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Moving knowledge into action: applying social marketing principles to crime prevention

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Foreword | *This paper considers the potential application of social marketing principles to crime prevention. Social marketing has been a significant force in the public health field in Australia for more than two decades. It is a key component in the promotion of engagement in health protection behaviours, early detection programs and the promotion of individual health behaviour change. It is built on the application of evidence-based strategies and often, dual consumer/provider communication strategies. The process works to translate evidence-based knowledge about effective practice for key target groups in a way that enables them to take action to modify their own behaviour to achieve the most efficacious outcomes. The approach places a strong focus on formative research to gain a thorough understanding of the audience's perspective on the issue being addressed and to frame what is being promoted in a way that engages this audience and meets their needs. Careful consideration of environmental mediators and potential facilitators of the promoted behaviour are also strong features of social marketing strategies. The potential for the social marketing approach to be applied to crime prevention is examined through examples of older people and crime, and online grooming of young people using social networking sites.*

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During the late 1990s and early 2000s, Britain undertook a large-scale project to reduce the rate of crime on a number of key indicators such as domestic burglary, motor vehicle theft and domestic violence, among other crime types. As part of this major national initiative, researchers were also carefully studying the effectiveness of the interventions that were being used in order to improve the repertoire of effective strategies (Homel et al 2004).

One of the intervention streams for the UK program was called the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI). The RBI involved around 60 demonstration projects in the three areas of England and Wales with the highest rates of domestic burglary (Hamilton-Smith 2004). A significant number of those projects (around 21) included at least some form of publicity designed to promote participation by householders in the planned schemes as well as some presumed deterrent message for potential burglars (Kodz & Pease 2003).

When analysing the impacts of the demonstration projects, the researchers found that publicising local crime prevention activity could, in itself, reduce burglaries (Johnson & Bowers 2003). Further, they noted that in 42 of the 60 schemes there was evidence suggesting that there had been a significant reduction in burglary in the three months immediately preceding actual implementation.

Johnson and Bowers (2003) attributed this reduction to the impact of the pre-publicity schemes associated with the introduction of the interventions and referred to it as an 'anticipatory benefit' effect. This interpretation was based on an earlier analysis by some other British researchers, Smith, Clarke and Pease (2002), who suggested that publicity about upcoming interventions impacted on offenders' perceptions of the availability of suitable opportunities to offend. In turn, this analysis was derived from an interpretation of the theories of offender behaviour such as Cornish and Clarke's (1986) Rational Choice Perspective and the crime triangle (Cohen & Felson 1979) that posits that a crime opportunity is a function of the presence of a suitable victim and a motivated offender, as well as the absence of capable guardian.

However, these explanations were focused on the behaviour of real and potential *offenders*, not their *victims*. An equally plausible explanation, the mechanisms of which are explored here, is that it was the householders who were motivated by the pre-program publicity to begin to think more actively about their circumstances as potential burglary victims and to undertake actions to prevent victimisation based on what they already knew they could and

should do, but simply hadn't done already. These potential actions included simple measures such as locking up their homes more consistently when they left and keeping a more active eye on their neighbourhood.

Consequently, when the interventions themselves commenced, in many cases, members of the community had already moved to a point where they were ready and willing to learn more about what they should do and to implement those measures, having already taken basic steps they were already aware of but otherwise had not done.

At the same time, none of this discounts the value of the original offender-focused explanation put forward by the British researchers. Rather, it demonstrates that the practical process for transferring evidence-based knowledge about effective practice in a way that enables key players to take action to modify their own behaviour to achieve the most efficacious outcomes actually operates on many levels at once and needs to be properly examined and understood.

The crime prevention task from a social marketing perspective

One of the most well developed and empirically grounded frameworks for systematically analysing and implementing a process for transferring evidence-based knowledge into action can be found within the principles of the social marketing approach, a strategy common in the public health field with evidence of effectiveness across a range of health behaviours (Stead et al 2007).

Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to explore the utility of applying social marketing principles to the prevention of crime, both as an analytical and intervention design tool, as well as to assess the potential for the social marketing approach to enhance the current repertoire of crime prevention responses.

In doing this, it is important to recognise that use of the principles and techniques of social marketing in the prevention of crime is not completely new. Two familiar examples of interventions making extensive use of social marketing principles are the ongoing campaigns for the prevention of drink driving and the prevention of violence against women.

While the systematic application of social marketing principles to crime prevention goals remains relatively circumscribed, there have been some attempts. For example, Capobianco (2002) speculated on the potential of the 'communication for social change' approach as a tool for enhancing the communication of crime prevention policy, practice and research.

