Crime Prevention

Approaches, Practices and Evaluations

Steven P. Lab

Crime Prevention

Approaches, Practices and Evaluations

CJ
anderson

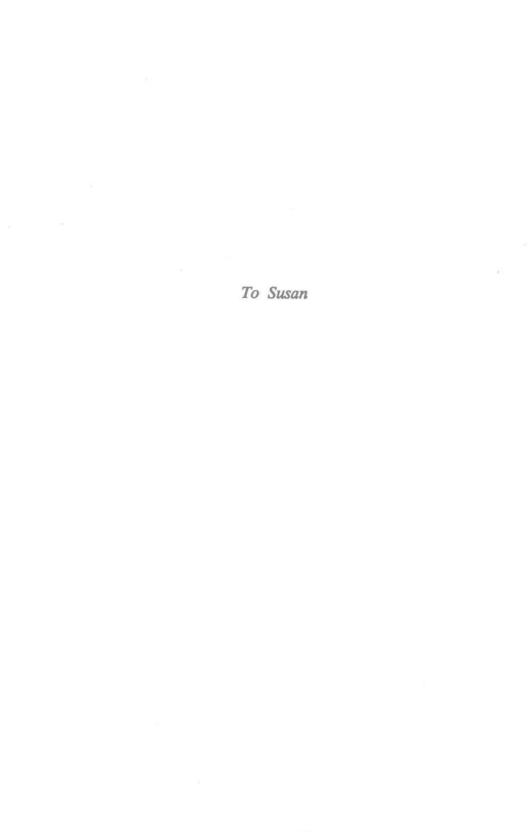Steven P. Lab

CRIME PREVENTION
Approaches, Practices and Evaluations

Kelly Humble *Managing Editor*
Cover Design by Ross Heck

To Susan

Preface

As a professor asked to teach a course in crime prevention, one of my first tasks was to find a text which approached crime prevention from an academic orientation. I was able to find any number of books and monographs outlining "how to" prevent crime. These efforts suggested the correct types of locks, windows, doors, lights, and other physical security devices most suited for different situations—even to the point of giving brand names. Other materials presented the proper ways to hitchhike, answer a door, respond to phone questions, or walk the streets at night. In many instances these books and materials are nothing more than can be gained by calling the local police and requesting crime prevention assistance. Although these materials may be helpful and useful for preventing crime or avoiding victimization, none of them are the proper focus for academic discourse on crime prevention.

Criminology and criminal justice programs have outgrown the basic "how to" orientation which dominated throughout the 1970's and those programs funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Today, the emphasis is on critically examining various methods used by the formal justice system and the public in combating crime. Higher education wastes its time when all it attempts to do is teach "how to." This type of activity leads to an unquestioning reliance on a method regardless of the approach's effectiveness. A great number of crime prevention techniques have been implemented and continue to be used without knowing whether they actually make a difference on crime or fear of crime. What is needed in crime prevention courses is the evaluation of various prevention methods. Unfortunately, no single book examines the wide range of crime prevention techniques from such an approach.

The present text attempts to fill this void. The emphasis is on presenting a brief description of the more well-known and recent crime prevention approaches and then presenting the results of evaluations which have been performed on each technique. In some instances the evaluative literature is difficult to find. Much of the material is buried in the great number of government reports filed over the past 25 years. Often the "evaluations" reflect little more than descriptions of a program's process and do not look at the program's impact on crime or fear of crime. The absence of better evaluations, however, leaves these materials as the best available.

The book is broad in its scope and looks at only a fraction of the many programs and approaches which have been tried. Those included were selected because of their representativeness, novelty, newness, and/or their promise for crime prevention. Clearly, the materials do not look only at programs that have been proven to work. Had this been the inclusion criteria, the book would have been very short. Instead, inspection of programs (successful or not) leads a to better understanding of where we should go in the future. Some of the chapters deal with materials found in many other criminology texts and courses. Indeed, crime prevention forms the core (hopefully) of most criminological and criminal justice writings and efforts. Chapters on deterrence, incapacitation, and rehabilitation, by necessity, deal with only a fraction of the evidence available (particularly since each of these topics holds a place all their own in criminology). I hope that I have been able to present a balanced view of these areas, at least to the extent that they address crime prevention as defined in this text.

