

Part of the Toolbox on

FAMILY-BASED CRIME



**Background
and theory of
prevention**

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The focus of this publication is twofold. First, it outlines the phenomenon of family-based crime. Crime sometimes runs in families, a phenomenon to which several factors may contribute. Second, the paper translates what we know about family-based crime into a theoretical basis for prevention. It emphasises the importance of a systematic and integrated approach to preventing family-based crime.

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All the papers which make up the EUCPN toolbox on family-based crime are available for download at

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PREFACE

This theoretical paper is part of the EUCPN Toolbox on Family-Based Crime, published on the occasion of the German Presidency of the EUCPN. The focus of this publication is twofold. First, it outlines the phenomenon of family-based crime. Crime sometimes runs in families, a phenomenon to which several factors may contribute. The most important factors are discussed here, and put into context by sketching three cases. Second, the paper translates what we know about family-based crime into a theoretical basis for prevention. It emphasises the importance of a systematic and integrated approach to preventing family-based crime.

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

INTRODUCTION

Family-based crime is a diverse and complex phenomenon. On the surface, there are the criminal activities of the criminal family. These can be anything from pickpocketing to trafficking in human beings, from drug trafficking to robbery. In other words, family-based crime is not a particular type of crime. Prevention as well as law enforcement and criminal justice responses need to be tailored to the specific—and acute—crime problem they aim to address.

But at its core—and in the longer run—family-based crime is not only a *crime* problem, but also a problem of *criminality*. In criminal families, each new generation is at risk of “inheriting” their parents’ criminal behaviour. As close-knit groups, often somewhat isolated from or antagonistic to mainstream society, these families are often impenetrable for outsiders, making it difficult to counteract the process.

Preventionists therefore face a dual problem. On the one hand, they need to keep active members of criminal families from committing (more) crime; on the other hand, they need to prevent criminal families from acting as incubators for new criminals. Given the diversity and complexity of family-based crime, it is important to base all preventive action on a thorough analysis of the problem and subsequently approach it from multiple angles. Such a holistic approach incorporates developmental, community, situational, and criminal justice prevention, and requires the cooperation of different actors.

This paper provides a theoretical background to the prevention of family-based crime. The first chapter describes the problem of family-based crime and outlines a series of explanations for the intergenerational transmission of criminality in families. To illustrate the problem further and to highlight its diversity, the subsequent chapter discusses three disparate cases, from Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. Chapter three emphasises the importance of problem analysis and theory, with specific attention to mechanisms of crime prevention. It advocates an integrated (or holistic) approach to preventing family-based crime which requires the cooperation of different actors.

01 CRIMINAL FAMILIES AND FAMILY-BASED CRIME

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 participate, at some point, in their family's criminal enterprise, sometimes at a young age. In a sense, they are predestined to become criminals. This is supported by evidence: children who grow up in criminal families are at a significantly higher risk of committing crime.¹ The link between criminal parents and criminal behaviour is the strongest,² but sibling offending has also been found to be associated with criminal behaviour,³ as has the criminality of in-laws.⁴

Family-based crime is crime committed by a criminal family. Presuming there is a real difference between family-based crime and other, i.e. non-family-based, crime, family-based crime can be defined as a criminal activity that is continued by a family. In other words, family-based crime is crime which involves multiple members of the same nuclear or extended family. This means two things. First, if the sole condition of being referred to as organised crime is that multiple perpetrators have a stake in it, all family-based crime is organised crime.⁵ Second, not all criminal families are involved in family-based crime. When members each have different, unrelated criminal activities, we can refer to a criminal family, but not family-based crime.

The link between criminal family members and the likelihood of an individual becoming a criminal should not be oversimplified. Growing up with criminal parents does not inevitably make children criminals, and not all criminals had criminal parents. Neither should the link be explained in mono-causal terms. Besides socialisation in a criminal milieu and the influence of the normalisation of criminal activities in such families, there are other factors at play. It is possible, for instance, that the criminality of the different generations is caused by the same environmental factors.

Learning to be a criminal: social learning and differential association

There is no doubt that growing up in a family of criminals increases the likelihood that an individual becomes a criminal him or herself. One mechanism through which this happens is that children 'learn' to be criminals from their parents and other family members. One theory that describes this process is the differential association theory. Like other social learning theories, it describes how an individual's behaviour and choices made later in life are shaped by their social ties.

According to differential association theory, criminal behaviour is learned through interaction, meaning that intimate peers have more influence than more remote social connections. Not only does this learning process only involve the technical aspects of crime (e.g. how to steal a car), it also involves a particular attitude towards crime (e.g. why it is okay to steal cars). The latter aspect helps to rationalise and eventually normalise criminality, and may instil a deep-rooted sense of criminal identity and disregard for the law and law enforcement in an individual.