What is social marketing?

For more than two decades, the social marketing approach has been a significant force in the public health field in Australia, having been a critical component in:

- the promotion of engagement in health protection behaviours (eg the promotion of childhood immunisation)
- early detection programs (eg breast and cervical cancer screening)
- the promotion of individual health behaviour change (eg HIV/AIDS, tobacco and other drug issues; Carroll 2000).

The approach is built on the application of evidence-based strategies and often, dual consumer/provider communication strategies. In essence, it is a process that works to engage key target groups to translate evidence-based knowledge about effective practice in a way that enables them to take action to modify their own behaviour to achieve the best outcomes. In marketing terms, this is referred to as facilitating an 'exchange'.

Within a social marketing approach, there is a strong focus on formative research to gain a thorough understanding of the audience's perspective on the issue being addressed and to frame what is being promoted in a way that engages this audience and meets their needs. Careful consideration of environmental mediators and potential facilitators of the promoted behaviour also features strongly in the design of social marketing strategies.

The social marketing approach defined

Social marketing has been described as the design of programs (using commercial marketing concepts and tools) to influence the voluntary behaviour of target audiences to achieve social objectives (Andreasen 2004).

Andreasen (2004) goes on to suggest that social marketing can be usefully applied whenever there is a target audience with a behaviour or set of behaviours that can be modified in order to produce positive outcomes for that group.

Properly understanding social marketing principles and practice requires an equally good understanding of what social marketing is not. Specifically, it is not:

- education only
- persuasion only or
- social advertising only.

Importantly, the term *social marketing campaign* is not synonymous with the term *mass media campaign*, although frequently it may involve mass media communication. The point here is that the key concept is in fact *communication and engagement to facilitate the exchange of a particular behaviour to achieve the desired outcome*. While social marketing is at its most obvious when its takes the form of large scale, high-cost mass media campaigns targeted at the statewide or national level, it is not necessarily carried out in this form. The real point is that the social marketing approach represents a way of thinking, problem solving and generating strategies that will resonate with the life experiences of the target audience with whom they have been developed. Such approaches can also take the form of low-cost, high quality communications that may well be targeted at very specific audiences and seek to influence a small number of key behaviours. Whether the final communication channels adopted within a social marketing strategy comprise high-cost national television and cinema advertising or a poster positioned on a tree at a key pathway in a rural village, the careful process of development of the communication materials, and the strategy of which they are a part, will be fundamentally the same (see Weinreich 1999).

The social marketing framework

Applying a social marketing process will typically involve a series of key stages, summarised by Andreasen (2004) as:

- listening
- planning
- pre-testing
- structuring
- implementing
- monitoring.

Carroll (1998) has operationalised this process into a multi-step model for developing a comprehensive social marketing campaign. As can be seen, many of the processes parallel key stages in a standard crime problem analysis model. However, there are a number of key differences that will inevitably lead to a slightly different form of intervention.

This framework is designed to be applicable to both large scale, mass-reach campaigns and more discreet interventions targeting smaller groups.

Step 1: problem analysis

The initial step of problem analysis entails the gathering and analysis of currently available data and relevant research in order to clearly define the nature of the problem or issue to be addressed. Where insufficient data currently exist, additional surveys or other research will be required.

Step 2: external analysis

Analysis of the external environment is essential to identify key stakeholders and to assess the degree and direction of their current activity and influence. This process entails the examination of both current and potential partnerships to assist in achieving the desired outcome (eg government, non-government and private sectors), as well as recognising the existence of competitive or antagonistic influences. Other relevant influential factors (eg economic, technological or social) should also be identified and assessed at this point.

Step 3: internal analysis

An internal environmental analysis focuses on identifying and quantifying the available resources (human, financial, technical) available to be applied to achieving the desired outcomes, current organisational arrangements and the range of internal influences that must be considered and incorporated within the strategic planning activities.

Step 4: identification of need and audit of complementary strategies

Based on the first three steps, it is now appropriate to assess the specific need for, and role of, any social marketing intervention. Assessment of this need necessarily involves an audit of any other related interventions and any guidance received from relevant stakeholders.

Step 5: target audience identification and analysis

Where the role for social marketing has been confirmed, the next step is to again use the information generated in steps 1 through 3 to identify the most appropriate target audiences for this activity. This involves a process of market segmentation by relevant demographic (eg age, gender, location etc), behavioural (propensity to offend etc) and/or psychographic (eg lifestyle, attitudinal) variables according to the nature and extent of the issue to be addressed. Where insufficient information is available, further research needs to be undertaken.

