Part of the Toolbox on

FAMILY-BASED CRIME

Effective prevention

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This publication lists seven
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for family-based crime, targeting different phases
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All the papers which make up the EUCPN toolbox on family-based crime are available for download at

https://www.eucpn.org/toolbox-familybasedcrime.

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PREFACE

This paper on effective prevention is part of the EUCPN Toolbox on Family-Based Crime, published on the occasion of the German Presidency of the EUCPN. It lists seven different types of preventive interventions for family-based crime, targeting different phases of the processes that lead to crime. It indicates for each one how it works, which prevention mechanisms it activates, to what extent its effectiveness is supported by evidence, and what it might contribute to the fight against family-based crime. Ideally, different types of interventions are combined into an integrated approach to prevent family-based crime.

The other papers, which along with this one make up the EUCPN Toolbox on Family-Based Crime, are a theoretical background paper and an overview of the participants in the 2020 European Crime Prevention Award, devoted to the topic of preventing family-based crime. They are available for download at https://www.eucpn.org/toolbox-familybasedcrime.

INTRODUCTION

An integrated approach to preventing family-based crime

Family-based crime is crime committed by a criminal family. A criminal family is a family, either nuclear or extended, whose members are disproportionately engaged in crime. Children growing up in such a family are likely to partake, at some point, in their family's criminal enterprise, sometimes at a young age. In a sense, they are predestined to become criminals.

Family-based crime is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, which is ideally countered with an integrated preventive strategy. This strategy should aim, simultaneously, at preventing members of criminal families from continuing to commit crimes, and at preventing children in criminal families from growing up to be criminals themselves. In other words, effective prevention should incorporate developmental, social, situational, and criminal justice prevention. This is summarised in Figure 1, which shows the processes leading to criminal behaviour, the different intervention stages, and which preventive mechanisms could be used at those stages.[1]

Family-based crime is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, which is ideally countered with an integrated preventive strategy. Effective prevention should incorporate developmental, social, situational, and criminal justice prevention.

'CAUSES OF THE CAUSES':

Psychological factors, socio-economic factors, upbringing, socialisation, …

PRIMARY PREVENTION:
- Establishing/ maintaining normative barriers;
- Reducing recruitment.

Moral beliefs & emotions

Crime is not an action alternative

Crime is an action alternative

SECONDARY PREVENTION:
- Deterring potential perpetrators;
- Disrupting criminal acts;
- Protecting vulnerable targets.

Habit

Deliberation

No criminal behaviour

Criminal behaviour

No criminal behaviour

Criminal behaviour

TERTIARY PREVENTION:
- Reducing harm;
- Reducing the rewards;
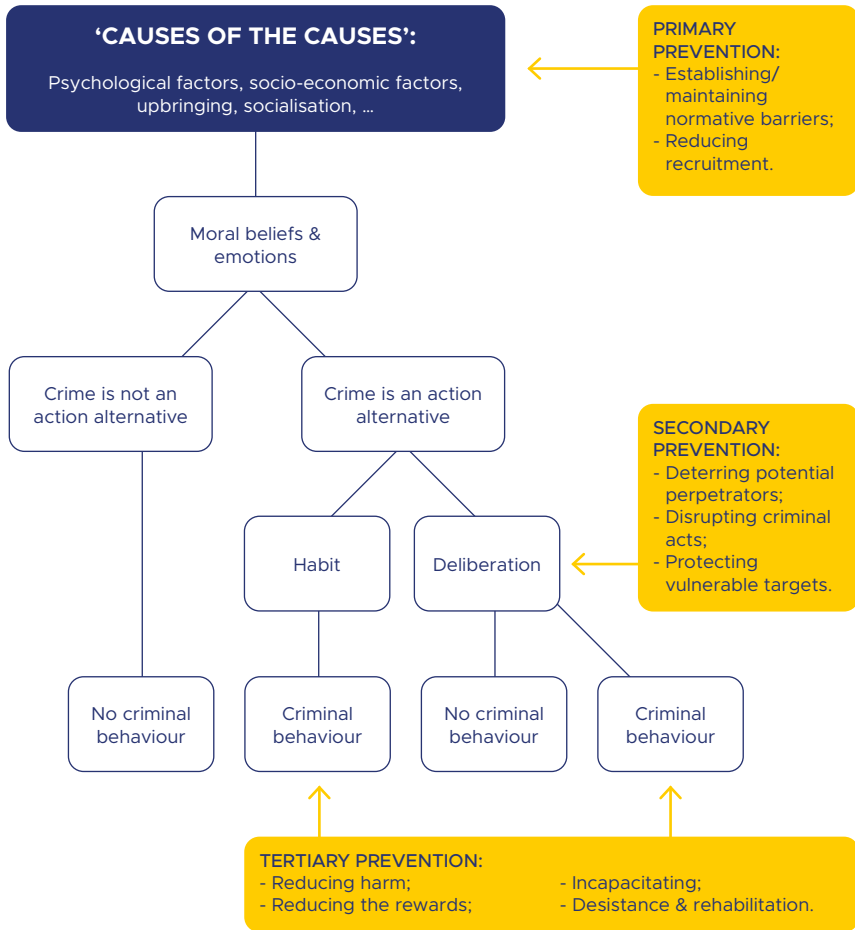- Incapacitating;
- Desistance & rehabilitation.

