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**Crime Prevention in Law Enforcement**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are continually challenged with controlling crime in their perspective jurisdictions and have come to the realization they cannot fight crime alone. Many agencies have chosen various crime prevention programs to bridge relationships with communities and to educate potential victims of crime on things they can do to become a harder target for criminals. These methods have reduced crime and assisted in the apprehension of criminals.

Early prevention and concrete solutions are effective in not only controlling crime in an area, but also diminishing it (Welsh, 2012). Crime prevention methods and applications allow citizens to obtain a better understanding of how and why crimes occur. These crime prevention methods have proven to reduce crimes in areas and allows citizens to work with law enforcement agencies, which allows both sides buy in to the various crime prevention programs (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1990).

The economic impact of crime and victimization to communities by criminals is a real problem faced by all. Through collaborative teamwork between police and citizens, crime prevention strategies assist in the reduction of crime. Crime prevention methods and education should remain a major tool in law enforcement organizations. The reduction in budgets of many law enforcement agencies have caused a shortage in law enforcement personnel. Continued education in the area of crime prevention has allowed law enforcement to stay ahead of crime in their jurisdictions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are continually challenged with the crime rate in their perspective jurisdictions and methods of which they can maintain and control crime in their areas. Research has proven a connection between juvenile and adult crimes. Almost all serious “chronic adult offenders” have extensive juvenile records. (Greenwood, 2005). Early prevention and concrete solution are effective in controlling and diminishing crime in an area (Welsh, 2012). Law enforcement agencies have recognized that crime prevention strategies are essential when educated citizens about crime and the financial result of crime.

Crime prevention activities have proven to reduce crimes and other crime issues by police working with citizens to instill a comfort level in dealing with crime situations (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1990). Many law enforcement agencies, through community based policing, work at educating the citizens in the jurisdictions on crime prevention. Community based policing is “a philosophy and an organizational strategy” in which the police form a partnership with the community they serve” (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1990, p. 24).

This allows the communities to contribute to the police process through the exchange of communications and crime prevention suggestions (Gaines & Kappeler, 2008). One approach of crime prevention is the neighborhood watch program; this program was developed in the 1960s as a result of the increase in residential burglaries (National Sheriffs’ Association, n.d.). Law enforcement officer disseminated information to the public on the actually number of home burglaries in their area, and also gave

them recommendations on how to secure their residential property and be less vulnerable.

Neighborhood Watch today has evolved into effective collaboration between citizens and the police, to where now the citizens are the eyes and ears for the police and their communities. Crime prevention should remain a vital tool and process in law enforcement organizations in combating crime. These pro-active measures and partnership with the community reduce crime.

When police respond to crime situations through reporting procedure, they are able to obtain dates, times, and type of criminal offenses committed, thus creating a crime analysis indicating a pattern of criminal behavior. Through criminal investigation, police are able to determine the method in which crimes are occurring and by communicating this information to citizens of crime, target hardening approaches are developed. The target hardening approach allows citizens to make it more difficult for criminals to make them a victim. In addition, by making it harder to commit the crime, the criminal more often leaves convicting evidence at the crime scene due to the crime being more difficult.

The cooperation between police and citizens in the areas of crime prevention, education, and application are important to the success of all crime prevention programs. Patterns of crime derived through police organization crime analysis allow police to direct patrols, thus creating proactive arrests in high crime areas "hot spot patrols," which have yielded evidence of crime prevention (Braga, Papachristos, & Hureau, 2012). Police visibility in a high crime infested area also detours criminal activity.

## POSITION

Police organizations, in recent years, have been forced to do more with fewer officers because of budget cuts due to the economy. During these times, crime prevention education was instrumental in the partnership with these agencies and the community. In March 2011, four constable departments in Harris County alone were forced to lay off 177 deputy constables (Thomas, 2011). Although these deputies were from four separate constable agencies, the lay-offs had a tremendous effect on patrol coverage and response time to calls for service.

Out of the four constable agencies, the one agency hit the hardest with lay-offs was Constable Ron Hickman's office at Precinct # 4. Constable Hickman was forced to lay off 100 deputies, from a patrol force of 400. Constable Hickman said his biggest concern was that he now would not be able to provide the same amount of service to his constituents to which they were accustomed. With the 100 deputies in his precinct alone, public safety and the comfort level of citizens would not be the same.