The theory of differential association argues that techniques, motives, attitudes and values of criminal behaviour are learned in social actions. This learning process is differential on account of the fact that an individual rarely only learns to break the rules or to obey them. Some social settings favour following the rules (e.g. the school), while other social settings may favour breaking the rules (e.g. peer pressure among adolescents). Ideally, the first outweigh the second, but in a criminal family it could easily be the other way around. Criminal behaviour is the product of contact with criminal behaviour, and the more contact an individual has with it, the more likely they will exhibit criminal behaviour themselves.⁶

Social relations and the social opportunity structure

Organised crime requires that offenders collaborate, ideally with trusted co-offenders. To identify and recruit trustworthy co-offenders, offenders tend to prefer people already in their social network, such as family and friends. In other words, individuals who take their first steps in organised crime are usually recruited by people from their inner social circle.

This helps explain how criminal families are formed. Not only can children internalise their parents' criminal behaviour, family members can also more actively recruit each other into organised crime. As such, there are documented cases where children have initiated their parents into organised crime.⁷ This means that criminal families may be the product of processes which are inherent to organised crime: family ties are a gateway to organised crime recruitment.⁸

Neuropsychological and biological factors

Individual neuropsychological factors may also play a role. The research tradition regarding neuropsychological factors of criminality was set in motion by Terrie Moffitt's theory of life course persistent antisocial behaviour.⁹ While a sensitive topic in its own right, it is well-established that to a certain extent, some of these factors have a biological or genetic basis and may therefore be hereditary. (Sex, for instance, is a biological factor that puts men at a much higher risk of offending than women.) To the extent that these biological factors are hereditary, they contribute to criminality running in the family.

That does not mean that there is a 'crime gene' which makes whomever has it a criminal. Rather, certain hereditary neuropsychological factors may stimulate certain temperaments (e.g. an impulsive and sensation-seeking temperament) which in turn puts an individual at an increased risk of crime. So while there is a hereditary component to criminality, biological factors do not inevitably lead to crime. They are instead mediated by the environment, including upbringing, education, and socio-economic conditions. This is referred to as the nature-nurture interaction.¹⁰

Ethnicity, migration, and culture

There appears to be a correlation between criminal families and ethnicity or migration status. Families with a migration background appear to be more likely to be criminal families. This does not mean that ethnicity and migration status are causal factors: socio-economic status and neighbourhood factors play a larger role.¹¹ If certain ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in given neighbourhoods, this may explain why they are more likely to engage in crime. Suburban poverty, social-economic status and unemployment are conducive to organised crime recruitment,¹² while economic setbacks act as acute stimulants to give in to organised crime.¹³

At any rate, the tendency in organised crime to cooperate with trusted co-offenders drives the ethnic homogeneity of organised groups: offenders generally prefer co-offenders of the same ethnicity, giving rise to “ethnic” crime groups and syndicates, such as the Italian, Russian and Albanian mafias, which extend into their respective diasporas.¹⁴

Finally, there is some evidence that culture, or at least certain aspects of culture, impact crime and criminality. Culture should not be understood here as a proxy for race or ethnicity. Rather, certain cultural traits, which may be present in a subgroup of an ethnic group (i.e., a subculture) or in multiple ethnic groups, have an influence on crime. This influence is not direct; rather, these cultural aspects are part of a complex web of crime correlates. In other words, it is part of the puzzle. They will not predict whether an individual will become a criminal or not, but they help explain certain patterns in criminality, e.g. why certain types of crime occur more frequently in one group than another. Examples include certain cultures of masculinity,¹⁵ the Mediterranean honour/shame social system, which may catalyse domestic violence and engender honour killings¹⁶; but also the Southern American preference for pickup trucks, which lies at the basis of a significantly higher incidence of truck thefts.¹⁷

Women in criminal families

Across the board, men are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour than women. This is also true in criminal families: men are likely to be responsible for most crimes, especially more serious crime. Women end up in these crime groups the same way men do: through family ties.¹⁸ In some minority groups, especially those with strong ethnic or clan identities, arranged marriages may reinforce these ties even more, reducing the opportunity of women to escape a criminal family.

At the same time, however, there are also indications that the roles of women, especially spouses, in organised crime are underestimated. Social network analyses of crime groups as well as analyses of criminal justice records have shown that they have important roles as administrators, money launderers, and intermediaries, especially regarding drug trafficking crimes, and as leaders in times of power vacuums.¹⁹

Family reputation

It is noteworthy that family reputation, more specifically the labelling that it may cause, may be a significant risk factor for the intergenerational transmission of criminality. There is evidence that growing up in a criminal family not only increases the likelihood of adopting criminal behaviours; biased attitudes of law enforcement and criminal justice also increase the likelihood of conviction and criminalisation (i.e., officially being a criminal).²⁰

Nevertheless, this is not the only possible explanation of the role of family reputation. A family's reputation can also instil the fear of retaliation in victims and witnesses, resulting in under-reporting and inadequate sentencing that in turn facilitates criminal careers.²¹ Finally, a family reputation can lead to discrimination and exclusion, e.g. when employers are hesitant to hire someone with a particular family name, which can then perpetuate socio-economic risk factors such as poverty and unemployment.²²

