

Benefits of Crime Prevention

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Introduction

Crime Prevention refers to the development and implementation of strategies and programs that aim to reduce crime before it occurs (White & Perrone 2010). Crime prevention can reduce both short term and long term economic and social costs associated with crime and the criminal justice system (AIC 2013). This means that crime prevention policies have the ability to achieve significant returns on investment for both society and the government in terms of benefits in justice, health, welfare and social capital (AIC 2013). This document highlights the key benefits achieved by the implementation of crime reduction strategies and programs.

Benefits

Reductions in Crime

The key benefit of crime prevention are the reductions in crime achieved (Cozens et al 2005). There is a large body of evidence that demonstrates crime preventions success in reducing crime and promoting safety (Cozens et al 2005, AIC 2013). This is evident in the fact that Australia, along with many other western countries, has achieved significant decreases in the majority of crimes over the past ten years (AIC 2013). Despite these falls, the social and economic costs of crime remain high, illustrating that there is still a need to prevent crime (AIC 2013).

An example where crime prevention has been very successful relates to motor vehicle theft. The introduction of car immobilisers within Australia clearly demonstrates the potential for significant reductions in crime (Kriven & Ziersch 2007). From July 2001 all new cars sold within Australia were fitted with engine immobilisers before sale and as a result, between the years of 2000 and 2004 car theft reduced by over a third (Kriven & Ziersch 2007). Newer cars which had been fitted with the immobilisers were also shown to have much lower rates of theft than older models (Brown 2013). It was evident that the implementation of the car immobilisers had caused major reductions in vehicle thefts (Kriven & Ziersch 2007).

Diffusion of Benefits

A major benefit of crime prevention strategies can be the 'diffusion of benefits'. This means that the benefits of crime prevention programs can reach beyond specific place, individuals or time frames that were originally targeted (Ratcliffe & Makkai 2004). This spatial diffusion of the benefits of crime prevention strategies has become evident in numerous studies and has replaced the assumption that crime displacement is an inevitable outcome of crime prevention approaches with the view that displacement is minimal and inconsequential (Weisburd et al 2006, Telep et al 2010). In terms of crime prevention strategies involving law enforcement this diffusion of benefits has come to be referred to as 'free policing' (Ratcliffe & Makkai 2004).

An example of the diffusion of benefits in a crime prevention program is evident in a targeted policing strategy in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) which aimed to achieve reductions in car crime and burglary (Ratcliffe & Makkai 2004). Known as Operation Anchorage this was a force wide operation and employed an array of strategies including specialist investigations and increased patrols. This strategy monitored the crime rates of not only the target area (ACT) but also the surrounding area of the South Eastern Statistical District of New South Wales (SESD). Analysis of the results of this strategy showed that not only was crime significantly reduced within the target area but there were also statistically significant reductions in both burglary and car crime within the surrounding SESD area. Furthermore the reductions in crime in these areas continued for a significant period after the operation had been concluded. This operation illustrates a clear diffusion of benefits to areas and time frames that were not originally targeted in the strategy (Ratcliffe & Makkai 2004).

Reduction of Fear of Crime and Increased Quality of Life

While crime is a major issue within society, so too is fear of crime (Cozens et al 2005). Crime prevention polices have been shown to be beneficial in reducing not only crime, but also fear of crime (Cozens et al 2005). Areas in which crime prevention strategies have been employed have been seen to have lower fear of crime, increasing property values and in turn, higher quality of life (Schneider & Kitchen 2002). It has also been shown that crime prevention strategies such as crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) or restorative justice conferences can directly reduce victim's fears of re-victimisation (Welsh & Farrington 2005).

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A key aspect of CPTED is street lighting, as a part of improving surveillance (Cozens et al 2005, Welsh & Farrington 2005). Street lighting, as a mechanical form of surveillance, has been proven to be effective in reducing not only crime but fear of crime (Cozens et al 2005). Farrington & Welsh (2002) highlight street lighting reduces fear of crime by increasing surveillance opportunities, informal social control and even community pride.

Public Support

There is a growing body of evidence that illustrates the high levels of public support for crime prevention initiatives (Roberts & Hastings 2007, Welsh et al 2010). As public support is critical for effective public policy, this is a clear benefit for this policy approach (Roberts & Hastings 2007). Welsh & Farrington (2005) highlight that not only is public support for crime prevention high, it is continuing to grow and this is evident in a number of areas (Welsh et al 2010).

Research conducted in Canada by Roberts & Hastings (2007) found that given the choice Canadian's support crime prevention over punishment. It was illustrated that Canadians would much rather invest money in prevention programs that have the ability to address social problems associated with crime than invest further money into law enforcement (Roberts & Hastings 2007). Roberts & Hastings (2007) also highlighted that this strong public support for crime prevention is also evident in other jurisdictions, including the US. This support exists even with limited public awareness of crime prevention programs, reflective of the limited amount of media attention crime preventions (Roberts & Hastings 2007).

Cost Effectiveness

One of the most influential benefits of crime prevention strategies is cost effectiveness. Multiple cost analyses have deduced that crime prevention is highly effective in regards to serious crime prevented per dollar spent (Greenwood et al 1998). This is especially true in comparison to tough on crime sentencing measures (Greenwood et al 1998). Overall the main two areas that make crime prevention cost effective are reductions in both the functioning costs of the criminal justice system and costs to victims (Morgan et al 2012). However, depending on the type of crime prevention approach financial savings can be extended to numerous other areas including reductions in special educational programs, reductions in welfare spending and increased tax revenue due to higher wages (Morgan et al 2012).

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The Perry Preschool Program as an early intervention program is a clear example of cost effective crime prevention (Dossetor 2011). This program targeted preschool aged children and their parents who were identified as living in poverty and set out to positively improve the developmental gains in these disadvantaged children (Dossetor 2011). The program was a success and it has been concluded for every dollar spent on the program the return for society was sixteen dollars (Dossetor 2011). This program demonstrates that this type of crime prevention is a profitable social investment and that benefits (both economic and social) exceed costs (Barnett 1985).

Conclusion

It is evident that there is an array of benefits to be gained from the implementation of crime prevention strategies. These benefits have the ability to reach across wider society from government bodies to victims or would-be victims of crime (White & Perrone 2010). The benefits addressed here are just a few of the possible benefits that crime prevention programs can achieve within communities and highlight their value as an area of investment. Consistent with this evidence, the Australian Crime Prevention Council calls for continued investment in crime prevention by all levels of government.

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