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### Toward a Common-Sense Approach in Crime Control

**Abstract:** Crime control measures do not, in my opinion, contribute any independent value to society. Intuitively one senses that crime control should not be necessary, just as crime should not exist in the first place. Thus, the ultimate objective of crime control must be found in a reduction of loss of security which can be regarded as a fundamental aspect of wellbeing. To my mind it is of utmost importance for the police to relate the fight for greater security with the well-being of citizens. For thereby the ultimate objective of crime control obtains two connotations of the concept of security, firstly the concrete chance for a citizen to become a victim of crime and secondly his fear of crime, or the absence thereof. I term these connotations objective and subjective security respectively.

**Keywords:** combat to crime; prevention; systematic approach; model; diagnostics.

Crime control is often described in terms of the many repressive and preventive activities that are alleged to contribute to the control of crime. Discussions on the (in) adequacy of these activities rarely lack the observation that there is an urgent need to formulate a comprehensive crime control policy at the various levels of government and administration. The following way of looking at the phenomenon may be helpful in edging our way towards such a policy.

For this purpose it is useful to think about crime control in terms of its life cycle and the various stages of development.

The root of crime control lies in the emergence of that which is at some stage considered desirable to control, namely crime. This emergence can be depicted as follows: (for practical purpose I will confine my attention to one specific crime - bicycle theft - in order to make the argument somewhat less abstract. The patterns of occurrence and reactive lines may be different for other types of crime.

Fig. 1

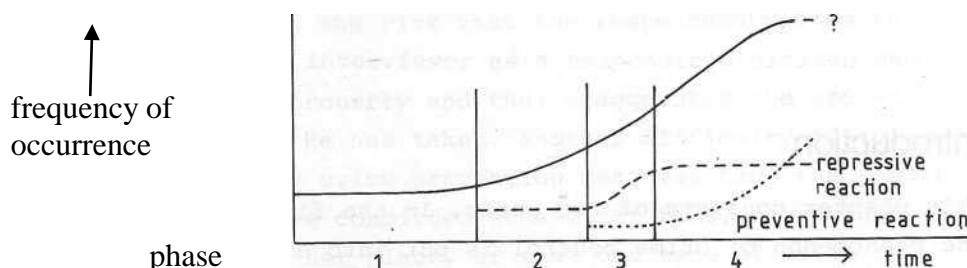


Fig. 1. Life cycle of bicycle-theft and reaction pattern if society is facing a crime problem.

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I would assume this to be a typical reaction pattern if society is facing a crime problem.

Phases 1-4 are characterised as followed:

#### Phases 1. Pre-phase

All elements that make bicycle-theft possible are present (see sect. 2 for a review of such elements), yet theft is rare or non-existent. The possibilities are not any significant extent converted into probabilities.

#### Phase 2. The problem begins.

This is the phase in which bicycles are being stolen, but the thefts are not considered to be a specific problem. People steal all sorts of things, this time it's a bicycle. Police reaction consists of run-off-the-mill registration and detection.

#### Phase 3. The problem is getting recognised.

The thefts keep on increasing and the problem is being defined as serious. All sorts of demands (political, economic, legal) are being raised to formulate a (police) policy to combat the problem. The crime is now getting more specific repressive attention by the police. Registration measures are improved, campaigns are being mounted and task-forces are being formed.

In this phase there is an emergence of preventive efforts by appealing to potential victims to be more careful with their property. This phase terminates at the point where the problem still increases and the limits of financial, procedural and personnel capacities in repressing it are reached.

#### Phase 4. The problem is getting out of hand: a call for systematic prevention.

This is the phase in which the police are forced into systematic prevention efforts. All else seems to have failed.

Presenting a model for approaching existing crime problems in a systematic way, as it occurs in many instances, is something that is thought of rather late in the day. In order to combat a crime problem (more) effectively it is, in my opinion, necessary to move the preventive reaction at least one phase to the left, and preferably two phases.

I believe that a systematic preventive reaction should start at the latest at approximately the same time that repression is intensified. If the start of systematic prevention could be further advanced, the repression may not need to be intensified to the same extent at all.

At first sight my propositions may seem rather obvious. Still the pattern of figure 1a often remains as it is.

The main explanation of this may be the fact that the organisational structure of police forces shows a fundamental lack in being able to perform a continuous monitoring function (which is needed in phase 1 and 2) and an early warning function (which is needed in phase 2 and 3). Even the many operations or planning departments use the information that is available to them mostly for purposes of improving repressive reactions in phase 3.

Consequently I believe that the first step towards a preventive approach that really warrants its label is to assign to some person or unit within the force the two functions that I mentioned.

Let me now turn to the way in which one can address oneself in a systematic way to the problems one may find.