Figure 1. Visualisation of an integrated approach to crime prevention, demonstrating how different preventive actions manipulate different aspects of the process leading to criminal behaviour.

This paper focuses on these intervention opportunities and preventive mechanisms. It discusses which types of interventions activate which mechanisms, and which might be effective (or not) for the prevention of family-based crime. Intervention types range from social work interventions for families to exit programmes in prison. The paper will also give consideration to how certain interventions may affect others, demonstrating that when they are part of a coordinated strategy, they can mutually enhance each other.

The purpose of this paper is not to propose a ready-to-implement approach to the prevention of family-based crime. An effective prevention strategy for family-based crime should be based on a meticulous analysis of the local situation, which includes the families' cultural associations, the types of crime they are active in, the neighbourhood context, and so on. Such a prevention strategy, by definition, applies to a specific situation, in a specific time and place. It should factor in the legal and administrative setting and be built up with local expertise.

Evidence and family-based crime

This paper makes frequent reference to evidence regarding the efficacy of crime prevention interventions, and aims to highlight those approaches which evidence suggests are effective, i.e., that they do in fact reduce the risk of crimes being committed.[2] Still, the reader is advised to keep the following three caveats in mind.

First, social service interventions may have a tangible and sustained impact in terms of crime prevention even if less evidence attests to this than is the case for situational prevention. This is because crime reduction is not necessarily the primary concern of social workers, who therefore tend not to measure the impact of their interventions on crime. When they do, however, the effect turns out to be observable.[3] As such, it may appear that situational interventions are more effective, while in reality there is just more evidence for this.

Second, evidence that certain interventions are effective or ineffective does not mean they always, or never, work.[4] Criminal families are often particularly tight-knit or even isolated from mainstream society, making it hard to reach them. Criminal parents will protect their family business from prying eyes. As we will see below, all this will limit the feasibility of family-based social work interventions, even though there is ample evidence that they work.

Finally, whether or not a crime prevention intervention or strategy is effective in a particular context can only be known if it is subjected to an outcome evaluation in that location. It is therefore advisable, when new strategies or interventions are implemented, to take appropriate measures, including data collection and budget allocation, to allow for proper outcome evaluations. No claims regarding the success of a crime prevention initiative can ever be made unless an outcome evaluation study has been carried out.[5]

1. Family-based social interventions for multi-problem families

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Establishing/maintaining normative barriers
- Reducing recruitment

Many factors contribute to the development of criminality in general, and criminal families in particular. A varying mix of economic, psychological, social and cultural factors means that some families consider crime to be a valid action alternative and even make it their "family business".[6]

This means that the criminality of the family is rarely the only problem; it coexists with a range of other problems, which may include poverty, poor integration, poor housing, truancy, parenting issues, domestic violence, and so on. Therefore, dealing with criminal families may require not just tackling their criminality, but ultimately also a whole range of other problems.

The originally Anglo-American concept of multi-problem families, which is traditionally applied to families who are in need of care as the result of a combination of socioeconomic and psychosocial problems, has also found its way into the child and youth care system of several European countries. The concept suggests that the problems are intrinsic to the families, but some may be related to their environment.[7]

A multi-problem situation is characterised not only by the multiplicity of problems; these problems are also complex (i.e., affecting one another), varying between families and over time, and intergenerational. This also makes the situation persistent: it is difficult to provide care for families in multi-problem situations, and above all to fundamentally change their life situations.[8]

Adequate care should come from multiple angles and be sustained. It also requires the involvement of various institutions, who at least should coordinate their efforts, but ideally should design an integrated care trajectory. One design mistake would be to focus too much on one particular problem and not enough on the other problems.[9] At the same time, a more comprehensive but fragmented care plan, where families have to interact with too many different institutions, also has adverse consequences.[10] A family with substance abuse issues, violence, parenting issues, and financial debt would be best served by a holistic approach, supported by different actors such as social services, health care, and debt mediation services, but not necessarily provided by each of them separately.

There are several social interventions which have been shown to yield positive results in terms of a reduction in criminal behaviour, although for reasons discussed below, their effectiveness in criminal families is subject to doubt. A first type is parenting support or parent training, which aims at strengthening parents raising children in difficult circumstances or helping them deal with children that display problematic behaviour. Examples include the Incredible Years parenting programme,[11] the Parent-Child Interaction Therapy,[12] and the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme.[13] These and similar parenting support interventions have been shown to have positive effects in terms of reducing antisocial and delinquent behaviour in children.[14]

A second type of family-based intervention focuses on the family as a whole. Although the goal is to prevent problem behaviour, including delinquent behaviour in young people, these approaches target the family and its environment as whole. Examples include Functional Family Therapy,[15] Multisystemic Therapy,[16] and Multi-Dimensional Family Therapy,[17] all of which were developed in the United States. There is strong evidence that all are effective in preventing delinquent behaviour in teenagers.[18]

In the context of criminal families, however, such family-based approaches present several challenges. They require that parents themselves acknowledge the need for an intervention and accept help.[19] Social workers need to secure access to, and gain the trust of, the families in question. This is often hard, if not impossible. Families may have had bad experiences with social care or government services in general. House visits, which many interventions require, may come across as intrusive and controlling.[20] A more mundane explanation is that criminals simply do not want carers or public officials to nose around in their business. In such cases, preventing children from becoming active participants in their family's criminal

The problem with reaching criminal families

Criminal families are often reluctant to open up to the outside world, including social workers. Cultural differences may aggravate this problem. Consequently, initiating preventive or care programmes is often challenging. In the event of criminal evidence against a subject, an intervention could be made mandatory, but at the risk of it missing the target. Ideally, subjects accept help voluntarily. In reality, members of criminal families have to be persuaded to accept care or made to realise they could use help.