In addition to the 100 deputies lay off, Hickman cut all employee incentive pay and all other budgetary spending. With the decrease in deputies on the street, Constable Hickman instituted a program entitled "Cop Line." The precinct 4 constable department assigned 2 patrol deputies to the communications division to take low priority police reports over the telephone from citizens. In addition, they answered crime prevention questions and concerns.

This program, although removing 2 additional deputies off the streets aided in the absence of the 100 deputies that had been laid off by relieving other deputies from responding to the police calls for service (Thomas, 2011). In addition, there were 4

other constable departments in Harris County that cut their deputies hours from 40 hours per week to 32 hours per week. This again placed a tremendous void in police patrol coverage in the perspective constable precinct. (Morris, 2011)

The chief law enforcement officer of Harris County, Sheriff Adrian Garcia, was to cut 10% of his \$376 million dollar budget by the Harris county budget office (Morris, 2011). Many of the hundreds of patrol deputies that were laid off because of budgetary restraints were displaced to other law enforcement agencies. Some of the laid off deputies had to move their families and commissions to other law enforcement agencies in other cities and towns far away from the Houston metropolitan area.

The patrol areas and district they used to patrol were now being covered by other deputies less familiar with the geographical location and criminals that frequent the areas. Law enforcement agencies relied heavily on their relationships and partnerships with the community with regard to crime prevention methods and initiatives. Although this reduction in actual officers on the streets was a significant detriment, crime prevention played a significant role in filling the void in the communities.

These lay-offs were only in one county in the state of Texas, which reveals the magnitude of the situation. In 2012, data from FBI crime reports indicated for that year, they could expect one in every 36 homes in the United States to be burglarized, resulting in a financial loss of \$1,675.00 (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1990). With a reduction in law enforcement in Harris County alone, partnerships between police and the community through crime prevention programs are a necessity. This collaboration with the communities allows law enforcement agencies to revert to an organization transformation which is "The alignment of organizational management, structure,

personnel, and information systems to support community partnerships and proactive problem-solving efforts” (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., p. 3).

Although law enforcement can utilize crime analysis to determine locations, dates, and times of specific crimes, they do not have capability to determine when a criminal will decide to commit a crime. Therefore, it is important to understand some of the different types (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., p.13 ) of research studies and theories that may help in explaining the matter. These theories enhance the ability of police to apprehend criminals in the process of committing crimes.

A research study was completed by the U.S Department of Justice pertaining to why crimes occur in some places and not others. Through the research of Paul and Patricia Brantingham, “Their work fused the principles of geography with criminology and helped develop new criminological theories” (Prenzeler, 2009, p. 8). These theories explain how criminal offenders single out and choose their targets of crime. The theories include, Routine Activity Theory, which is when an offender chooses a potential target because a lack of anyone watching over the victim. The criminal may be going to or from work or in their routine travels when the crime is committed.

Situation Crime Prevention Theory (Prenzeler, 2009, p. 13) indicates that are crimes that could be prevented if only crime prevention methods and education were applied. For example, if a burglar burglarizes a home and steals the contents, the home could have been protected by auxiliary locking devices on the doors and windows, or an alarm system. The Broken Window Theory refers to an area of a neighborhood that are run down, graffiti invested, and has broken windows and other signs of disorder. The neighborhood’s unwillingness to address these problems leads to more serious crimes



occurring in that neighborhood. Crime Opportunity Theory suggests that when a criminal is looking to commit a crime, they look for the easiest target and commit the crime. For example, if a neighborhood has vehicles that park outside in driveways and owners leave valuables in plain sight, these would be easy targets for the criminal.

Social Disorganization Theory indicates that crimes occur when neighborhood relationships and other services do not exist. For example, neighborhoods without street lights may have more crime committed than neighborhoods with street lights.

Finally, Crime Pattern Theory focuses on geographical locations that lacks social control and signs indicating ownership of the location. For example, a neighborhood can become a haven for criminal activity pertaining to garage burglaries because some of the homes have inadequate protection and no one at the residence to protect the property.

These theories are of the utmost value to crime prevention applications and education, when law enforcement partners with the community and through collaboration it puts the police and community at a significant advantage. Citizens obtain an understanding of how and why crime occurs and are in a much better position educationally to help law enforcement, and not become an easy target for criminals. Law enforcement organizations across the United States recognize they can not fight crime alone, and through partnerships with communities there jobs become much more effective.