Once we have accepted the idea that prevention of crime should be less "reactive", we need a way to think through our crime problems and their commensurate control mechanisms. In doing so we need to organise our tools and the way in which they are being used.

Arraying the tools of Crime Control. If we want to get away from using Crime Control measures in an ad-hoc fashion, the first thing we need is to array the available measures in a coherent way.

Major advantages that derive from such an array are, first of all, that the measures can be regarded within the perspective of their mutual relationships and, secondly, it can serve a heuristic function when searching for alternative solutions to crime problems.

Even though one can find a number of arrays in the literature - and recognizing that different purposes require different arrays - I have found it useful to categorise the tools for crime control along three basic dimensions:

1. Is the primary intended effect of the measure aimed at altering
  - the behaviour of the perpetrator
  - the behaviour of the victim
  - the situation in which or because of which crime is possible?
2. Is the primary effect of the measure intended to occur:
  - before the offence takes place
  - during the offence
  - after the offence has taken place?
3. What is the level of operation of the primary intended effect of the measure:
  - incidental
  - structural?

Before turning to the subject of strategy I would like to mention one more possible function of the matrix in addition to the functions of creating coherent order and of providing a heuristic aid in finding solutions for crime problems. The additional function concerns the possibility to ascribe specific characteristics to the various categories of measures, for instance in terms of unwanted side-effects like prescription of modus operandi or like increasing injustice or subjective insecurity.

I shall return to such effects in the next section.

The matrix meanwhile, however much it may be further developed, remains to serve its purpose as an instrument for structuring our ideas about crime control measures.

Elements for a strategic model of Crime Control. Obvious elements for a strategic model of Crime Control are its objectives, the means or instruments by which its objectives are to be achieved, the conditions that must be met before instruments can function effectively, and the other effects that may derive from the use of applied instruments. Let me consider these elements in an example. If the stated objective of citizen participation in an operation-identification program were the reduction of the individual risk for a participant to become a victim of burglars, a necessary condition would be that prospective burglars are made aware of the fact that objects in the premises are registered.

Awareness alone, however, is not enough. The burglar must also be reasonably convinced that stealing registered goods leads to increased risk of apprehension, and eventual conviction, or would be significantly less rewarding in terms of lower cash-value for such goods. An additional condition for the measure "registration" to be effective would be a sustained effort at better detection rates for registered stolen goods as compared with non-registered stolen goods. If successful this would lead to a second effect - in addition to the stated objective of individual burglar-risk reduction - namely an increase in detection and possible clearance rates. Other effects, both from applying the instrument (registration plus the announcement thereof) or from attaining the stated objectives, might in-

clude backfiring of the program unless a sufficiently large proportion of the population participates, or various forms of displacement of the crime that is being countered.

As becomes apparent from the example, the use of a strategic model requires one to reason through various relationships between the elements of the model.

Starting at stated objectives one must consider alternative instruments for achieving them.

And taking a closer look at those instruments, one must take into consideration whether and under what conditions the instruments can function effectively. Crucial in this sequence is the question to what extent the immediate effect of the selected measure contributes to the achievement of the objective it purports to attain.

And if one suspects such contribution to be insufficient, what additional measures must be taken?

Finally one must include possible effects that might derive from the use of selected instruments and weigh the costs in terms of negative effects against the benefits of goal attainment.

Before I present the model, let me briefly discuss its constituent elements.

Crime control measures do not, in my opinion, contribute any independent value to society. Intuitively one senses that crime control should not be necessary, just as crime should not exist in the first place. Thus, the ultimate objective of crime control must be found in a reduction of loss of security which can be regarded as a fundamental aspect of wellbeing. To my mind it is of utmost importance for the police to relate the fight for greater security with the well-being of citizens. For thereby the ultimate objective of crime control obtains two connotations of the concept of security, firstly the concrete chance for a citizen to become a victim of crime and secondly his fear of crime, or the absence thereof. I term these connotations objective and subjective security respectively. The ultimate objective of police crime control measures can now be defined as:

enhancing objective and  
subjective security of  
citizens with regard to crime.

Allowing for both preventive and repressive measures, the following more specific objectives of police crime control measures can be formulated:

1. Reduction of the risk for individuals to become a victim of crime
2. Reduction of the general level of crime
3. Balancing the level of fear for crime with actual crime threats
4. Reduction of the amount of damage (material or immaterial) through crime.

As the matrix of crime control measures that I have discussed earlier suggests, these objectives can be operationalised in terms of perpetrators (from better guidance in order to prevent deviant behaviour to improved detection, apprehension, conviction and rehabilitation), in terms of victims (from educating them with regard to elementary precautions to motivating them to report crimes and provide the police with adequate information for their repressive tasks) and finally in terms of situations (from architectural designs that are less inductive to criminal behaviour, defensible space that lessens opportunities for such behaviour, to techno-preventive hardware such as locks and bolts).