02 DIFFERENT KINDS OF FAMILY-BASED CRIME: THREE CASES

Mhallami “Clan crime” in Germany

In recent years, specific Arabic-speaking clans have drawn media attention and instilled a fear of crime in certain parts of Germany, notably Berlin, Bremen, and the Ruhr valley, particularly Essen. In German discourse, these clans are generally referred to as Mhallami Kurds. In reality, the Arabic-speaking clans who fled Lebanon during the Civil War (1975-1990) and sought refuge in Germany, include Palestinian refugees alongside the Mhallamis proper, a group originating in the Kurdish part of Turkey.²³

What they have in common is a tribal social structure. Clans are groups of multiple extended families with (presumed) shared ancestry. The clan, and not ethnic origin or nationality, is the primary constituent of its members' identity. Clan ties are typically reinforced by rigid conceptions of kinship, endogamy (intermarriage), and a strict social system based on honour and shame (including honour killings), like those observed in other Mediterranean cultures.²⁴

In the case of the German clans, the clan structure was retained throughout successive waves of migration to Lebanon and Germany. This is at least partly due to the fact that in both countries, these clans were perceived as outsiders and were not successfully integrated into mainstream society.²⁵ In the poor conditions in Lebanese refugee camps, the clan provided a basis for solidarity and support, while the threat of revenge provided some sense of security.²⁶

In Germany, they typically received temporary residency permits on humanitarian grounds. Some had prolonged stays in refugee centres. More important,

however, is that as stateless persons, they were not authorised to travel when their temporary permits expired. They enjoyed a liminal legal status referred to as *Duldung* (literally: toleration), meaning they did not have residency rights, but nor were they punished or deported when they stayed in Germany. *Duldung* was a short-term status that had to be regularly renewed, but could under certain conditions be converted to permanent residency rights. As people under *Duldung* did not enjoy residency rights proper and other rights associated with residency, their access to the labour market was limited. This situation once again promoted the clan as a firm basis for identity, security, and solidarity.²⁷

In its original tribal context, or in a confessional system like in Lebanon, clan structures are not conducive to crime—quite the contrary. In Western societies, however, the opposite is true. Accustomed to repressive states in which the laws are there to be resisted and circumvented, clans may perceive the democratic West, which attaches great value to the rights of the individual, as weak. One manifestation of this attitude is the active exploitation of the age of criminal responsibility, which in Germany is 14. Clans often actively employ children under this age in criminal activities precisely because it safeguards them from prosecution.²⁸

‘Ndrangheta families in Calabria and diaspora

The southern Italian ‘ndrangheta is a clan-based mafia-type criminal organisation, made up of family cells called *‘ndrine* (singular *‘ndrina*). The importance of family, including extended family, is ubiquitous in Calabrian society, as is male authority, especially the ‘pater familias’. This extends into ‘ndrine: they are held together by family ties, alliances are forged through marriage, and the pater familias is in command. The ‘ndrangheta is Calabrian to the core. Crime obviously sets it apart from the rest of Calabrian society, but its core values are the same as that of Calabria, albeit an extreme version.

The ‘ndrangheta have migrated to, or ‘colonised’, northern Italy and several other regions around the world; in Europe they are predominantly active in Germany and the Netherlands.²⁹ They have developed into what is arguably the most important international Italian mafia.³⁰ Drug trafficking is their core business.

The importance of family ties, so characteristic of Calabrian culture, is key to understanding the 'ndrangheta and their global success. Take for instance the European cocaine trade, in which the 'ndrangheta plays a major role. To a large extent, they owe their success, and the fact that they appear relatively unaffected by the rise of competing groups, to their strong family ties and strong sense of connectedness and belonging, even abroad, which significantly limits their members' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement.³¹

In 'ndrangheta families, children are important not just because family is important in general, but also for strategic reasons. Marriages with other 'ndrangheta families serve to secure amical relationships and strategic alliances, but this type of endogamy naturally depends on having children to marry off. Additionally, the 'ndrangheta family can be thought of as a criminal dynasty.³² Dynasties are families that are adept at sustaining political or corporate success across generations. The success of dynasties has been ascribed to a combination of “brand name advantages”,³³ resilience (relatively unaffected by competing businesses) but at the same time adaptability to changing circumstances,³⁴ and a type of combined strategising that takes both family and business interests into account at all times.³⁵

Boys born into an 'ndrangheta dynasty are not just socialised in a criminal environment and exposed to the same criminogenic setting that made their fathers criminals; they are actively prepared to take up a role in the criminal family business. On-the-job learning ensures that they are able to fulfil the role the dynasty envisages for them, and accepting the job is crucial to both the continuation of the business and family honour—another example of a quintessential Calabrian value to a corrupted extreme. There is little to no room to break away from the family and escape the predetermined mafia career. Finally, like business dynasties, 'ndrangheta families are characterised by shared values (not least of which is family honour) and a shared vision, which they instil in their children. The result is often a personal desire, i.e. not just a sense of obligation, to continue the family business.