Prevention practitioners should grab the opportunities created by other actors or events. An arrest and detention of a criminal father, for instance, could be the opening that is needed to initiate contact with the mother and children. At the same time, the father's detention and probation could be used to promote an exit programme.

Another technique is to make certain services which the subject wants or needs (e.g. public housing, welfare) conditional on accepting a programme. These could also be used as justification towards family members or the wider community ("I had to accept the programme").

enterprise is exceedingly difficult, as their parents will not allow an intervention to take place. This, in turn, may alienate social workers from difficult-to-reach target groups and cause a sort of "care paralysis": no intervention is made where it is needed the most and where the potential for crime reduction is the highest.[21]

There are certain things that can be done in an attempt to overcome this problem. The first is to look for the right persons and train them to build a rapport with the target group—be it a family or the entire neighbourhood. Personal skills and qualities have an influence. A combination of tenacity, empathy and acceptance proves best: the social worker should take initiative and come across as trustworthy.[22] When dealing with families from minority groups, it could be helpful to use figures of authority from within those communities as mediators.[23]

A second element not to be counted on too much is the willingness of parents to cooperate, the focus should instead be on the children, and outside of the family residence. Children can be reached out to in school (although there is mixed evidence regarding school-based interventions[24]), in the neighbourhood, and via afterschool activities (see next chapter). Opportunities to work with families sometimes arise when the fathers are in prison, and young people themselves could be subjected to anti-recidivism projects when they come into contact with the juvenile or criminal justice system. A good example of the latter is the German BENGALO programme (see box). Approaches like these show how, for recalcitrant and care-averse families, criminal justice interventions (arrest, probation) also create opportunities for preventive action.

BENGALO

BENGALO is a treatment and education programme for young people with violence and addiction problems. The project was conducted by the German Centre for Addiction Research in Childhood and Adolescence at the juvenile detention centre of the city of Hamburg at Hahnöfersand. The programme, which consists of weekly group sessions, aims at improving self-regulation skills and reducing impulsive and aggressive behaviour by promoting other action alternatives. An evaluation study showed that both immediately after the intervention and six months later, participants were less aggressive and had better self-control than the control group. As such, it is a promising approach to prevent recidivism. BENGALO won second place in the 2019 European Crime Prevention Award.

BENGALO's primary focus is not family-based crime, but the programme illustrates the value of using opportunities for intervention whenever and wherever they arise.

For more information, see https://eucpn.org/document/bengalo

2. After-school activities for at-risk children

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Establishing/maintaining normative barriers
- Reducing recruitment

A relatively common type of social crime prevention focuses on after-school activities for children, often sports. Naturally, such initiatives have the immediate effect of keeping children off the streets, thus preventing them from breaking the law at least for as long as the activity lasts. But the effects are intended to reach beyond that: it is reasoned that these activities can serve to teach young people specific social skills and improve social cohesion, both of which are negatively associated with criminality.

Moderate but significant effects can be expected from programmes that target teenagers, as long as they devote sufficient attention to social skills and character development.[25] A good example is the Line Up Live Up programme developed by UNODC. A series of life skills training for 13 to 18-year-olds grafted onto sports activities, its training manual gives more attention to group discussions, debriefings, and other non-sports related trainer skills than to the sports activities themselves, which are easy for sports trainers.[26]

Some caution is advised, however. A 2015 systematic review of after-school programmes, while pointing out their potential for at-risk youth, concluded that effects varied across studies, but that overall, there was no conclusive evidence for a positive effect of after-school programmes on school attendance behaviour (including crime and substance abuse).[27]

This does not suggest that after-school programmes are intrinsically ineffective, but that we do not exactly know why some programmes are able to report positive effects, whereas others are not so promising. One possible explanation is that the latter programmes fail to reach those at-risk adolescents among whom they would have a disproportionate effect, attracting mostly adolescents that are likely to stay out of trouble anyway.[28] In addition, after-school programmes may also have adverse effects. That is the case when the after-school activity gives at-risk youth the opportunity to reinforce each other's antisocial behaviour, a mechanism called deviance training.[29]

It is therefore essential to make sure that after-school programmes actually reach the target group of at-risk youth, that life skills training is designed into the programme (i.e. not *just* fun and sports), that the trainer is trained to supervise this kind of activity, and finally that the outcome of the programme is evaluated.