Having identified and prioritised the target audience(s) for the intervention, strategic formative research is undertaken with these groups to identify key beliefs, attitudes and behaviour relevant to the issue or problem so that the development of strategies and tactics will personally resonate with the target audience, rather than simply reflect the perspective of the program designer.

Step 6: channel analysis

Channel analysis is more than a media-planning task as it entails analysis of the range of potential options for effectively reaching and engaging with the designated target audience. It should consider the broader lifestyle factors and other relevant behavioural practices related to the desired outcome. This ensures the strategy developed in the next step is guided by a thorough understanding of the most effective and efficient means of engaging with the target audience to communicate in a personally relevant way.

Step 7: strategic planning

In order to achieve the designated social marketing objective (eg reducing alcohol-related crime) the strategic planning process entails the formulation of specific behavioural and communication objectives for each target audience segment. This set of objectives should be grounded in appropriate behavioural and communication theory and serves to provide a clear framework within which to develop and pre-test strategies and to identify indicators for monitoring and evaluating outputs and impacts.

It is at this step that options must be considered about the marketing mix for the intervention. That is:

- What is it that will be offered to the target audience consumer (eg reduced risk of becoming a burglary victim or victim of violence)?
- What will be the cost to the consumer to take up this offer (eg physical, social or psychological, such as possible restrictions in activity)?
- Where is the offering to be made available (eg will additional security measures be installed in homes or must the resident do it themselves)?
- How is this offer to be promoted (eg mass media communications, face-to-face interventions etc)?

Step 8: formulation of a marketing plan and management system

The formulation of a marketing plan is critical as it provides the opportunity to synthesise the body of strategic information as well as establishing the blueprint for action with clear roles and responsibilities, timelines and budgets.

All aspects of the comprehensive strategy should be incorporated into the marketing plan, including stakeholder consultation and involvement in the development of the intervention, and the show-casing of the final strategy and materials to relevant individuals and groups in order to ensure broad-based ownership of the process and outcomes.

Regular monitoring of progress against this plan and appropriate refinement of the strategy where indicated should be

undertaken throughout the life of the social marketing intervention.

Step 9: development of strategies and materials through formative research

Formative research plays a central role in ensuring that materials developed for the various strategies are communicating effectively in line with the relevant strategy objective. The development of communication materials with the target audience through pre-testing ensures that the material is optimally tuned and refined, from the perspective of the target audience themselves. Formative research is also essential for ensuring that material developed for delivery by intermediaries such as police, local crime prevention workers or teachers reflects their desire for, acceptance of, attitude towards and intention to use the materials.

This formative research also informs the development of public relations and publicity strategies and promotional and resource materials.

In addition, the process of paid media planning and buying is undertaken at this point.

Step 10: implementation of strategies and process monitoring

Once strategies have been formulated and operationalised, the monitoring process begins. This means assessing how effectively the intervention has been implemented and how well it is being received. Stakeholder consultation, identified in the marketing plan, is integral to this process.

A range of methodologies are employed in process monitoring, both quantitative and qualitative, and implementation of the strategy should be adjusted accordingly, depending on the emerging findings.

Step 11: summative evaluation

One of the strengths of this process is the use of quantitative benchmark surveys and assessments of the target audience in order to quantify measures of beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. These measures are constructed against the framework of objectives designed for the strategy and key indicators should be assessed repeatedly throughout the life of the initiative and at the end.

In addition, measures of the relative salience of the issue being addressed are also taken, often both within the target audience and in the community as a whole. These measures of issue salience are important within an agenda-setting model in terms of what they indicate about the change in the perceived importance of a particular issue and problem, and the implications of this movement for the facilitation of policy or structural change initiatives (eg measures that might seek to modify access to firearms over time).

Step 12: review and analysis for subsequent phases of activity

This step is both the final step for one phase of an initiative and the first step for the subsequent phase. It involves the integration of new information gathered through the process of developing, implementing and evaluating a phase of social marketing activity and its application to a re-analysis of the problem or issue based on changes arising from any impacts from this activity.

What this step highlights is the need for a comprehensive over-arching strategic framework with clear long-term goals and an ongoing commitment to the achievement of those goals—something that is frequently absent from the crime prevention field.

The policy focus for applying social marketing principles—upstream vs downstream

Examining the longer term strategic context for interventions built on social marketing principles introduces a broader policy issue associated with their use and application. This is the question of whether the strategies should be primarily directed at the achievement of *individual behavioural change* (downstream measures) or *structural change* (upstream measures)?