Criminal families in the Netherlands

Two Dutch researchers recently provided interesting insight into criminal families in the Netherlands.³⁶ The cases they describe are interesting for a number of reasons, but first and foremost for the following reason. The families in question did not develop a family business, meaning that different members of different generations had different and sometimes unrelated criminal activities. These families are therefore examples of criminal families that are not involved in family-based crime. Nonetheless, criminality clearly appeared to run in the family, and children born into these families were somehow destined to become criminals themselves.

Based on records in public archives, police records and interviews with (former) practitioners, Spapens and Moors outline the main characteristics of seven families from the southern Netherlands, who for at least three generations have been involved in crime. The first generation of these families was born between 1930s and 1950s, in a region that at time could be characterised as rural, agricultural and poor. Some of them live in larger cities in the region, but others live in smaller villages or trailer parks.

The authors have found that an unusually large share of men in these families, as well as women from the second generation onwards, have criminal records. The types of crimes they are known for are diverse and, more importantly, varied across generations. In the first generation, there were records of theft, fencing, domestic violence, illegal alcohol production and trafficking. In the second generation, there is a marked shift to violence and even manslaughter and murder, as well as threats and extortion, which appear to be auxiliary to this generation's core businesses of drug trafficking and synthetic drug production. Money laundering also became important. In the 1990s and 2000s, the third generation shifted the families' role in the drug market when they invested primarily in illegal cannabis cultivation.

All this leads to the conclusion that there is no family business, or that the family is not a single organised crime group: most members are criminals, but they all do their own thing. One explanation suggested by the authors is that the family fathers remained active in their criminal enterprise for too long without passing a leadership role to their children, who in the meantime developed their own criminal activities.³⁷ This is in contrast to 'ndrangheta families, for instance, where fathers tend to envisage roles for their sons.

Another explanation is that Dutch organised crime is not as interwoven with, and dependent on, local power structures as is the case with Italian mafias. In the absence of corrupt local officials, every run-in with the authorities is bad news. This requires an exceptional skill set, which unlike authority derived from a family name and social rank, is not something a criminal's children automatically inherit.³⁸

03 FROM ANALYSIS TO ACTION

So far we have discussed certain factors which may play into the intergenerational transmission of criminality in families, and we have illustrated the diversity in criminal families by sketching three cases. This helps understand the phenomenon of family-based crime in general, but is not sufficient to draw up specific preventive actions. Rather, we should first be aware of the specific problem and its context, so that the best approach—most likely a combination of several preventive measures— for a particular family can be identified. This, in turn, will dictate which institutions are in the best position to implement these measures. While this may appear obvious, it is actually the opposite of what often happens in practice, where one institution or agency gets tasked with doing something about a given crime problem.

Preventive action is frequently limited by institutional boundaries.³⁹ Prevention organisations or institutions may have a rather narrow focus and tend not only to favour interventions that align with that focus, but also limit them to it. For example, the preventive work of a social service or socially oriented organisations will be social prevention; preventionists at law enforcement agencies will rather focus on deterrence. That is fine, as long as the fact that not everything works for every type of crime is taken into account and that coordinated approaches may outperform more one-sided approaches.

To transition from problem analysis into effective prevention, we can rely on criminological theory and evidence. Research on the impact of preventive interventions is important because it explains which approaches work and which do not. Implementing interventions that are known not to work comes at

a significant cost: not only is it wasted financial resources, the crime it is trying to tackle continues unabated. Of course, interventions may fail to yield good results due to implementation issues, but multiple evaluation studies will help identify these issues. Conversely, favourable impact evaluations are not a ticket to guaranteed success.

Besides evidence, decisions regarding crime prevention should be supported by theory. Evidence may indicate that certain interventions work most of the time, but that does not mean they work in any given situation. It is important, therefore, that whatever shape the prevention of family-based crime takes, there should be a clear idea of how and why it will work with respect to a specific case. This is called the programme theory, and is the first step to effective crime prevention. The programme theory comprises both a theory of change and a theory of action. The first is the conceptual explanation of the intervention's working principle, i.e. the underlying mechanism, while the second explains how this can be realised with regard to real-life limitations and factors that influence the outcome.⁴⁰

Family-based crime and theories of prevention

Family-based crime and criminal families are multi-layered phenomena. At the surface, there is the specific criminal behaviour of family members: the actions which individually are criminal offences and which, possibly, together make up an organised crime enterprise. At a deeper level, however, we are also looking at the intergenerational transmission of criminality and the normalisation of criminality in these families. Preventive action could address either or both.

Situational action theory (SAT), first developed by criminologist Per-Olof Wikström, is a theory that can help make sense of the relation between criminality (or propensity for crime) and the act of crime, and what that means for prevention. SAT integrates individual (including moral, emotional, but also social, familial) and environmental (or situational) factors.

