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Preventing Crime

A Holistic Approach

Tore Bjørgo

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Foreword

Crime remains an important factor that affects the quality of life of individuals, households and societies. The study of the causes of crime, at multiple levels, and perhaps even more important, the study of mechanisms that are responsible for producing the outcome, will therefore remain a key task in criminology. This mechanism-based approach has now become established and is at the core of recent theoretical developments (e.g. Wikström et al., 2012). It is an approach that has urged researchers to explain their hypotheses about how individual and environmental factors combine to produce their effects.

Knowledge and challenging theoretical ideas need to be put into practice. This, however, is a daunting task. Sometimes we know that factors are related to each other, and we know that manipulating the putative causes brings about a desirable effect, but sometimes we do not know why (i.e. the intervening mechanisms).¹ As crime is a multilevel and multi-causal phenomenon, it remains difficult for practitioners to choose between a series of measures. Indeed, putting theories into practice proves to be a major challenge for a knowledge-based approach to crime prevention.

While many developers of contemporary theories have been convinced of the importance of thinking in terms of mechanisms, this style of thinking is not yet a standard way of dealing with crime prevention. I am convinced that crime prevention needs to broadly adopt a mechanism-based approach as it is important to be able not only to justify one's preventive actions but also to bring something about. If preventive measures do not target mechanisms that are directly or indirectly related to crime causation, then I am inclined to say we have a problem.

This brings me to the great appeal this book offers. Professor Bjørgo has succeeded in translating the mechanism-based approach, which is deeply rooted in analytical sociology (e.g. Hedström 2005; Pauwels, Ponsaers and Svensson 2010), into the world of crime prevention and continues thereby work of influential scholars such as Nick Tilley (2013). The multi-causal nature of the phenomenon of crime requires a holistic approach. This mechanism-based approach also has a solid philosophical background in the systemic approach (Bunge 2000). In such an approach, individuals, neighbourhoods, cities and societies are seen as

systems. Scholars who take such an approach ask questions about the composition of a system, what surrounds it (environment), what elements keep the system together (the structuring elements, such as social ties) and what makes the system work (i.e. the mechanism). I believe that crime prevention projects also can be seen as systems. Such projects consist of many elements, are developed in a context, are kept together by the people engaged in them and aim at preventing crime from emerging or re-emerging among the general population, risk groups or groups that have already exhibited criminal behaviour. From such a systemic perspective, the crucial question emerges automatically: what are the preventive mechanisms – the active gradients – that can make the difference?

Professor Bjørge provides and applies a general integrated model of crime prevention that is based on nine preventive mechanisms. To show the general nature of these mechanisms he applies this integrative approach to a series of highly different phenomena. The key idea of Bjørge's model, to which I fully subscribe, is that the dichotomy between prevention and crime control is not useful. Both prevention and control are complementary elements in keeping crime down. The general mechanism-based model is explained thoroughly from a theoretical background and is written in a concise way, so that it will be of great use for students of crime prevention and practitioners who are looking for an inspiring general model that can be applied to a wide array of local phenomena. Examples relate to, for example, the prevention of radicalisation and terrorism, gang membership, organised crime and MC-gang-related crimes, domestic burglary and driving under influence of alcohol.

Most of the book's examples are drawn from contemporary practices in Norwegian crime prevention and therefore give us a unique insight into the Nordic holistic model of crime prevention. Scholars who want to learn more about crime prevention in the Nordic countries need to read this book. Yes, despite the specificity of the examples, the generality of the mechanism-based approach suggests that the examples can be applied in highly diverse contexts. However, it should be noted that universal mechanisms still require local translation. With this remark in mind, this book challenges a broad audience of practitioners who work in the field of crime prevention and who are looking for inspiration to guide their preventive actions.