The most common application of social marketing principles tends to focus on the facilitation of individual behaviour change through promoting knowledge about actions that can be taken locally within an individual's environment. However, social marketing has a significant capacity to address upstream issues and produce solutions that are directed at facilitating the targeted behaviour(s) by mobilising the community, changing policy, removing structural barriers and persuading government (Andreasen 2006; Donovan & Henley 2003).

Challenges for achieving upstream solutions can include mobilising politicians to enact new regulations or legislation, encouraging community leaders to induce community participation, motivating business leaders to provide products, equipment etc and persuading local leaders to stop supporting existing ineffective or non-efficacious alternatives.

This issue is reflected in the environmental analysis component of the social marketing framework. That is, no social marketing intervention operates within a vacuum. There will always be a range of other influences on the behaviour being targeted, some which may be supportive, or even synergistic, while others will be competitive. Generating strategies within a social marketing program to achieve structural or policy change to make the desired behaviour 'easier' for the target audience to undertake can play a very important role in facilitating the success of the program. In this way, it is possible for a social marketing program to feature both upstream and downstream components, operating in a mutually reinforcing way.

Clearly these challenges have the potential to generate community conflict unless managed through an effective and collaborative process—a process that the social marketing approach is well credentialed to achieve.

The practical application of social marketing principles to crime prevention

As has been suggested by the use of specific examples throughout the explanation of the model, there is really a high level of congruence with the most common principles and processes in local community crime prevention planning and program intervention. Perhaps the most significant point of departure is the capacity of the social marketing model to hand over

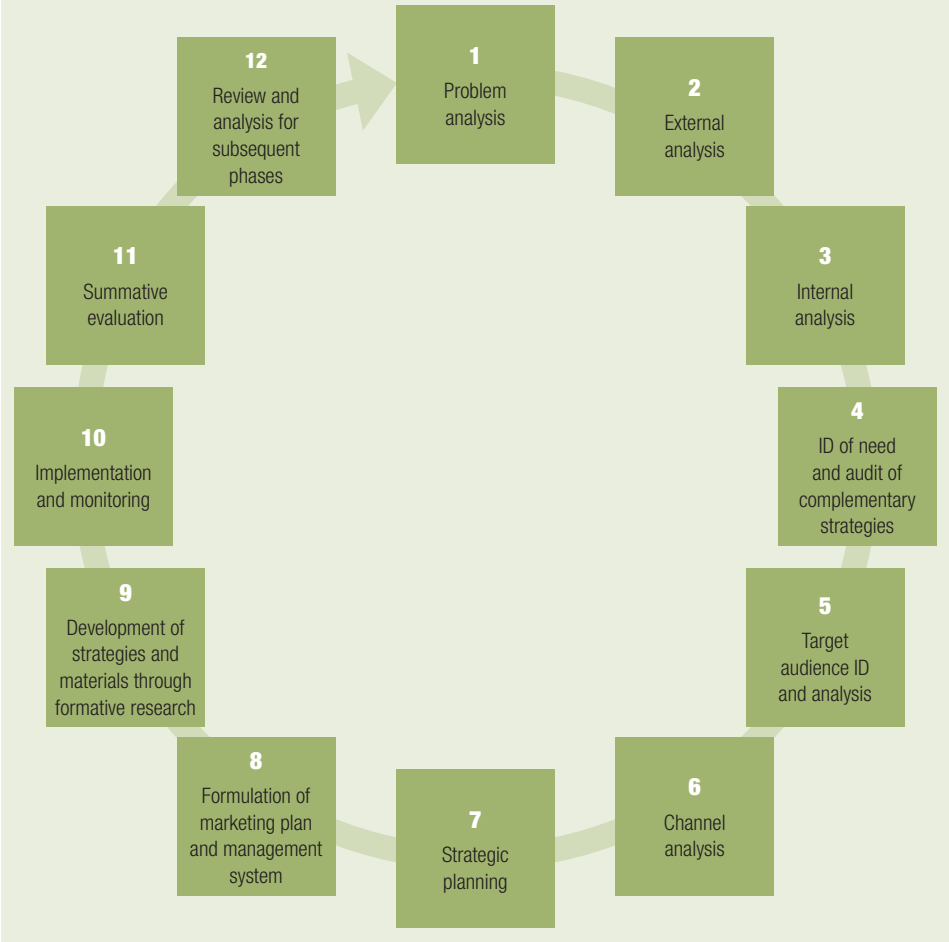
the process for the identification of the most salient issues and important behaviour change processes to the key target group themselves through its use of detailed and ongoing consultation and analysis processes.