Though it may be argued that a good relationship between the police and the public is more than a means properly speaking, we tend - in the Netherlands - to regard improvement of this relationship as a fundamental goal for all crime control measures. This choice must be considered against the fact that we have, in our country, no separate police force charged with justiciary

tasks exclusively. The task of maintaining order and rendering assistance to those who need it, on the one hand, and the tasks associated with prevention, detection of crime and apprehension of criminals on the other, is combined within every single police force. Hearing this combination of functions in mind, there are at least two good reasons for this emphasis. The first is that without a good relationship the police, when executing their repressive function effectively, can hardly expect the citizens to voluntarily cooperate in prevention programs. Secondly, as a consequence of adopting a definition of goals that comprises subjective security, we reject misinforming the public by letting them believe that they are more secure than they actually are, and we also reject the method of boosting people's fear of crime in order to get them to take preventive measures. With propaganda and unnecessary fear ruled out in this way, we must - and do - rely on a good relationship between the police and the public, thereby adding a further objective to the list:

5. Attaining and maintaining a good relationship between the police and the public.

The advantages of defining the objectives of police crime control as broadly as I have done become clear if one realises that goal attainment for one objective may sometimes have a negative impact on the other stated objectives. Relating measures and objectives, as the model suggests, allows for adjustment of the measures so as to offset such negative side-effects, or for adding additional measures that amplify positive effects. A fine example of similar reasoning can be found in Austria. Before initiating measures aimed at reduction of the number of bank robberies the Vienna police, together with the University of Vienna and a private security firm, analysed the probable displacement of robberies. As predicted, the robbers turned from banks to petrol stations. The latter, prior to the implementation of the anti-bank-robbery measures, were informed and instructed as regards preventive measures. Thus, inclusion of not only the immediate category of victims, but also of displacement effects and considerations regarding the general level of robberies, led to more effective crime control than could have been expected from a narrower approach, which would only have taken the specific bank problem into account.

Having discussed measures and objectives, the remaining elements of our model are "conditions" and other effects. Conditions may come in many forms, they may apply to personnel, finance, information, etc. At the level of implementing measures they may be as trivial - in the case of operation identification - as having engravers available and sufficient citizen support. Likewise, for security hardware advice by the police, a necessary condition is the availability in local stores of the materials recommended. Granted, this may not be a primary responsibility for the police, but if it is overlooked, the practical effect of recommending certain materials may be nil.

At the level of goal attainment - taking the registration example again - conditions may take the form of additional measures with regard to antiburglary activities.

Other effects - I am referring to effects other than the stated objectives - may be as diverse as displacement, unnecessary arousal of fear or increased reporting of crime. Registration campaigns not only lead to preventive objectives but also engender expectations in the public as to improved detection. That obviously is the implication of the often heard commentary by policemen when victims report without adequate information: "if you don't know what you're missing, how do you expect the police to trace it?"

Clearly registration programs alone cannot do the job, a police department must be prepared for and capable of processing an increased and improved input. This applies consequently - also to the public prosecutor and the judicial and penitentiary systems.

A preliminary model that contains the basic elements as discussed can graphically be presented as follows.

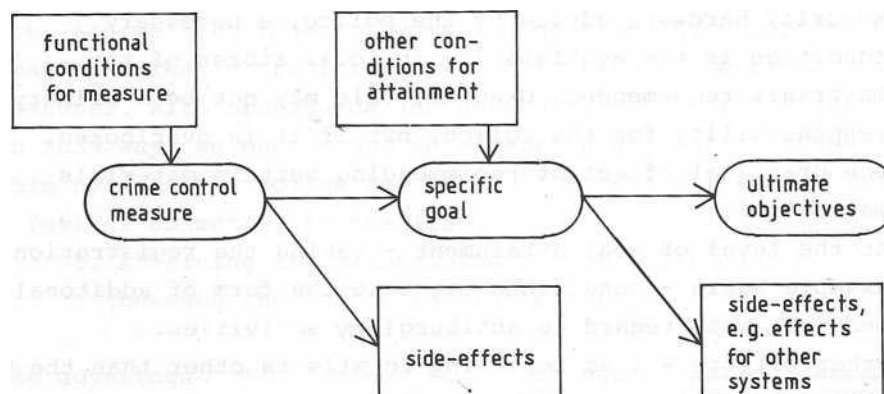


Fig. 3. Preliminary Crime Control Model, relating goals to measures, conditions and further effects.