SPIN

A good example of a crime prevention project based on an after-school sports activities is the Estonian SPIN programme, modelled on the British Kickz Programme. SPIN started in 2015 and its outcome has since been evaluated positively. The programme ticks all the boxes: it targets 10 to 18-year-olds, it specifically looks to attract disadvantaged and at-risk youth, social skills training is an integral part of the programme, and it employs not just sports coaches but also involves the police, child protection services, social workers, and the school system.

BENGALO's primary focus is not family-based crime, but the programme illustrates the value of using opportunities for intervention whenever and wherever they arise.

For more informationon the SPIN programme see
https://eucpn.org/document/spin-programme

3. Neighbourhood-based interventions: business improvement districts

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Establishing/maintaining normative barriers
- Deterring potential perpetrators
- Protecting vulnerable targets
- Reducing the harmful consequences of crime

Certain types of crime are associated with certain neighbourhoods, and certain neighbourhoods with crime. For example, certain businesses or streets may be known for the drug trade, or a particular urban area may be notorious for violent crime. The perpetrators themselves may or may not reside in that particular area. In fact, there may be many reasons for a particular area to be more susceptible to crime than others: socio-economic factors, situational factors (e.g. lighting, police presence), accessibility, and so on. A criminal family, especially when this concerns an extended family, may also affect the neighbourhood they live in. This is the case, not only because of direct victimisation, but also because their presence can create feelings of insecurity, attract other criminals, and in the longer run, drive businesses away and impact property values.

A crime problem such as family-based crime can be viewed not only from the perspective of the offender and the victim, but also from the place and community where it happens. When viewed from this angle, preventive action does not focus primarily on the offender or the victim, but on the neighbourhood, and requires the involvement of neighbourhood residents and businesses.

It appears that the key to success is twofold. The approach should be cooperative. All stakeholders in the neighbourhood should be part of the process: business owners, residents, property owners, the police, and local authorities. The approach should also be programmatic: transforming a neighbourhood and the people takes time and requires continuously evolving efforts. Prolonged involvement and longer-term funding are necessary.[30]

It is not always clear what makes neighbourhood-based approaches effective. It appears that effective approaches activate a combination of preventive mechanisms, including deterrence, protection of vulnerable targets, reducing the harmful effects of crime, and maintaining normative barriers. This is because most neighbourhood-based approaches consist of a variety of situational and community prevention measures, such as street lighting and other urban and

The Sofielund Approach

A good example of such an approach at work is the Sofielund approach in the city of Malmö, with which Sweden won the 2019 European Crime Prevention Award. In the Sofielund district, the BID association counts more than 45 members, including representatives of businesses, property owners, and residents. In the space of ten years, they managed to effectively reduce drug-related crime and youth gang crime, as well as the fear of crime.

The BID achieved this by implementing a wide range of measures. Situational interventions including camera surveillance, active monitoring of the camera images, an increased police presence, and efforts to keep the streets free from litter. These were then supplemented with social measures, aiming at preventing youngsters from engaging in crime, but also contributing to social cohesion in the neighbourhood. These measures included safety walks, clean-up patrols, mothers patrolling around schools, training local fire marshals, and self-defence workshops for women and girls.

For more information on the Sofielund Approach, see
https://eucpn.org/document/sofielund-appraoch

architectural design measures,[31] clean-up actions and other types of disorder policing,[32] police patrols, neighbourhood clean-up actions, and enhanced reporting. The community engagement itself stimulates social cohesion and informal control, and is conducive to collective efficacy, the ability to control the behaviour of other community members, i.e. maintain normative barriers. Collective efficacy, in turn, is associated with lower violent crime rates.[33] Community involvement and the fact that something is being done, is also likely to reduce the fear of crime, a major harmful effect of crime.[34]

A well-known example of a neighbourhood-based prevention initiative is Neighbourhood Watch. Focusing primarily on domestic burglaries, Neighbourhood Watch trains tenants to protect properties and notice suspicious behaviour, and mobilises them to keep an eye out and report to law enforcement when they notice something. In addition, signs are displayed throughout the neighbourhood to warn visitors that there is an active Neighbourhood Watch there, which could deter potential offenders.[35] In other words, it deters criminals, increases social control and suppresses feelings of insecurity.[36]

For other crime phenomena, including gang violence, drug-related crimes and nuisances, and indeed family-based crime, the methodology of the Business Improvement District (BID), which has its origins in urban development, is more promising. A BID can be many things,[37] but its added value in crime prevention is that it serves as a vehicle to unite different stakeholders, harmonising the actions of tenants, business owners, local authorities and law enforcement, while fostering collective efficacy.

4. Police presence and focused deterrence strategies

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Reducing recruitment
- Deterring potential perpetrators
- Incapacitation

Crime problems confined to a specific neighbourhood or associated with a particular minority or subcultural group often prompt calls for a tougher police response. This is a normal reaction, which comes at the risk of undermining the very idea of a preventive approach: catching criminals after they commit a crime does not prevent the crime. Additionally, a show of force on the part of law enforcement, especially when directed at a particular group, may lead to an escalation of violence rather than appeasement, especially if that group has a negative attitude towards the police.[38] Note also that the latter condition can be phrased in terms of the legitimacy of, and trust in, the police![39]

The police has a major role in guaranteeing the safety of citizens, which includes addressing problems with criminal families. This role includes collecting information about, liaising with, and listening to citizens. We could include this role of law enforcement under the term community-oriented policing.[40] Apart from that,

'catching criminals' does of course have an effect on crime and safety, but in order not to misrepresent or overestimate the impact of arrests, we should differentiate between deterrence and incapacitation.

