

DEVELOPING CRIME REDUCTION PLANS: SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE REDUCING BURGLARY INITIATIVE

Briefing Note

Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 7
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“The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).”

Background

The Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) increases the opportunity for local crime and disorder partnerships to win central government funding to tackle crime. The CRP has many facets, focusing on burglary (Reducing Burglary Initiative [RBI]), targeted policing, CCTV, national initiatives (designing out crime), early interventions in the lives of those at risk of offending and domestic violence. The examples provided in the report refer explicitly to burglary although much of what is described can be applied to all types of crime reduction.

The report has been produced as a guidance document for all practitioners and local policy makers planning crime reduction projects. The lessons were drawn from demonstration projects with three partnerships in order to generate burglary reduction plans. Each area exhibited differences in terms of geography, socio-demographic make-up and the nature of offending.

The main sections of the report are presented in the order in which you might expect to find them in an exemplary crime reduction plan.

Identifying populations at high risk

Populations at high risk of crime can be defined in terms of geographical or virtual¹ communities. Geographical communities may be easier to define as computer systems can be set up to extract data on the basis of geographical units, to which census and crime data can be fitted relatively easily. The disadvantage of basing crime reduction plans on geographic communities is that *individual households* at high risk within geographic areas of lower risk are disregarded. Alternatively, virtual communities enable groups defined in non-geographic terms to be targeted. The process in one project area described in the report focuses on the elderly and those living in houses of multiple occupation (HIMOs). However, the difficulty here is estimating the number of households within the virtual community so that burglary rates can be calculated.

Analysing the problems within high risk populations

Data quality

Analysts rely heavily on police records for information on crime even though they may be used in conjunction with other data

systems. Data quality varies by force: common weaknesses include errors in the coding of incidents, inconsistent spellings of names and places and inaccurate postcode information. Police crime data therefore needs to be examined carefully, undertaking the necessary ‘cleaning’².

Analysis

A crime will only occur when there is a capable and motivated offender who finds a suitable target, without anyone or anything there to keep the two apart (Felson, 1998)³. A useful starting point for analysis therefore is to think about what is actually allowing the crime to occur within the high-risk group. The answers to these questions will become evident from the data as various hypotheses are tested. Some hypotheses will be erroneous, yet others will prove to be valuable insights.

The analyses undertaken in the three project sites showed, in part, the following:

- Seasonal variation in patterns of mode of entry: a large number of burglaries from insecure premises tended to occur in August, whilst from October to December there were more burglaries from forced entries.
- High rates of repeat victimisation (within three months) in postcodes that had suffered more than one burglary.
- Burglaries tended to be concentrated on one side of the street with odd numbers (1, 3, 5, etc) suggesting perhaps, that situational crime prevention measures, at those most critical sites, would be most appropriate.

Moving from analysis to strategy

The salient points to emerge here are that:

- A strategy is more likely to emerge as a cohesive, workable document if the key players, i.e. analysts, policy makers and practitioners, work *together*. Many tasks are complementary - as the analyst tests out the practitioner’s hypotheses, the policy maker can decide on a prevention strategy based on the analysis.

¹A community that is defined by features other than a common geography.

²This is particularly important for the analysis of repeat victimisation where accurate, consistently recorded address data is crucial.

³Felson, M (1998) *Crime and Everyday Life*, Second Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

- The best strategies will be those that are analysis driven, that attempt to understand how crime will be reduced, and that employ mutually advantageous interventions that are ordered sequentially.
- Interventions should ideally be interactive (e.g. crackdown and consolidation), avoiding conflicting approaches or those that would be detrimental to the success of others (e.g. target hardening and covert detection methods employing tracking devices on the same households).

Defining aims, objectives and targets

The approach adopted in the report is to define the interventions before clarifying aims and objectives. This does not conform to standard text book lessons of project management where interventions follow from (previously determined) aims and objectives, but it worked best for us in the particular projects we examined. It may not suit all project styles. Moreover, we also felt that developing our interventions first would help clarify the project rationale.

Aims, objectives and targets set out what the project is planning to achieve in terms of 'outcome', as follows:

- *Aims:* aims outline the project's overall rationale, e.g. to reduce domestic burglary in [name of town/ward/beat, etc].
- *Objectives:* in this study, project objectives described how the aim was to be achieved by adopting certain crime reduction theories that were translated into interventions. For example, this could mean increasing natural surveillance in order to increase the risk of detection; in effect, changing X to achieve Y.
- *Outputs/milestones:* these serve to quantify how the intervention will be applied over time, acting as measurable activities against which project progress can be assessed. For example, an output may be to establish eight Neighbourhood Watch schemes in an area over 12 months: the related milestone would be to set up two schemes per quarter.
- *Targets:* these should cover the short, medium and long term and should be reassessed at frequent intervals depending on the life of the project.

Project monitoring

Monitoring is more likely to be effective if projects are kept simple, with clear stated aims and objectives. It is easier to assess whether a project is fulfilling its overarching aim if it is utilising quantifiable measures such as outputs and targets.

Monitoring progress is an important part of the project management process which can lead to 'tweaking' interventions where necessary and being open to emerging lessons. The project manager is central to the monitoring process, both in terms of generating crime prevention ideas and choosing the relevant data sets to be collected.

Achieving sustainability

Projects funded for a finite period are often felt to limit the potential for sustainability. Examples of improving sustainability include incorporating good lessons into mainstream practice and investing in comprehensive security upgrading, avoiding 'short term fixes'.

Developing an action plan

Once targets have been set and provision for monitoring has been made, a clear action plan (that sets out how the project will be delivered) needs to be drawn up. It is useful to do the following, all

of which are relatively easy using standard project management computer packages:

- Chart the key project stages
- Work out the 'slack' project time
- Delegate particular areas of work to the project team
- Create an activity network (i.e. the 'critical path').

The action plan should also place the interventions in a logical order by working out how short, medium or long term work interacts. For example, target hardening may produce early, tangible results that will boost confidence where as offender based schemes are more likely to lead to crime reduction in the longer term.

Costing interventions

Estimates should be made regarding the overall costs to the project along with the costs per month/quarter.

Overall costs

Two kinds of costs should be included here:

- Existing/redirected resources that are internal within the organisation. This should indicate as full costs as possible, including staff time. Estimates for purchasing equipment/services should also be included in the costings plan.
- Additional resources (external, e.g. central government funding).

Costs per month/quarter

Overall costs should then be broken down into months/quarters so that project spend can be monitored. This also allows project under/overspend to be identified.

Taking time to prepare a funding bid

In the context of this study, the modal figure for bid preparation in the three areas was fifteen working days.⁴ However, such preparation will greatly depend on the quality and availability of data, the expertise of the analyst and any procedural complexities for agreeing the bid.

Conclusions

- Much can be usefully obtained by interrogating (police) crime data, although the quality varies by force.
- Crime problems can be concentrated in both geographical and 'virtual communities'.
- Geographical communities will display substantial variation in risk in sub areas, where preventive efforts can be most usefully targeted.
- High rates of repeat victimisation, particularly in the period immediately following a crime, can provide focus for analysis and preventive efforts.
- An understanding of high-risk populations can be gained by site visits, interrogating data about MOs, goods stolen and victim attributes.
- There are various ways of trying to achieve sustainability. Their planning requires imagination and thought from the early stages of project development.

⁴ This is to be taken as a measure of activity time required rather than a chronological sequence.