This emphasis is probably the result of the gradual development of a stronger confidence in the strength of the public health evidence bases than there currently is for much of the crime prevention evidence bases. But it is also because crime prevention still tends to place a lot of focus on interventions directed at offender behaviour rather than on the capacity of the wider community of potential victims to enact efficacious preventive behaviours. In other words, a lot of time is spent looking at methods to deter and control offender activity at the expense of promoting effective protective behaviour built around existing strengths and resilience within the wider community.

The focus on offender control measures, while essential, confronts the continuing fact that offenders are highly motivated individuals, particularly when it comes to acquisitive crime such as theft and robbery, or even sexually motivated offences such as online grooming. In this context, offenders would assess the cost of changing their behaviour to non-offending as being a very high cost. However, social marketing suggests that potential victims could be more readily persuaded to adopt improved protective behaviours if these could be conveyed in a soundly researched and efficient manner. In effect, this wider population-based focus would produce a potentially higher value outcome for a lower per unit cost.

For example, a potential application of a social marketing approach could involve engaging with older Australians on the salient issue of personal security, effectively communicating that there are specific behaviours they can undertake that will be effective in reducing the likelihood of their becoming a victim of personal crime (response efficacy) and that are within their perceived capacity to undertake (self-efficacy).

Figure 1 Multi-step model for developing a comprehensive social marketing campaign



Source: Carroll 1998

Identification of these specific crime prevention behaviours would require an evidence review and formative research would be necessary to understand how to most effectively engage with older Australians and communicate effectively about the issue and required behaviours. However, using this process would be quite a practical measure to reduce unfounded anxieties among this growing population group. It would have a positive impact on their quality of life, as well as exerting a downward pressure on crime resulting from the increased adoption of these crime prevention behaviours.

Looking at a completely different type of problem, the principles of social marketing present a valuable framework to assist in developing new and more effective forms of preventive interventions to be delivered through the so-called 'new media' of internet-based communication.

Advances in technology have provided individuals with new and exciting opportunities to communicate efficiently and in real time. At the same time, the community has been exposed to a wide range of criminal activities, one of which involves the online exploitation of children. The potential for individuals with an inappropriate sexual interest in children to establish online contact with, and groom, children for sexual abuse represents a very real threat to the safety of children in the technological age.

The grooming of children for sexual abuse is a premeditated behaviour that commences with sexual offenders choosing a location or target area likely to be attractive to children. Social networking sites, in particular, have become an important element in the child grooming process. These technologies, popular with the digital/virtual generation, allow offenders to make contact with children and to masquerade as children in cyberspace to secure their trust and cooperation. As trust is developed,

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offenders seek to desensitise child victims to sexual conduct by introducing a sexual element into the relationship (Choo 2009).

Recent work by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Choo 2009) has illustrated how children can be vulnerable to adult sexual predators because their development of social skills are not yet complete, making them less likely to pick up relevant cues such as inappropriate remarks that predators may make during conversations. Children with low self-esteem, a lack of confidence and naivety are more at risk and more likely to be targeted by offenders. Some adolescents who are more curious are also more willing to take risks than less curious children, thus making them a target for potential offenders (Choo 2009).

To date, most preventive responses to the problem of online grooming have focused on the detection of offenders and the filtering or blocking of access to inappropriate sites and content. Other preventive action has focused on encouraging parents to be highly vigilant and aware of their children's online activities (Choo 2009). However, as is well known from our study of other crime types (Ekblom 1999), offenders who are highly motivated can be extremely innovative in their techniques when they identify suitable targets, such as curious children. So a reliance on conventional situational prevention measures such as website monitoring and blocking and the vigilance of guardians, while essential, will often be insufficient, particularly when the capable guardian is less familiar with the technology than the potential victim and offenders.

An additional complementary strategy then is to better empower the young people themselves to develop and use effective protective skills and enhanced judgement while enjoying their cyberspace social activities with less risk of harm. What is clear is that the principles of the social marketing approach have great potential to be applied to achieving this outcome through the systematic development of appropriate engagement and communications with young people at risk of becoming victims to promote the use of efficacious protective behaviours of their own. The point is that social networking sites and the Internet are merely different venues and media for social communication and as such, have a range of risks and protective mechanisms similar to other more traditional settings. The principles remain the same and have the potential to significantly impact on a crime problem of great community concern. For example, the same rules apply in relation to something like 'stranger-danger' in cyberspace as apply in a public park. So while it may be that some of the specific behavioural responses are different, the principles are the same and need to be effectively conveyed and promoted.

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