When the police patrol the streets and arrest criminals, two preventive mechanisms come into play. The most obvious mechanism is referred to as incapacitation: for the duration of the apprehension and the potentially ensuing prison sentence or electronic confinement, the criminal is prevented from committing more crimes. But the long-term effect is questionable, since the preventive effect of an arrest ends as soon the criminal is released. It is also expensive, as it requires many and long prison sentences. Finally, the limited available evidence suggests that not much should be expected from custodial sanctions in terms of preventing recidivism, and that they underperform compared to non-custodial sanctions.[41]

The other prevention mechanism is deterrence. The threat of being caught and punished can keep an offender from committing a crime. This happens when that threat outweighs the benefits of the crime. As such, effective deterrence requires that the risk of apprehension and punishment is sufficiently high; the severity of the punishment is less relevant.[42] In other words, police presence has a preventive effect as long as the likelihood that offenders are arrested is sufficiently high, and that prosecutors and judges follow through with swift and proportionate punishments.

For the police this means that frequent patrolling and consistent arrests for certain offences is crucial. Less consistent and less frequent repressive actions, such as raids or the arrest of leaders of organised crime groups have little or no preventive effect. In fact, evidence from Mexico and the US, where this kingpin strategy has been extensively implemented, has shown that it has destabilising effects and causes an escalation in violence.[43] Agent-based models have shown that the same is true for different kinds of European organised crime groups.[44] Finally, if police aim at contributing to prevention, they should engage in productive partnerships with other prevention actors and harmonise their actions in a given area.[45]

There are policing methods that help law enforcement agencies organise their work and allocate human resources to maximise crime reduction. There is robust evidence for the effectiveness of hot spots policing[46] and problem-oriented policing,[47] two policing approaches that many law enforcement agencies employ in some shape or form. The latter in particular is associated with steep drops in crime, with negligible risk for crime displacement to other areas.

Avoiding illegal profiling

Profiling is the categorisation of individuals based on personal characteristics. Law enforcement and border control officers routinely, and often legitimately, use it to support decision-making, e.g. in order to decide when to a stop and search and when not. Profiling is illegal in the EU when it is based exclusively or predominantly on protected characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. Profiling is acceptable when it is based on objective grounds of suspicion. Ethnic profiling is not only illegal, it also undermines trust in the police and negatively affects the effectiveness of policing. Finally, systematic ethnic profiling will lead to confirmation bias: if police efforts target a specific ethnic group, causing more interventions and arrests in that group, which could (falsely) be interpreted as a confirmation of that group's higher delinquency rate. In other words, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Generally speaking, police action should be informed by patterns of behaviour or events, rather than a person's ethnicity, age, gender. The current paper advocates a problem-oriented approach, which from the outset helps avoid actions that target certain persons based on personal characteristics. Indeed, while family-based crime may be connected to certain ethnic groups or (sub)cultures, police and preventive actions should not affect the non-criminal majority.

For more information on legal and illegal profiling, consult the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's guide on the issue: https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/ preventing-unlawful-profiling-today-and-future-guide

Problem-oriented policing (POP) was first conceptualised by Herman Goldstein in 1979. It centres on solving a particular crime problem instead of operating methods such as patrolling or arrests, which are just the means to an end.[48] POP is often put into practice by using the SARA approach, a four-phase workflow: scanning, analysis, response, assessment.[49] Rather than asking what the police

should do and where they should do it, POP asks what constitutes a particular crime problem, who is involved, why and how they do it. It then goes on to examine what the police can do about it and with whom they should collaborate in this regard.[50]

A particularly promising way to focus police work on the prevention of ongoing crime phenomena is focused deterrence. The first focused deterrence strategy, called Operation Ceasefire, was implemented in Boston in the 1990s as part of the fight against gang violence. The strategy, also called Group Violence Intervention, has since been at the core of many (mostly American) violence prevention programmes.[51] There is convincing evidence that focused deterrence strategies are effective in reducing crime.[52] A few things set it apart from traditional deterrence based on mere police presence.