Summarizing what X have noted about the elements of the model, the following questions must be asked of each element when working out a strategy:

1. How is the specific goal operationalised, how will attainment be measured and how does attainment relate to the ultimate objectives of crime control: reduction of the chance for individuals to be victimized, reduction of the general level of crime, balancing fear with actual crime levels and a good police- public relationship?

2. What is the selected crime control measure, to what extent can it contribute - when functioning as expected - to attainment of the specific goal?

3. What conditions must be met before the selected measure can function effectively and, if they cannot be met fully, what is the consequence thereof for attaining the specific goal?

4. What may be other expected effects that derive from applying the selected crime control measure, e.g. geographical displacement of crime, displacement in terms of criminals selecting different targets or using other modus operandi on the same targets, or arousing fear?

5. What other measures may be necessary to warrant attainment of the specific goal if effective functioning of the selected measure would by itself be insufficient? Also what additional measures may be used to amplify the effect of the selected measure or to diminish factors that possibly reduce its effectiveness?

6. If the specified goal is reached, how does that affect other systems, what arrangements must be made to ensure that goal attainment at the specified level does not generate problems at another level or in adjacent systems that might well frustrate the contribution of the whole strategy in terms of achieving its ultimate objectives?

Some general guidelines for a crime control strategy. The logical sequence of steps involved in a crime control strategy are: 1) diagnosis, 2) defining a specific goal and the measure(s) by which it must be achieved, 3) implementation and 4) evaluation.

#### Diagnosis

This phase involves description of the problem by answering the following questions:

1) What is the problem and who reported it?

2) What is the measure of intensity of the problem expressed in offences:

- absolute numbers in last 5 years;
- ratio as compared with other offences;
- trend over the past 5 years, possibly supplemented with prognosis for the years to come?

3) What are the offence characteristics according to:

- place
- time
- characteristics of victim
- weapons used/modus operandi (absolute and trend)
- damage
- type of damaged/stolen goods
- other possible criminal characteristics?

4) Personal sense of security in relation to specific offences

5) What are the factors that encourage/discourage the offence (i.e. level of preventive countermeasures, publicity of offences, mental attitudes of the population, etc.)?

6) What knowledge and experience already exist in relation to this offence, and to solutions and countermeasures?

Defining goals and measures. In this phase we select solutions on the basis of examination and diagnosis. To reach the solutions we develop countermeasures and choose the concrete measures necessary. Searching for measures may be enhanced by using the matrix of crime control measures.

In the choice of a certain countermeasure it is of importance to determine:

- the target which are set;
- which are the target groups towards whom the countermeasures are directed;
- who implements the countermeasures;
- when to apply countermeasures;
- whom to approach as the closest concerned;
- which other persons or institutions can assist or might oppose application and how these "target groups" can be approached;
- the cost involved in the countermeasures.

When working out the strategy one has furthermore to consider the six categories of questions that I just mentioned when discussing the model.

Implementation. Implementing the strategy requires that target groups be approached at a predetermined time and in a predetermined order. Preventive and/or repressive measures are then executed, including a follow-up in order to establish that the measures, as far as their application is conditional on other persons or measures, are fully implemented. Problems which present themselves at the implementation stage are solved, including continuing care to meet personnel, material and otherwise supportive conditions.

Evaluation. Evaluation during and at the end of the activities associated with the implementation and execution of the strategy is basically not different from a repeated diagnosis and examination of the changes brought about in the perspective of the changes that were a priori declared desirable.

It is important to look at possible side-effects - and to measure them! - of both the introduction of measures and of attaining the specified goals.

Final remarks. I hope I have been able not only to convince the reader once more of the fact that criminality and our efforts to counter it are of a highly complicated nature, but also of the fact that this complexity can be so structured as to enable us to address ourselves to our tasks, in a rational and orderly way.

If that is the case, then the purpose of this chapter has been well served.

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### На пути к здоровому подходу в борьбе с преступностью

**Аннотация:** Меры по борьбе с преступностью, на мой взгляд, не несут какой-либо самостоятельной ценности для общества. Интуитивно чувствуется, что борьба с преступностью не должна быть необходимой, как и преступность вообще не должна существовать. Таким образом, конечная цель борьбы с преступностью должна заключаться в уменьшении потери безопасности, которую можно рассматривать как фундаментальный аспект благополучия. На мой взгляд, крайне важно, чтобы полиция связывала борьбу за большую безопасность с благополучием граждан. Таким образом, конечная цель борьбы с преступностью приобретает два значения понятия безопасности: во-первых, конкретный шанс для гражданина стать жертвой преступления и, во-вторых, его страх перед преступлением или его отсутствие. Я называю эти коннотации объективной и субъективной безопасностью соответственно.

**Ключевые слова:** борьба с преступностью; профилактика; системный подход; модель; диагностика.

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