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Series Editor's Introduction

This book provides a fresh take on crime prevention. It is not based on new empirical evidence, at least none that was prepared specifically for the book; rather, it reflects detailed thinking about an array of approaches to tackling crime, incorporating a wide range of theories, and it collates these in a way that provides a different focus for crime prevention practice. Interestingly, the heavy Nordic influence in the examples and evidence used is refreshing – in fact many of the most common references from North America, Europe and Australasia in particular are not mentioned at all. This underlines the author's original approach, his view that we need to think differently about how we approach crime.

Tore Bjørge presents in this book what many might see as an ambitious task: a comprehensive model for crime prevention. The approach is based on various strands of thinking, including the beliefs that traditional criminological theories have not paid sufficient attention to mechanisms; that measures and approaches are always contextually dependent; that offences differ markedly but share the common element that there is always a need to assess how the right measures can be made to work; and that it is possible to encapsulate a broad array of thinking and practices in nine specific mechanisms. This book provides a way of explaining theories and their application within one overall approach.

The author illustrates the point by showing how the mechanisms apply to very different types of crime: domestic burglary, violent youth gangs, organised crime (and specifically outlaw motorcycle gangs), driving under the influence and terrorism. Indeed, he devotes a chapter to each and shows how his approach can be used to interpret and solve very different types of problem. The thinking is likely to appeal to many, not least practitioners who sometimes lament the tendency of academics to confuse what is already a complicated scene. Indeed, as the author notes: "One of the goals has been to make the theoretical model so simple and obvious that it can be understood and used by regular police officers, crime prevention officers, politicians and policy developers."

Many will find the examples illuminating: they look at how different measures can activate different mechanisms and take account of who

has oversight or control of them. What we learn about is the diverse range of stakeholders involved in preventing crime and reducing its impact. There is nothing new in highlighting the role of family members, peer groups, schools and businesses, public agencies, communities, politicians, police, education and private security in tackling crime (and reintegrating offenders to prevent them reoffending), but what is different is that, although these mechanisms can be specified in relation to specific forms of crime, they can also be seen as nine different strategies or sub-strategies that collectively provide one overarching strategic approach.

The book finishes with a clear summary of the main arguments and reflects on some of the challenges of evaluating what works and what doesn't – and why.

This text offers important new insights on crime prevention but most importantly invites a different way of thinking. It fits very well with this book series where one aim is to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Tore Bjørge's book exemplifies this aim.

Preface

The main goal of society's efforts to combat crime is to reduce future crime – in other words, the main goal is prevention. This book develops a general, comprehensive model for preventing crime. It aims to show, in a way that is easy to understand, how this general model can be applied to prevent very different forms of crime, from domestic burglaries, crimes committed by criminal youth gangs and driving under the influence of alcohol or other intoxicants to organised crime and terrorism. The concept of “prevention” is used here in a broad sense to mean reducing the occurrence of future criminal acts.

One of the underlying concepts in the book is that there is no simple measure that alone can dramatically reduce a particular crime problem, but there are many means that can reduce the problem to some degree. A comprehensive strategy must therefore be based on establishing a series of barriers that can work together: the criminal acts or actors not stopped by the initial barrier may be stopped by one of the other barriers. These barriers to committing crime can be described as prevention mechanisms, which are the central analytical concepts in this book. A mechanism may in this context be understood as a theoretical explanation of how a measure produces an effect, such as reducing a crime problem.

The book describes nine such prevention mechanisms. These are generic: in other words, they can in principle be applied to all forms of crime. However, the means that activate the mechanisms can vary greatly depending on the type of criminality. For example, the means required to disrupt terrorist attacks are completely different to those needed to disrupt domestic burglaries or driving under the influence. The relevant means are also at the disposal of different prevention actors. The book describes how the comprehensive model for preventing crime can be applied to five very different forms of crime: domestic burglary, criminal youth gangs, driving under the influence, organised crime originating in outlaw motorcycle clubs and terrorism.