Focused deterrence is rooted in POP and adopts its focus on resolving a specific crime problem. Whereas traditional deterrence strategies consist of general police presence, focused deterrence has the police and its partners focus all efforts on a particular crime group or crime phenomenon in a specific area. It is ensured that offenders who wish to stop offending can get help. At the same time, it broadens the scope of sanctions and incorporates various actions that drive up the cost of offending and remove the incentive to offend. This includes the priority treatment of all related cases, performing searches, seizing assets, organising neighbourhood watches or other local initiatives against crime, ordering drug tests for apprehended persons, and stimulating informants.[53]

Focused deterrence uses direct and repeated strategic communication to dissuade offenders from offending and advertise the fact that there is a concerted effort to disrupt criminal enterprises and punish the offenders. This strategic communication should draw clear lines, indicating precisely what the new policy is aiming at, but also which type of support is available to offenders. Offenders have to know that if they are involved in criminality due to addiction or financial problems, they can get drug treatment and socioeconomic support, for instance. In Boston, the head outreach social worker summed up the core message to gang members as follows: "We'll give you any help you want but I've been to too many funerals. The violence stops *now*."[54]

Finally, focus deterrence strategies employed against crime groups, such as gangs or criminal families, would typically be targeted on that group as whole, and even involve the wider community of which it is part. This is to activate the mechanism

of informal control. Criminals may not be impressed by the police's formal control, but are likely to be influenced by the non-violent members of their own community—their wives, grandmothers, or religious leaders, for instance. To get these people to condemn crime is important. It will also contribute to the legitimacy of the state and the police. If influential community leaders speak out against particular crimes, this legitimises police actions against those crimes.[55]

"Sluta skjut" – Stop shooting: a Group Violence Intervention implementation in Sweden

In the Swedish city of Malmö, a consortium of the police, the prison and probation service, city authorities and citizens has initiated a focused deterrence initiative modelled on the American Group Violence Intervention. "Sluta skjut", or Stop shooting, aims at preventing shooting and serious violence. It achieves this by focusing repressive action on the issue, but not without a strong community engagement and offering help to offenders to break the cycle of violence.

An evaluation study will be carried out by Malmö University, but in view of the evidence supporting focused deterrence strategies, it will likely be very promising.

For more information (in Swedish), see https://malmo.se/slutaskjut On Group Violence Intervention, see https://nnscommunities.org/strategies/group-violence-intervention/

5. Removing children from criminal families

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Reducing the recruitment
- Establishing and maintaining normative barriers

Intergenerational transmission of delinquent behaviour plays an important role in the continued operations of criminal families. A radical option to disrupt this kind of recruitment into crime is removing children from their criminal families as a preventive measure. This option has been suggested in popular media as a response to family-based crime.[56]

The assumption is that by removing children from their families, they would no longer be exposed to a negative set of values and social norms. This should result in compliance with positive social norms since everyday behaviour is strongly influenced by social relationships.[57] The result is a breaking of the cycle of intergenerational transmission of delinquent behaviour.

Nevertheless, there is neither a strong basis in theory nor empirical evidence in support of this prevention technique. Some voices tentatively state that specific socio-cultural backgrounds, e.g. 'ndrangheta in Calabria, could be a situation where removing children from mafia families might be a valid measure. The argument is that 'ndrangheta culture and values are built upon a corrupted form of normal Calabrian values. In other words, the Calabrian cultural norms are manipulated by the 'ndrangheta to facilitate their mafia culture. Therefore, children growing up in 'ndrangheta families are not only highly exposed to this corrupted mafia version of the Calabrian culture, but the norms and culture they encounter in schools and sport clubs will not contradict this culture either.[58]

For a short period, the Youth Tribunal of Reggio Calabria enforced the removal of children as a preventive measure. However, the set-up within the Youth Tribunal meant that the follow-up of these children was cancelled when they turned 18. Furthermore, no evaluation has been carried out on this intervention.[59]

PROTON, an EU-funded research project, used an agent-based model (hereafter ABM) to test this intervention in a virtual world. An ABM is a type of simulation study that allows a researcher to create, analyse and experiment with models made up of agents (virtual people) interacting within an environment. An ABM

can never completely describe the real world, but it does enable policymakers to predict the effects of different policies before they are implemented in real life.

One of the policy questions tackled by the PROTON project specifically concerned the removal of children from criminal families. The project simulated this scenario in two different environments; a southern European city and a northern European city. When the simulations were run with standard interventions, there was no effect of removing children from their criminal families on their recruitment into organised crime. The project then ran the simulation again with more extreme parameters and implemented a strong variant of the intervention; i.e. removing 100 % of the children aged 12 to 18 years old from organised crime families. This inflated simulation showed a statistical effect of removing children from their criminal families in the southern European city; after 30 years of implementing this simulation the numbers of organised crime members fell by 8.7 %.[60] Nevertheless, the strong intervention did not yield significant results in the northern European city.[61]

Questions are also raised as to the proportionality and ethical aspects of removing children from criminal families. Prevention actions need to respect legal boundaries and should be proportionate.[62] Moreover, it is unclear what the legal grounds are for removing children from their families as a preventive measure. How are these criminal families legally classified and which boundaries need to be crossed before a child is removed from their family?[63] If these families or certain family members are involved in crime, the question can be raised as to why they are not incarcerated. The absence of parents could lead to children being placed in foster care, or with other members of the extended family such as grandparents.