My hope is that this book is useful in both introductory and advanced courses on crime prevention. As should be clear, the approach is one of evaluation and avoids any "how to" prescriptions. Such "how to" materials can be obtained from your local enforcement agencies. I have endeavored to tailor the discussions to students who have a basic working knowledge of criminology and criminal justice, and the terms and ideas which are a part of these disciplines. Indeed, much of the material in this text has been used in my crime prevention courses over the past two years.

I must acknowledge the help of various persons in the preparation of this manuscript—Susan Lab, Bob Langworthy, Charles Lindquist, Georgia Smith, and John Whitehead. Each of these individuals read various portions of the book, suggested changes, and/or provided access to materials I did not know of or could not locate. In many respects, this work is a collaborative effort of myself with these persons and the many others who have helped shape my outlook and career.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1
Introduction—The Crime Problem

Crime remains an indisputable fact of life for many, if not most, members of modern society. Crime has continued to increase or remain at unacceptably high levels, regardless of whether crime is measured by official records or victimization surveys. Most individuals turn to society for help in alleviating crime and their fear of crime. Society, in turn, has established the criminal justice system, with its many components, to combat the crime problem. The ability of the criminal justice system to single-handedly alleviate crime in society has been seriously questioned by both proponents and opponents. One has only to look at the alarming trend in crime rates over the past twenty years to observe the failure of the formal criminal justice system to do little more than process law violators and victims through a confusing maze of legal procedures. Society clearly needs to pursue alternate means of preventing crime.

The recognition of a need to pursue non-criminal justice system solutions to crime is not new. The police, courts, corrections, and other system components need help. Simply throwing more money at the criminal justice system will not improve its ability to stop crime. Crime is a societal problem, not just a criminal justice system problem. Crime prevention, therefore, must utilize the wide range of ideas and abilities found throughout society. Community planning, architecture, neighborhood action, juvenile advocacy, security planning, education, and technical training, among many other system and non-system activities, all have a potential impact on the levels of crime and fear of crime. The realm of crime prevention is already vast and open for expansion. However, throughout the various crime prevention programs and approaches already in existence, there is a need for systematic evaluation and synthesis of the available knowledge.

It is important to place the need and evaluation of crime prevention within a working framework. The first question which needs to be addressed involves the measures and amount of crime in society. The numerical level of crime, however, should not be the only concern of crime prevention programs. Often, the "fear of crime" poses a greater, more far reaching problem for society and its members. Demonstrating a need for crime prevention is not hard to accomplish. The second general problem, that is, addressing the state of the knowledge on crime prevention, is not as easily accomplished. The definition of crime prevention varies from study to study and program to program. In addition, the lack of knowledge about preven-

1

tive methods stems from the lack of organization and direction in the field of crime prevention. Placing the various crime prevention strategies into a working scheme can provide the basis for coherent analysis and evaluation. Both of these issues, the scope of the problem and the realm of crime prevention, are addressed in this chapter as a basis for further exploration of crime prevention strategies.

The Problem of Crime in Society

The magnitude of the crime problem can be evaluated using a variety of approaches. The use of official crime statistics, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports, provides a view of crime from the standpoint of what the formal criminal justice system must handle. Many critics argue that this provides an inaccurate and incomplete analysis of the true levels of crime in society. These individuals point to the results of victimization surveys as a basis for their argument. Further consideration can be given to the level of crime as it is perceived by societal members. The "fear of crime" presents a view of criminal victimization which, although not necessarily real, forms the basis for daily "inactivity" and anxiety. Each of these views of the crime problem in society are discussed below.