The individual risk factors influence someone's morality and the perception of a criminal act as a valid "action alternative". For instance, children who internalise the values and behaviour of their drug-dealing parents may consider drug dealing acceptable. But whether they would actually do it themselves at some stage, and

when and where, depends on situational factors: whether an opportunity presents itself, whether there is a temptation or prospect of success, or rather a chance of getting caught, being filmed by a security camera, and so on. Whether an individual chooses to commit a criminal act depends on both their propensity for crime and a criminogenic situation (see Figure 1).⁴¹

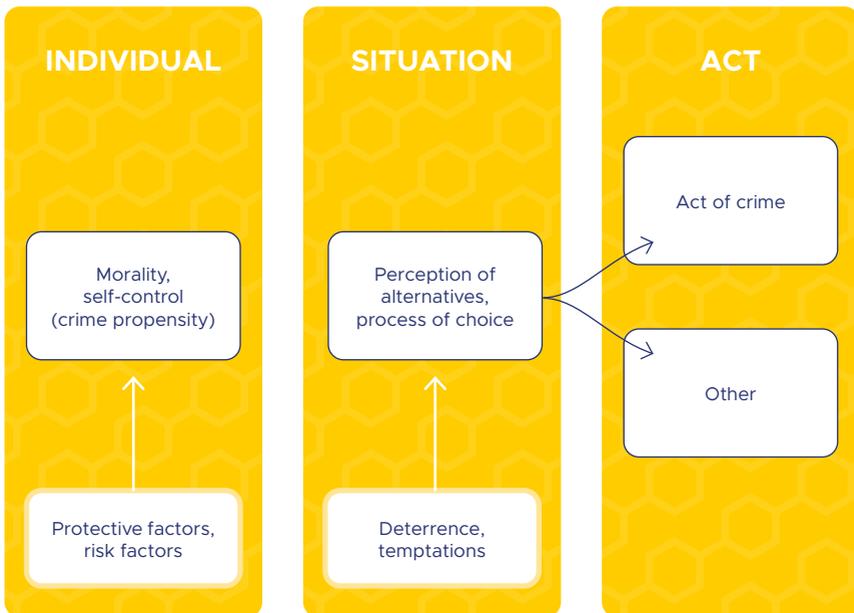


Figure 1. Schematic representation of situational action theory (adapted from P.-O. Wikström, 2004).

Crime might be prevented by intervening in the situation (situational prevention), e.g. by deterrence or by eliminating certain temptations, so that in that particular time and place, the potential offender chooses not to commit the criminal act. Crime might also be prevented by changing the propensity for crime in individuals, or by preventing people from developing a propensity for crime and other antisocial behaviour (social, developmental prevention; see Figure 2). The latter element can

be achieved by reducing risk factors (e.g. childhood abuse, criminal peers, lack of social cohesion, poor integration, poverty, unemployment, and mental health) and promoting protective factors.

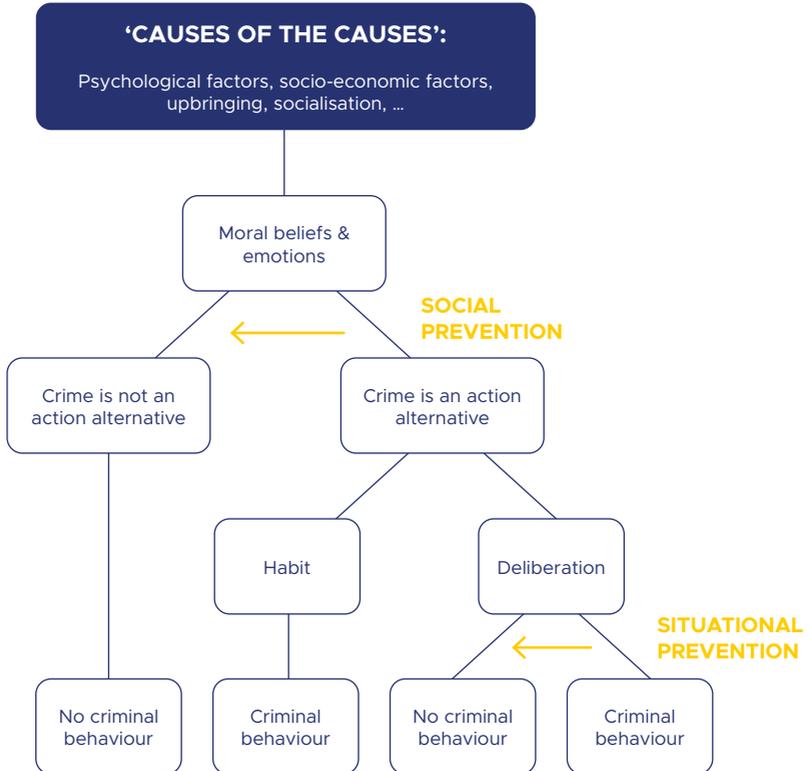


Figure 2. Schematic representation of the processes leading to criminal behaviour, showing how both social and situational prevention may prevent crimes (adapted from Rummens, et al., 2016).

However, the link between risk factors and crime is not straightforward. Not all risk factors are causal factors; some can be thought of as mere predictors, which predict criminality but do not cause it. Intervening in causal factors will change the crime outcome, but intervening in predictors will not. In reality, it is often hard, if not impossible, to know which combinations of risk factors *cause* crime.⁴² On the other hand, early social prevention could have many beneficial outcomes apart from crime prevention (e.g. in terms of well-being or substance abuse, the fight against poverty, etc.).⁴³ In line with the EUCPN's view of crime prevention,⁴⁴ this paper advocates an integrated approach that embraces both situational and social prevention (see below).