Prevention efforts should not cause any harm to the target audience.[64] The children generally experience their removal from home as punishment which negatively effects their well-being, rather than as protection. The emotional distress following the forced removal of children cannot be underestimated and might actually increase their risk of delinquent behaviour.[65] Furthermore, there are also ethical and practical problems linked to foster care. It has been proven that foster children have a higher risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system.[66]

There is a consensus within welfare systems to only remove children from their families as a last resort in all situations. Especially in family service-oriented systems, such as the Nordic countries, the policy is to first support the family, rather than disrupt it.[67]

Deciding on crime prevention initiatives based on an assumption or a gut feeling has governed crime prevention policy for far too long. Rather, "crime prevention interventions must be seen as "products" that need proper testing in order to ascertain that the outcomes are beneficial and to ensure that any possible side effects are not harmful at levels that might undermine the community's social environment, disrupt the normal functioning of persons in the target group, or result in even bigger crime problems. This is a matter of ethical practice."[68] Implementing the removal of children from criminal families as a preventive measure does not fall under this definition. It would not only be a waste of valuable resources, but the intervention would also focus on minors, who do not have the capacity to express their consent or interest in this intervention. Policymakers have a responsibility towards children and adolescents to ensure that any intervention directed towards them is at least free of harm.[69] Since there is no evidence of a positive effect of this intervention and there are clear indications that harm might be caused, it is not recommended to integrate this measure into the holistic approach to prevent family-based crime.

6. Exit programmes: disengagement from the crime group and desistance from offending

Activate the following prevention mechanisms:
- Desistance and rehabilitation
- Reducing the harmful consequences of crime

Generally speaking, criminal behaviour peaks in adolescence and early adulthood, and declines thereafter. This means that most offenders spontaneously stop offending at some point in early adulthood. This process, called desistance, can be used for prevention: by persuading, stimulating or assisting offenders to stop offending or leave a crime group, we can hasten their desistance from crime. This is referred to as an exit programme, an approach principally associated with extremist or terrorist groups and (motorcycle) gangs.[70] Such a programme may be initiated in prison, but exit support could also be extended to crime group members outside of the criminal justice system.

The feasibility of exit programmes depends on the possibility of leaving. Some organised crime groups, such as outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs), allow their members to leave. This enables members to cut ties with the group and initiate a process of disengagement that could ultimately lead to desistance from offending.

In other cases, leaving is not a formal option, and may be met with a threat of violent retaliation.[71]

To the extent that an exit from the criminal social context is possible, it is important that the person leaving the crime group is presented with a positive and sustainable alternative: a job, an income, a fulfilling social life. Desistance, therefore, is not something that crime group members can do on their own. It requires social services and correctional rehabilitation services to support offenders to reintegrate. This requires the support of the education system, employers, health care, and the welfare system.[72] If the person in question is under threat of retaliation—either for exiting or for taking to the witness stand—additional protection measures, such as relocation to a different part of the country or even a new identity, may be necessary.[73]

In principle, it is possible to leave a family. In practice, family members who leave should have reached the age of majority. More importantly, in certain (sub)cultures, cutting ties with a family violates prevailing norms and values, and could be met with threats or retaliation, including honour killings.[74] The latter is especially the case when girls attempt to escape a forced marriage, a phenomenon that is present in some minority communities in Europe and which shows some overlap with the phenomenon of criminal families.[75]

In families, which naturally make up the inner social circle and support network of an individual, the will to leave will be rare for these reasons alone. But families are not only held together by social ties and shared activities, which are also present in gangs, for instance. Families, especially extended families and endogamous "clans" provide what in other cases, such as gangs, are incentives for disengaging from the crime group: marriage, parenthood, a 'normal' family life.[76] Whereas gang members often disengage from the gang and desist from crime because of an innate longing to lead a normal family life, this is exactly what hinders disengagement from criminal families.[77] Indeed, observational studies have shown that organised crime offenders are more likely to start or continue offending after marriage and throughout adult life. In such cases, spontaneous desistance is less likely, narrowing the window for exit programmes.[78]

Although there is little evidence regarding the feasibility and effectiveness of exit programmes for members of family-based crime groups specifically, we can cautiously draw the following conclusion. Exit programmes have limited promise for tightly-knit criminal families. People with weaker ties, i.e. younger, unmarried

members, would benefit the most from exit programmes. The prison system seems a good place to offer exit support, because offenders are physically removed from their families, but success remains dependent on their will to disengage. Special attention should go to girls and women wanting to leave the family or, in some cases, avoid arranged marriages. Often a co-offender and victim in equal measure, they would benefit from what could be termed 'escape programmes', which would contribute to harm reduction as well as disengagement. In any event, adequate protection against retaliation is essential.

7. The administrative approach to serious and organised crime

Activates the following prevention mechanisms:
- Disrupting criminal acts
- Reducing the rewards

The central objective of the administrative approach (AA) to serious and organised crime is to disrupt crime by denying criminals access to legal infrastructures. Organised crime depends heavily on legal infrastructures: official businesses as fronts for money-laundering, transportation and shipping services for the trafficking of goods and persons, including all interactions with the authorities (for licences, permits, travel documents) that this entails. Taking administrative measures to deny organised crime the use of legal infrastructure will drive up the cost and lower the benefits of crime.[79]

For AA to be effective, it needs to be complementary, meaning that while the administrative approach in and of itself is a multi-agency approach, it cannot stand on its own, and is almost always more effective when part of wider approach that includes criminal justice and social interventions.[80] Consequently, the success of AA is dependent on collaboration and information exchange. In order for local authorities to deny criminals a business licence, for instance, they would have to rely on fiscal or criminal justice data. Authorities should really work to investigate how the often one-way flow of information from the local to the national level can be transformed into a two-way exchange of information where necessary.[81]

