevented.

The traditional approach to crime prevention has been to try to identify the psychological and social causes of crime and to attempt to remedy these deficiencies by treating the individual offender and/or designing special educational, recreational and employment services for groups regarded as being at risk. The escalating crime rate suggests that this approach is not working.

An alternative is 'situational crime prevention'. It rests on two assumptions: that the criminal is a rational decision maker who only goes ahead with a crime where the benefits outweigh the costs or risks; and that the 'opportunity' to commit a crime must be there. Situational crime prevention aims to remove the opportunity, and make the costs of a crime greater than the benefits. It includes various forms of target hardening to make the objects of crime less vulnerable (e.g. car steering column locks, deadlocks on dwelling

doors, passenger and baggage screening at airports); defensible space architecture, which encourages residents of an area to exercise control over their public spaces and keep intruders out; community crime prevention initiatives such as Neighbourhood Watch programs and citizens' patrols; and a variety of other strategies such as channelling potential offenders away from potential victims (Clarke 1988).

Situational crime prevention places more responsibility on the individual for ensuring his or her own safety than does traditional law enforcement, but to succeed, it needs the co-operation of the police, public and private organisations and members of the community.

The Institute of Criminology has long been aware of the importance of crime prevention, and has published widely on the subject, namely:

- *Resolving Conflict: Dispute Settlement Mechanisms for Aboriginal Communities and Neighbourhoods*, by Kayleen M. Hazlehurst, July 1986.
- 'Alcohol, Outstations and Autonomy: An Australian Aboriginal Perspective', by Kayleen M. Hazlehurst, in *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Spring 1986.
- *Graffiti and Vandalism on Public Transport*, by Paul Wilson and Patricia Healy, July 1987.
- *Neighbourhood Watch: Issues and Policy Implications*, by Satyanshu Mukherjee and Paul Wilson, November 1987.
- *Child Abuse*, edited by Ron Snashall, 1987.
- *National Conference on Domestic Violence*, edited by Suzanne E. Hatty, 1986.
- 'Widening the Middle Ground: The Development of Community Based Options', in *Ivory Scales, Black Australia and the Law*, by Kayleen M. Hazlehurst, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1987.
- 'Racial Tension, Policy and Public Order: Australia in the Eighties', by Kayleen M. Hazlehurst, in *Police in Our Society*, by Police Complaints Authority, Melbourne. Sydney: Butterworth, Sydney, 1988.

- *Community Justice in Northern Queensland: Problems of Implementation and Development*, Australian Institute of Criminology in collaboration with the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council, consultant, Kayleen M. Hazlehurst, Cairns, Queensland, 1988.

To raise the awareness of police, policy-makers and members of the public about the need for crime prevention and to provide practical ways of implementing crime prevention programs and measures, the Institute is compiling a series of publications. It will include:

- *Missing Children*
- *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*
- *Preventing Vandalism and Graffiti*
- *Crime Prevention in Shopping Centres*
- *Preventing Fraud*
- *Preventing Armed Robbery*
- *Preventing Arson*
- *A Handbook for Aboriginal Community Crime Prevention*
- *Crime Prevention for Aboriginal Communities – 1/2 hour video*
- *Crime Prevention for Migrant Communities*
- *Community Crime Prevention*