The choice between social or situational prevention, or both, is not the only one to make. Concrete interventions have to be selected, developed, and implemented. There needs to be a clear idea of how and why it will work in a given situation. Criminologists have described several mechanisms of crime prevention. A practical book on this subject was written by Tore Bjørgo.⁴⁵ He lists nine prevention mechanisms. These are not yet interventions or concrete crime prevention initiatives, but rather models explaining how certain measures help reduce crime. This is based on theory and observational insights about crime.⁴⁶ Every crime prevention initiative should employ one or more of these mechanisms in order for it to possibly be effective. The nine mechanisms are the following:

1. Establishing and maintaining normative barriers;
2. Reducing recruitment;
3. Deterring potential perpetrators;
4. Disrupting criminal acts;
5. Protecting vulnerable targets;
6. Reducing the harmful consequences of crime;
7. Reducing the rewards;
8. Incapacitating;
9. Encouraging desistance from crime and rehabilitating.

Bjørgo applies the nine mechanisms to domestic burglary, violent youth gangs, organised crime by outlaw motorcycle gangs, driving under the influence, and terrorism, but they could be applied to any crime phenomenon. The list is useful as an adequacy test: if a preventive action does not activate at least one of these mechanisms, it has little or no chance of success.

An integrated approach to family-based crime

Many people in the field of crime prevention, both theorists and practitioners, are aware of the virtues of an integrated or holistic approach to crime prevention. What exactly is understood as integrated crime prevention is open to interpretation.

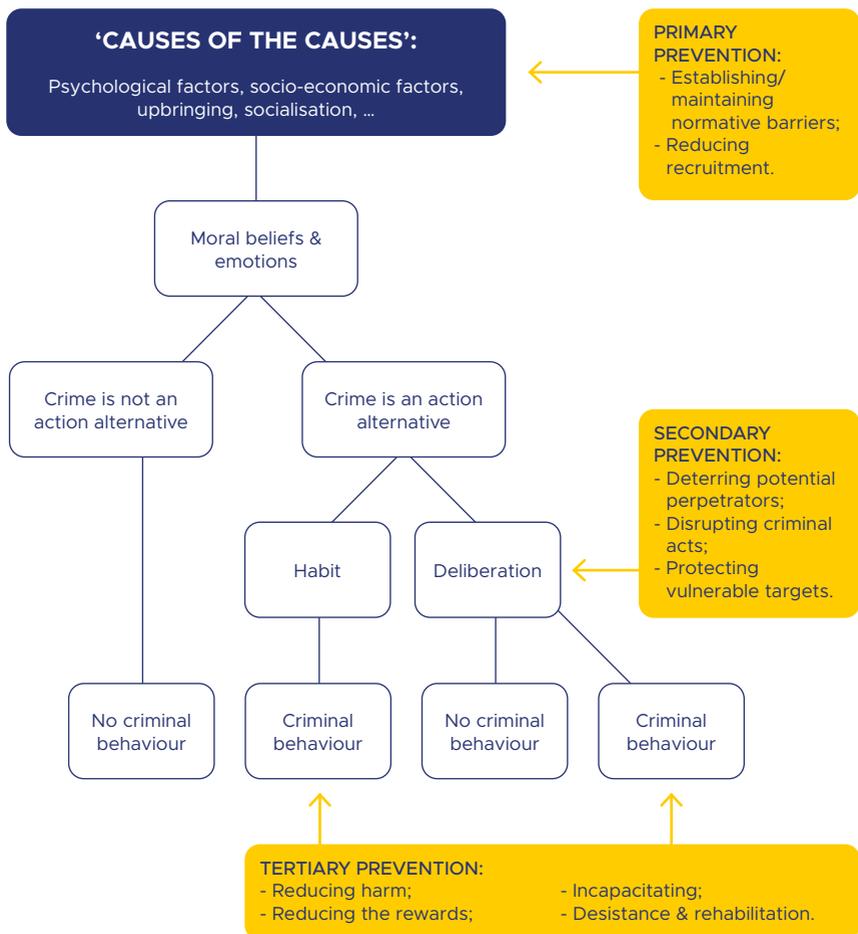


Figure 3. Visualisation of an integrated approach to crime prevention, demonstrating how different preventive actions manipulate different aspects of the process leading to criminal behaviour.

One way to conceptualise integrated crime prevention, aligned with the discussion of situational action theory, is that it targets not just the criminal act itself (situational crime prevention), but also the risk factors for considering crime as an action alternative (developmental prevention and community prevention). As the very concept of family-based crime simultaneously encompasses the social dimension of intergenerational transmission of criminality and the specific criminal act, it is logical that an integrated approach to family-based crime consists of both.

Bjørge, who advocates a “holistic” approach that ideally puts all of the nine crime prevention mechanisms to work, adds a third pillar. As shown in Figure 3, the mechanisms address both the root causes and the situational aspects of crime, in addition to what should and could be done when the crime has already been committed, which we could refer to as criminal justice prevention.