In addition, law enforcement agencies have also incorporated other programs within the organization to better develop trust among police and communities they serve. Police organizations now have citizen police academies which allow citizens to

attend and go through various aspects of police training, so that the citizen can better relate to police and what they go through daily while out on patrols. These citizen police academies consist of class room training, police patrol ride a longs, and up to and including firearms training (“Harris County Constable’s office,” 2013). These activities allow the citizens to better relate to police in the context of their jobs enforcing laws and learn crime prevention methods to protect themselves and their property. Law enforcement and community members must have collaborative and problem solving relationships through crime prevention in today’s society.

### **COUNTER POSITION**

There is some research that suggests crime prevention and methods have a negative impact on communities. Crime prevention methods have proven to reduce crime in areas and effectively harden the area targeted thus creating fewer opportunities for criminals. In some cases criminals have been arrested and incarcerated because of the communities’ partnership with the police. It is sometimes suggested that when implementing crime prevention initiatives in certain areas, that crime is displaced to other areas. One study found, “Overall, displacement is viewed as a negative consequence of crime prevention efforts, but in some cases it can still provide some benefit” (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., p. 3). While research indicated that geographical displacement is not really a big problem, it should be considered when initiating crime prevention programs.

Some crime prevention methods have had an opposite effect on what was intended. Some crime prevention initiatives make it easier to offend and commit crimes. Some stores have signs indicating video cameras were active in stores. This

information provides would-be criminal specific intelligence helpful in assisting in the commission of the crime. The same is to be said for homes that display alarm signs, or neighborhoods that display crime watch signs. This could give an advantage to offenders to be more careful. Crime prevention through environmental design and other crime prevention strategies may give the perception of a fortress mentality.

The homeowner often takes significant measures to fortify a home and the fortification of the property influences other's perception on the property leaving a negative image. In addition, the financial costs related environmental design and crime prevention recommendations can get expensive for families attempting to better secure their homes. The basic monitored alarm system installed currently costs and estimated \$800.00 for installation and has a monthly monitoring fee ([www.adt.com](http://www.adt.com)). Surveillance video camera systems, depending on the quality can cost in the thousands of dollars for installation and monthly monitoring. The costs of installing metal plates in door frames can also get expensive with installation costs associated. Although some Crime Prevention methods can get expensive, however, these costs should be given consideration with the realization that these recommendations are for each citizen's safety and safety of their families.

In 2012, home burglary statistics indicated through the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, we can expect one out of every thirty-six homes will be burglarized accounted for an average loss of \$2,230.00 per home ([www.asecurelife.com](http://www.asecurelife.com)). Crime prevention can have some negative consequences, however, when evaluated, many of the positive approaches and methodologies there is a clear indication many crime prevention recommendations are well worth the investment.

In addition, the collaboration and relationships developed between law enforcement and the communities build a bond of trust and through mutual respect and team work both can work effectively together against crime. Crime prevention methodologies, theories, and practices are a necessity in 21<sup>st</sup> century law enforcement and community relations has provided effective results to society as a whole. By working together police and citizens reduce opportunities for crimes to occur.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The safety of citizens in communities and the application of crime prevention programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will determine the overall effectiveness of law enforcement organizations. Crime prevention programs within law enforcement organizations continue to bridge relationships with communities and form strong partnerships between police and citizens. Community based policing and the partnerships with citizens in communities have yielded a significant reduction in crime in neighborhoods across America. (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., p.3)

When law enforcement organizations experienced the economic impacts of having to lay off police officers within their departments, they found themselves doing more with less police personnel. These lay-offs caused a lack of patrol coverage in some areas and also yielded higher response times due to fewer officers. Crime prevention methodology and applications were applied to communities that were effected and the crime prevention applications provided successful results.

Neighborhood watch programs assisted in forming a partnership and mutual trust between law enforcement officers and citizens and reduced crime in communities (Prenzler, 2009, p.14). It is, at times, suggested that crime prevention methods cause

crime to be displaced to other areas. But again, there is no way to determine when and where a crime will occur.

Through research, it has been established that effective collaboration between law enforcement organizations and the community certainly has provided positive results in the reduction and control of crime in certain areas (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d., p.5). Law enforcement organizations have realized they cannot combat crime alone and they must develop a partnership with the communities in which serve (Welsh, 2012). Crime prevention will continue to be a major application utilized by law enforcement and communities across America.

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