Measuring the Actual Level of Crime

Uniform Crime Reports. The FBI Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) are the most widely used and cited official measures of crime in the United States. The UCR represents the number of criminal offenses known to the police. The reported crime rate reflects only those offenses known as Part I crimes (violent crimes: murder, rape, robbery, and assault; property crimes: burglary, larceny, auto theft, and arson). A host of other offenses (i.e. fraud, kidnapping, and drug offenses), known as Part II offenses, are not included in the computations and reported crime rates. The resulting crime rates, therefore, reflect only a portion of the offenses with which the formal criminal justice system comes into contact.

Other official crime measures include criminal court filings, conviction records, and jail populations. Each of these alternate measures provide increasingly narrower views of the level of crime. The police are often referred to as the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system. This means that they control, to a large extent, the numbers and types of problems handled by latter stages of the system. Few offenders or cases enter the criminal justice system without first being processed by the police. It is the police who make the decision to arrest,. file reports, and refer the cases to the

prosecutor and, subsequently, to the court and correctional arenas. Any measure of crime based on system processing after the police stage will reveal smaller numbers of offenses and offenders than the UCR. The police figures appearing in the UCR are the most inclusive of all official measures. Our interest in the official level of crime in society, therefore, is best indicated by the UCR.

According to the UCR, crime in the United States rose a great deal in the 1960s and 1970s and has leveled off in the early 1980s. The crime rate in 1960 was 1,887.2 offenses per 100,000 population. With a single exception in 1972, this rate continuously increased to a rate of 5,281.7 in 1975. The crime rate fluctuated in the late 1970s, reached its peak in 1980, and has shown a consistent drop to the level of 5,031.3 in 1984 (Flanagan and McGarrell, 1986). The 1984 UCR reveals more than twelve million crimes in the United States. Violent crimes make up more than 1.2 million of the total reported crimes (Flanagan and McGarrell, 1986).

The UCR comes under fire from a variety of sources over the methods of data collection used and the meaning of the crime rate figures. Foremost among the concerns for our discussion is the question of whether the reported UCR crime rate is an accurate depiction of the amount of crime in society. That is, do the police records and reports provide an unbiased, complete view of crime in society? Popular wisdom would answer this question with a resounding "No!" Examination of the UCR reveals three major points at which the UCR can be inaccurately adjusted.

First, the UCR is a voluntary system of data collection. It is possible for police departments to adjust their figures in order to enhance the image of their operation and/or their jurisdiction. The police operate within a political framework similar to any other governmental organization. Funding is based on service delivery and the appropriate measure of productivity. Police productivity is often based on the crime figures which they report (O'Brien, 1985). As a result, it may be in the best interests of the department to alter their collection and reporting practices in order to make themselves look better. Interestingly, this may be accomplished through both increasing and decreasing the level of crime. For example, an increase in the reported crime rate may be touted as an indication of better police work and improved police effectiveness. This would be especially true if the police had previously announced a "crackdown" on a selected crime and then wished to demonstrate their success. Similarly, a decrease in the level of crime may be pointed to as deterrence brought on by improved police performance.

A second major problem with the UCR involves the ability of individual police officers to adjust the crime rate. Any officer can refrain from making an arrest or a formal report on an incident. Such activity may allow

the officer to deflect minor or unimportant events away from an already overburdened criminal justice system.   More importantly, however, such discretion plays a factor in a distorted and under-represented crime rate. Departmental policies may also contribute to this shift in reported crimes. Administrative procedures concerning the handling of crimes may alter the level of reported offenses. McCleary et al. (1982) found that, by requiring all reported cases of burglary to be investigated by detectives, the number of officially recorded burglaries showed an immediate drop.   This was attributable to the detectives reclassifying offenses which were not burglaries (i.e. thefts) to their correct UCR categories. Less experienced officers who used to handle these offenses elevated many instances to the burglary category. It is clear that the UCR crime rates are subject to unintentional, as well as intentional, manipulation.

The third criticism of the UCR revolves around the claim that many offenses are not brought to the attention of the police. The police are a reactive force. This means that the police primarily respond to calls for service. Despite the patrol function of the police, little crime is encountered directly by the police. They must rely on victims and witnesses to call them for help. The absence of such calls when offenses do occur translates into crimes which are not known to the police and which do not become part of official crime figures.   The reasons why some individuals do not report crimes to the police will be explored below. The fact that there is much unreported crime, along with the potential problems of data collection, have prompted many individuals to rely on victimization surveys in order to assess the extent of the crime problem.