As such, Bjørge eliminates the dichotomy between prevention and crime control,⁴⁷ which is particularly relevant when one is looking to suppress a particular crime phenomenon that is already taking place, such as in the case of family-based crime. This ultimately reinforces the work of all actors involved. Social workers will find their job hard to do when the police are not present to arrest offenders, and conversely, a show of force by the police will not be very effective as long as social services do not prevent children from being coaxed into a life of crime from an early age onwards.

A Dutch guide on preventing family-based crime goes one step further, and proposes a triangular model to tackle the phenomenon, consisting of coordinated preventive actions, repressive actions, and actions to enhance resilience (see Figure 4). Resilience refers, first and foremost, to the skills of professional actors (police, social workers, teachers) to deal with, and respond to, the threats that criminal families pose. It also encompasses the protection of professionals against their criminal clients. Indeed, criminals often intimidate authorities, enforcers, and care and service providers, which may hinder appropriate and effective action. Secondly, resilience refers to actions to put an end to domination of neighbourhoods, which criminal families owe to the fear they instil in their environment, whether deliberately or otherwise.⁴⁸



Figure 4. Integrated model to tackle family-based crime combining repressive and preventive actions as well as measures to further professional resilience, after Boer et al. 2020.

Naturally, the EUCPN's focus is on the preventive aspect of dealing with family-based crime. This includes the contributions that social workers, law enforcement, criminal justice and other actors can make to prevention. These contributions will be covered in more detail in another paper which is part of the EUCPN Toolbox on Family-Based Crime.⁴⁹

This brings us the conceptualisation of integrated, or holistic, crime prevention that we would like to put forward here: an approach to crime prevention that is not limited to preventing crimes in the narrow sense, but which instead spills over into

An integrated approach to crime prevention is not limited to preventing crimes in the narrow sense, but which instead spills over into neighbouring policy and professional fields. This is not limited to crime control and criminal justice, but also encompasses welfare, social services, education, and (mental) health care, depending on the particular context.

neighbouring policy and professional fields. This is not limited to crime control and criminal justice, but also encompasses welfare, social services, education, and (mental) health care, depending on the particular context.

As the cases discussed above show, criminal families often have problems other than criminality, which is why they are often referred to as multi-problem families. Given that these problems are interconnected, solving them requires taking the bigger picture into account. A holistic approach will deal with this complex problem in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

Different actors – different target groups

If it requires an integrated approach to break the cycle of persistent criminality in families, different actors will have to work together. And there is a wide range of actors: crime prevention practitioners, law enforcement, probation officers, social services (e.g. social workers, employment counsellors), child protection, the education system, local housing authorities, sports and leisure organisations, health care (addiction treatment), and so on. To this list can be added citizens and businesses, who can play an important role via neighbourhood initiatives.

It is a challenge to get different actors to collaborate and coordinate their actions when they do not normally do so. In fact, various actors may not even regard themselves as working in the area of crime prevention. Take for instance school teachers and administrators. They may see it as part of their role to give special attention to children from families in multi-problem situations, for a number of reasons: because the children in question have learning issues, a different native language, because they skip class more often than other children, or simply because they know they have problems at home. What they may not realise, however, is that their work may also contribute to preventing family-based crime.

Nevertheless, the required harmonisation of actions goes beyond first-line professionals. Besides the 'horizontal integration' of their efforts, a 'vertical integration' of different competences at different policy levels: local, national, and everything in between. Local social work efforts would ideally be in harmony with the efforts of a prosecuting authority. Finally, a truly collaborative security effort also involves citizens and businesses, who are treated as partners. This requires that they, as well as institutional actors, commit to a shared vision of security.⁵⁰

Systems matter: governance, ownership, processes, and information exchange

It is important that systems are created, and existing systems adapted as needed, to facilitate both horizontal and vertical integration. A common analysis of the problem(s) should lead to a shared vision on what is to be done, and who should do what. All parties involved should take collective ownership of the issues and their resolution. This can only be achieved if these parties sit together and reach consensus. They should also be able to share information, within the confines of EU and national data protection regulations and professional confidentiality.

For all of this to be possible, processes and protocols have to be in place. What happens when a teacher suspects that there may be problems in a child's family? Whom does the teacher alert? Who will check what is already known about that family? Will there be a house visit? Such protocols are dependent on the national context, but the important thing is that they are there.

Sharing information: but which information, and with whom?

Collaboration and cooperation logically imply the exchange of data, but sharing information is easier said than done. People have a right to privacy. Personal data is protected by the GDPR (EU Regulation 2016/679), the so-called 'Police Directive' (EU Directive 2016/680), as well as national legislation. Additionally, many professionals are bound by confidentiality. Social workers rely on confidentiality to be able to build relations of trust with clients. Police investigations and criminal investigations are also subject to confidentiality or judicial secrecy.