There is no doubt that AA, when implemented faithfully, is an effective tool in the fight against organised crime. However, in outlining the conditions of effective application, its limitations become visible. First, the administrative approach is a way to tackle serious and organised crime. It is not a recommended approach

for types of crime and anti-social behaviour that cannot be classified as serious or organised crime, such as (occasional) burglary and disorder. This is because, by definition, AA can only be used when criminal operations depend on the legal infrastructure. This poses limitations on the applicability of the administrative approach even when there is an organisational aspect to the criminal operations. For instance, fiscal measures to detect and interrupt money laundering will do little to prevent smaller but sustained cash transactions in criminal milieus.

Secondly, AA is primarily a disruptive technique, tackling crime that is already being committed or about to be. It may prevent an established criminal obtaining a licence for a car wash that will serve as front for a drugs money laundering operation, thereby disrupting organised crime. It will not, and does not claim to, prevent a child born into a criminal family growing up to become the applicant for the licence. The administrative approach is thus a valuable tool in the fight against organised crime, but in the case of family-based organised crime it should be complemented with care and welfare-oriented approaches that primarily target children and young people in these milieus.

The Dutch Bibob Act

The 2003 Public Administration Probity Screening Act, known by the Dutch acronym Bibob, is a law granting municipal, regional and national authorities the right to deny licences, subsidies, real estate transactions and government contracts when there is a risk that they are the result of, or may be used for, criminal activities. If, for instance, someone involved in a criminal organisation applies for a permit to open a business but there is reasonable suspicion that the business would be a front for a criminal activity or money laundering, the permit could be withheld under the Bibob Act. This helps prevent criminal organisations making use of the legal infrastructure for their criminal activities. The applicant's integrity is assessed by the so-called Bibob Office, part of the Ministry of Justice and Security, and is based on antecedents and criminal records of the applicant as well as (business) associates.

That is not to say that the administrative approach does not have any preventive effects. Both disrupting crime and reducing the rewards of crime are preventive mechanisms that keep offenders from continuing to commit crime and which in the longer run, may even make crime a less attractive proposition.[82] If the authorities are able to show that crime does not pay, this may discourage people from committing a crime or reoffending.

The European Network on the Administrative Approach (ENAA)

ENAA is a network of national contact points who are competent in the field of administrative measures to tackle organised crime. Its goal is to promote and exchange information on successful implementations of the administrative approach.

For more information on the administrative approach, visit ENAA's website at https://administrativeapproach.eu or consult the Third EU Handbook on the Administrative Approach, available in all EU languages at https://administrativeapproach.eu/publications/third-eu-handbook.

CONCLUSION

Family-based crime is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, which should be countered with an integrated preventive strategy. Such a holistic approach combines different types of interventions in order to address the problem from different angles and activate as many prevention mechanisms as possible at the same time. The seven categories of interventions discussed in this paper stand out as potentially effective at preventing family-based crime.

In practice, however, not all appear to deliver results as we would hope, possibly due to implementation issues. Delivering social interventions to a criminal family is difficult, even if there is robust evidence for the effectiveness of such interventions in the general population. Certain exit programmes have proven effective, to an extent, for members of motorcycle gangs and extremist groups, but it is much harder to envision how well they would work for family-based crime, since they hinge on the prospect of a 'normal' family life, which criminal families already offer.

In other cases, there are ethical concerns with certain interventions. Blanket incapacitation (incarceration) may be considered effective in theory, but it is grossly disproportionate. Likewise, there are some indications that under certain conditions, removing children from criminal families may help prevent family-based crime, but this is fraught with ethical problems. (In both cases, it is questionable how such approaches could ever be scaled up sufficiently to create the desired effect.)

In sum, no intervention is a panacea. There is no conclusive proof that any of the types of interventions discussed in this paper are effective in preventing family-based crime, but some are promising. All this can be summarised in the following recommendations:

- 1. It is important to develop a strategic approach that integrates various types of promising interventions. This synergy has the potential to create an effect larger than the sum of each individual prevention initiative. Police deterrence and disorder policing could stimulate businesses and residents to engage in a neighbourhood-based prevention project; the arrest of a criminal father could create an opening for a social prevention initiative focused on his wife and children.
- 2. Practitioners and policymakers should never assume that what they do is effective. In the absence of conclusive proof, new implementations or interventions should be subject to thorough process and outcome evaluations. A reduction in the risk of crime occurring is the central objective of crime prevention.
- 3. Adverse effects and ethical and legal issues should always be taken into account. When dealing with children and families, it should always be made sure that prevention initiatives do not cause harm. As family-based crime is often confounded with ethnicity or (sub)culture, care should be taken not to hinder processes of integration and drive a wedge between communities. Illegal ethnic profiling should be avoided at all cost.

ENDNOTES

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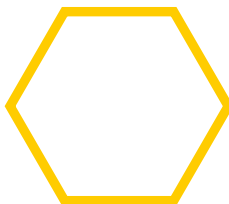Criminology 12:2 (2016), 229-48*. https://dx.doi.
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