Victimization Surveys.   Victimization surveys are exactly what they sound like. They are surveys of the population carried out to measure the level of criminal victimization in society. This form of crime measurement experienced great growth in the late 1960s and continues today through a variety of ongoing social surveys. The surveys typically inquire about the victimization experiences of the subject and/or his household over a specified period of time (usually the preceding 6 months or year). Such surveys have been lauded as a more accurate reading of crime in society because they circumvent the problems of official records, noted above, and they uncover crimes which are not reported to the police.

Consistent with UCR figures, victimization surveys reveal increasing levels of crime throughout the 1970s. The National Crime Survey (NCS) estimates that there were 35,646,755 offenses in 1973. This number rose to 41,267,496 in 1981. A steady decline since 1981 has resulted in an estimated 35,459,649 offenses in 1984 (Flanagan and McGarrell, 1986).

Comparison of victimization survey results to UCR figures present a consistent pattern of under reporting by the official data sources. In one of

the earliest and most well known comparisons of victimization and UCR data, Ennis (1967) finds that the victimization figures show about twice as much crime as that found in the comparison UCR data. The 1984 National Crime Survey uncovered 35,459,649 crimes of which only 12,465,873 were reported to the police (Flanagan and McGarrell, 1986). This means that the UCR reflects only about one-third of the crimes committed.

Individual offenses and offense categories display varying amounts of discrepancy in the two types of crime measures. The 1984 NCS reveals that only 47% of the violent personal crimes, 26% of the personal thefts, and 36% of the household offenses are reported to the police. Looking at individual offenses, the UCR typically finds slightly more homicides and higher amounts of auto theft than the victim surveys. This can easily be attributed to the crimes themselves. Homicides will not be uncovered in surveys of personal or household victimization if the victim lived alone. Conversely, the offense will come to the attention of the police due to the existence of a body as a result of the crime. Victims of auto theft are highly likely to alert the police about the crime because of insurance requirements that victims must file police reports before a claim can be paid. The remaining Part I offenses exhibit victimization levels ranging from 1.5 times higher than UCR figures (robbery) to 3.7 times higher (rape) (Ennis, 1967). These figures are comparable to those found by many other victimization surveys.

Victimization surveys clearly uncover much more crime than does the UCR. Many victims and witnesses are deciding not to call the police in the aftermath of offenses. The reasons for this non-reporting are many and revolve around the two issues of what the system can do for the individual and what costs are incurred by reporting the offense. The Milwaukee Victim/Witness Project investigated these two areas through a survey of 1775 victims and 1225 witnesses (Knudten et al., 1977). The first set of findings revealed that respondents see little to gain in calling the police. The second issue dealing with costs to the victim/witness in reporting crime uncovered a variety of system related costs ranging from lost time from work, lost income, uncomfortable surroundings, a lack of knowledge about what to do, and a general sense of non-caring on the part of the system (Knudten et al., 1977). The finding that individuals refrain from reporting crimes symbolizes a rational, cost-benefit analysis on the part of the victim/witness. This process leads to official crime records far below the level of actual victimization.

The victimization studies are not without their critics and shortcomings. Among the many problems inherent in the surveys are the lack of knowledge of what constitutes various crimes on the part of respondents, problems of respondent recall, and issues of question wording. These issues are well documented elsewhere (see O'Brien, 1984) and will not be considered here. The magnitude of the difference between official and victimiza-

tion figures, however, is too large to be offset by the problems of victim surveys. There is little question that victim surveys uncover more crime than official measures.