Unlike many other books on crime prevention, which are characterised by American or British perspectives in terms of empirical material as well as cultural, criminological and socio-political outlooks, readers will find that this book is written from a Norwegian, Scandinavian and Nordic position. This can be seen from many of the examples used, but

mainly because the holistic model of crime prevention presented in this book may be seen as an expression of – or a further development of – what has often been called “the Nordic model of crime prevention”. However, this is not a formal model; it rather represents some common traits in crime policy and shared views and ideas about the role of prevention in reducing crime. The so-called Nordic model emphasises social prevention in combination with situational prevention, and there is less reliance on and faith in the criminal justice system’s ability alone to reduce crime. Instead there is often a partnership between the police, schools, social agencies and civil society in order to intervene early when young people are developing towards delinquency or extremism. In contrast to most other countries, the criminal justice systems and prisons in the Nordic countries put less emphasis on retribution and more emphasis on reducing future crime and rehabilitating offenders.

Although this book is in no way an attempt to formalise the so-called Nordic model of crime prevention, there is no doubt that the model developed here has been strongly influenced by this general way of thinking about crime prevention in a holistic perspective. I do believe that this is an area where the world has something to learn from the Nordic countries, and that many of these lessons can be applied elsewhere.

This book project has a long history stretching back to 2006 and has been through many stages. It started as an attempt to develop a comprehensive model for preventing terrorism, since both government action plans to combat terrorism and anti-terrorism work in general appeared to lack comprehensive strategic thinking and a unifying theory. The idea was to utilise criminological theory to build a more comprehensive anti-terrorism model. However, I found that the traditional criminological models for preventing crime (such as the social, the situational and the criminal justice prevention models) were narrow and not very comprehensive. Even though they overlap to some degree, they have no room for key aspects of the other prevention models. My ambition has therefore been to deconstruct these prevention models, which to some extent compete with each other, and combine them into a new, more comprehensive model based on the respective crime prevention mechanisms. This model was then applied to the form of crime called terrorism. This work was first published in a Norwegian language research report by the Norwegian Police University College (Bjørge 2011b) and subsequently expanded and developed into a English language book version, *Strategies for Preventing Terrorism* (Bjørge 2013), published by Palgrave Macmillan.

It was during the process of creating a comprehensive model for preventing terrorism that it gradually became clear to me that this model could just as well be applied to other, quite different, forms of crime. I therefore had to write a new book in which I demonstrated the applicability of the model to a number of very different types of crime and in which I could use the same analytical form. I ended up with the five forms of crime that I address in this book. I had originally planned to apply the model to other forms of crime as well, such as domestic violence, online child sexual abuse, corruption in public office and piracy in Somalia. The model worked well in relation to these forms of crime, but conducting all of these analyses in one go proved too labour intensive. I hope to apply the model to some of these forms of crime in future works.

The model also provides a suitable analytical framework for students writing a bachelor's, master's or doctoral thesis on the prevention of various forms of crime. The groups of students for whom it is relevant are those studying criminology, security studies and, not least, policing. I have established an online knowledge base on the Norwegian Police University College's website (<http://www.phs.no/forskning/crime-prevention-knowledge-base>) where students and researchers who have used the model in theses or articles can make their work available to others. This will require the submitted works to undergo some form of quality assessment. Over time this will, I hope, become a crime prevention knowledge base covering a wide range of forms of crime. Such a knowledge base would be of great benefit to practitioners in the police, crime prevention and policy development.

I would like to thank a number of different institutions that have contributed financial support to various phases of this project. The Research Council of Norway's Societal Security and Risk programme (SAMRISK) provided support to the project on preventing terrorism in 2010–2011. Earlier phases of my work on the book projects *Root Causes of Terrorism* and *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (which from a thematic perspective are closely related to two of the sub-strategies in the model) received support from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which also helped to disseminate the results to users at a high level internationally. The Consortium for Research on International Terrorism and Organised Crime has supported the work by funding my part-time post at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), which primarily involves research into terrorism. I would like to thank the Fulbright Foundation and Norwegian Police University College who made it financially possible for me to spend the autumn semester of

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