All of this appears to thwart the sharing of information, but that does not have to be the case. An important condition is that a legislative framework is created, in consultation with all partners, that permits and facilitates information exchange in certain cases. This should be limited in scope, however, so that confidentiality remains the default. This can be done by judging on a case-by-case basis whether or not information exchange is necessary, and by limiting it to only the most persistent crime problems or the most refractory crime groups. The actors involved should always weigh the pros against the cons (e.g. loss of trust), and it should always be established transparently from the outset which actors have access to which information.

Finally, information exchange is not limited to personal or confidential data. Different actors who are confronted with different aspects of the same problem could learn from each other's experiences. Discussing with their partners the successes and failures they have encountered would in itself be useful.

In the Netherlands, the Centre for Crime Prevention and Security (CCV) has developed a roadmap for an integrated approach to criminal families.⁵¹ When a local actor voices a concern regarding family-based crime, a quick scan is performed to gain more insight into the problem and to assess whether an intervention is necessary. If it is, the next step is to design the intervention around the relevant partners, and to make sure that all partners are able to perform their part of the plan.⁵² The third step is implementation, following which a fourth step is initiated in order to sustain the benefits.

Such standardised protocols are useful to help organise the workflow. What is even more important is that these processes involve the relevant actors, ideally in a one-stop-shop where actors share information and develop integrated solutions. To whom is the teacher going to signal that something appears to be irregular with a particular child's family? Who is going to examine the claim, and who is going to develop an intervention?

There is a need for collaborative organisations in which different stakeholders shed their light on specific cases and coordinate their actions. Again in the Netherlands, the so-called Care and Safety Houses successfully bring different actors under one roof.⁵³ They are essentially regional multidisciplinary collaborations of law enforcement, criminal justice, local authorities, and care and welfare organisations. As such, they bring the right actors together to address criminal families. Other cases dealt with by Care and Safety Houses include care avoiders who display anti-social behaviour, radicalisation, and serious disorder.

Policymakers are responsible for creating the structures that make this possible. Information flows, as well as flows of government funds, tend to be contained within certain policy levels (local, national) and policy domains (care, youth, police). Multidisciplinary problems such as criminal families can only be properly addressed if these boundaries are deconstructed and new interdisciplinary, collaborative structures are created.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Family-based crime is complex and diverse. What the criminal “clans” among the Mhallami Kurds in North-Rhine Westphalia, criminal families in North Brabant, and ‘ndrangheta families in Calabria have in common is a strong inter-generational transmission of criminality. Children born into families of criminals are at a heightened risk of becoming offenders themselves. There are various explanations for this, including social learning, social opportunity structures, labelling and stigmatisation, and even cultural and neuropsychological factors.

But that is where the similarities end. Criminal families may have different divisions of labour, be involved in different types of crime, and have different cultural particularities. Their crimes may impact a particular neighbourhood or be cross-border in nature. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Family-based crime is also complex. It is, by definition, both a crime problem and a problem of criminality, possibly complicated further by educational or school issues, socio-economic problems, unemployment or poor integration.

Effective prevention of family-based crime accounts for both the diversity and the complexity. Prevention should be tailored to the specific problem: a particular (extended) family, crime group, or crime phenomenon. At the same time, prevention should address the problem in all its complexity, integrating different interventions that activate different prevention mechanisms. Police should restore safety in unsafe neighbourhoods, for example by deterring criminals from offending, while social actors can offer children viable pathways to non-criminal lives and assist offenders in exiting a life of crime.

This paper discussed the basic requirements of an integrated yet tailored approach to the prevention of family-based crime, including the importance of theory and the role of systems and the collaboration of different actors. They can be concisely rephrased as the following recommendations:

- 1. A problem and needs assessment should be carried out to define and map the problem. This should include not just the family or criminal activities, but also the wider criminogenic environment.
- 2. There should be a coherent link between the problem and the solution. Relying on criminological theory, preventionists should be able to explain logically why an intervention contributes to a reduction in crime and identify the preventive mechanisms which are activated.
- 3. Family-based crime and criminal families are best countered with a holistic approach that integrates different types of prevention (developmental, community, situational, and criminal justice prevention) and activates multiple prevention mechanisms. The successful approach addresses active criminals and ongoing problems of unsafety, while at the same time preventing younger family members from becoming offenders themselves.
- 4. An integrated approach to the prevention of family-based crime requires the involvement of multiple actors. Law enforcement, social workers, the welfare system, civil society, the educational system, ... all can play a role in preventing family-based crime. Furthermore, they cannot do it alone. They should take collective ownership of the problem and proactively collaborate to jointly ensure security and tackle the problem of family-based crime.



AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO FAMILY-BASED CRIME

Did you know that crime sometimes runs in families?

Family-based crime is complex and diverse, so how could it be prevented?

BY A TAILORED

perform a problem analysis and needs assessment to define and map the problem

create a coherent link between the problem and the solution, and rely on criminological theory

& INTEGRATED APPROACH

integrate different types of prevention and activate multiple prevention mechanisms

involve all the actors necessary: law enforcement, social work, welfare system, civil society, educational system, ...

By working together on different fronts, family-based crime can be prevented. Discover more in our toolbox: eucpn.org/toolbox-familybasedcrime.

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