Clearly, both official measures of crime and victimization surveys suffer from a variety of shortcomings. The exact nature and level of crime in society is unknown. Official UCR figures reveal a staggering amount of crime. More than doubling those numbers to account for unreported offenses, as victimization figures would suggest, compounds the problem. The declining trend in both official and victimization figures should be addressed at this point. There is a clear tendency for moderation in recent crime figures. This does not mean that the criminal justice system or existing crime prevention measures are being effective. Nor does it indicate that crime should be viewed as a lessor problem or that it is getting better. The great increases in offending during the 1970s can be attributed to the great numbers of 1950s baby boom youths in the population. As crime is highly a youthful behavior, the aging of the population sees fewer persons in the crime prone ages. However, this is only a temporary reprieve. As the baby boom cohort matures, marries, and reproduces, there will be another upturn in the number of persons in the high crime ages. This should result in another increase in offending during the mid to late 1990s. Crime prevention efforts should prepare for this occurrence.

The level of crime, whether at its peak or more moderate numbers, exceeds the limits of what the criminal justice system can hope to handle. The system is already overburdened and often simply processes people through the maze of legal requirements without having an impact on the crime rate. The President's Crime Commission (1967) presents a view of criminal justice system processing which shows only 63,000 offenders being incarcerated in prison out of more than 2.7 million officially known crimes. Adjusting this official figure of known crime to account for unreported offenses only exacerbates the view of an ineffective criminal justice system.

In addition, this view of criminal justice productivity is an after-the-fact approach to crime. The system is dealing with crimes which have already been committed. There is little, if any, evidence to show that the system actually stops crime before it occurs. To further compound the problem of these levels of "actual crime" in society, one needs only to examine the perceived levels of crime and the resultant fear held by many members of society.

The Fear of Crime

The fear of crime represents a real or perceived risk of victimization. Various studies place the level of fear in society at around 50% (Hindelang,

1975; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Toseland, 1982). Fear of crime steadily increased from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s (Erskine, 1974) but appears to have leveled off in the area of 40-50% since the mid seventies (Toseland, 1982). Fear is not found equally across society. It is principally an urban problem and affects the elderly and women to a greater extent than other groups. Greater than 60% of those persons living in urban areas express fear of crime. Conversely, only 30% of rural residents voice the same fears. A wide range of studies reveal that the elderly and women are the most fearful groups in society (see DuBow, 1979). Skogan and Maxfield (1981) reveal that females are more than three times as fearful as men (22.8% versus 6.4%) on neighborhood streets. Similarly, those individuals aged 50-59 are more than twice as fearful (22.2%) as any group of younger persons. The problem is greater for those over age 60 where 40.7% feel very unsafe on their neighborhood streets (Skogan and Maxfield, 1981). In contrast, the least fearful are young, upwardly mobile, middle income males.

Fear manifests itself in various ways depending on the person involved and the basis for his/her anxiety. Some individuals fear walking on the streets in their neighborhood while others fear physical attack within their own homes. As a result, there may be a shift in physical functioning such as high blood pressure and rapid heartbeat or there may be a change in attitudes about walking alone in certain places and avoiding various activities. Regardless of the source of this fear, it is real for those individuals who perceive these threats.

Interestingly, fear of crime is not related to actual levels of victimization. Garofalo (1977) notes that fear of crime increases faster than actual levels of crime. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) found that, while roughly 40-50% of the population is fearful of crime, only six percent of the population were victims of violent crime in 1973-1974. The 1976 General Social Survey of the National Opinion Research Center found that 44% of those surveyed responded affirmatively to a question on fear of crime (Toseland, 1982). When compared to the actual amount of victimization by those fearful of crime, only 2% had ever been mugged, 7% had been burglary victims, 18% had been threatened with a gun, and 27% were victims of a beating. Skogan and Maxfield (1981) similarly illustrate the lack of a connection between victimization and fear by comparing levels of fear between robbery victims and nonvictims. Approximately 48% of the nonvictims reported feeling somewhat or very unsafe. Similarly, 54% of the robbery victims report the same fear. Interestingly, the least fearful groups are the most victimized. The levels of fear appear to far exceed the actual levels of victimization and respond to factors unrelated to the chances of victimization.

How does one justify the levels of fear in light of the actual levels and chances of victimization? One potential explanation involves vicarious vic-