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## NEIGHBORHOOD CRIME PREVENTION & SAFETY

THE SAFETY OF A NEIGHBORHOOD is an important indicator of its overall economic and social health. Neighborhood crime prevention efforts are essential. Safe neighborhoods are necessary to foster common values and community quality of life. Neighborhood crime, on the other hand, creates fear and distrust among residents. Crime is more common in poorer neighborhoods with high population turnover density where bonds between residents are vulnerable. Crime also flourishes in neighborhoods where there are more opportunities for violence, such as illegal drug and gun markets (Reiss and Roth<sup>\*</sup>).

Left unchallenged, neighborhood crime contributes to community neglect and disintegration. There are few incentives to invest, either economically or socially, in an unsafe neighborhood. Residents are suspicious of each other and become demoralized about their neighborhoods, inhibiting cooperation. Community networks formed by youth emulating positive adult behavior suffer when people are fearful and distrustful (Moore<sup>\*</sup>). Creating safer through communities through neighborhood crime prevention programs is one way to disturb this negative feedback circle that weakens communities.

The famous “broken windows” theory (Wilson and Kelling<sup>\*</sup>) may constitute a way to break the cycle of community violence. Minor signs of neglect and disrepair, such as abandoned buildings and cars and street litter, send a message of neglect and absence of community behavioral standards. As a result, gang activities, drug markets, prostitution, and violent crime worsen (Moore<sup>\*</sup>). “Zero tolerance” policies that crack down on these minor offenses are based on the broken windows theory.

At the same time, it is notoriously hard to disentangle the effects of resident fear, illegal activities, and social breakdown on neighborhood safety (Reiss and Roth<sup>\*</sup>). Neighborhood crime prevention efforts must not neglect the deeper factors that create crime in the first place—lack of economic opportunities and weak social bonds between residents. In practice, efforts to create safer neighborhoods must go hand in hand with other community development activities such as attracting jobs and increasing access to affordable housing (Sampson<sup>\*</sup>).

### **Organizations wishing to lead neighborhood crime prevention programs should:**

- ➡ Assess the state of neighborhood safety and create a master plan for action. Conduct environmental surveys of the neighborhood, involving police and parks departments. Note places without adequate lighting and landscaping. Are there a lot of green areas, or is there lots of stone landscaping (possible fodder for rock throwing)? Note the traffic patterns in the neighborhood. Which routes are used

by residents, and where does there seem to be a lot of out-of-town traffic? Illegal drug markets are often located near roads with easy access to highways. (Glensor and Peak\*; Smith\*)

- 👆 Work with power companies to fix broken streetlights (Glensor and Peak\*; Smith\*).
- 👆 Coordinate landlord communication, which is often sporadic or completely absent in high crime areas. Troublemaking residents who are evicted often move to a nearby building with a new landlord. Sharing information on troublesome residents can make it more difficult for them to spread destructive behaviors. Communication also creates the opportunity for landlords to put informal pressure on each other to maintain the inside and outside of their buildings and their landscaping, which discourages crime and fosters resident trust (Glensor and Peak\*).
- 👆 Work to establish a community policing program. Community policing stresses problem-solving, frequent police contact with residents, and flexible intervention. The biggest value of community policing is the partnerships it fosters with existing community programs, if implemented correctly. Good programs do a great deal to reduce residents' fear of reporting crimes, even if their effect on crime rates is still unclear (Moore\*; MacDonald\*). It is imperative, however, to ensure that police support the program and are committed to share decision-making power with neighborhood groups (Roth et al.\*).

#### **Long term neighborhood crime prevention strategies:**

- 👆 Evaluate the program not only in terms of crime rates, but also using common sense measures that tap into how ordinary people live. Could a person walk through this neighborhood to work an 11 pm shift? Would mothers with children feel safe playing in a park? Have property values increased? (Roth et al.\*; Smith\*). In fact, expect reports of some crimes and disturbances to rise after the project begins. Residents will have less fear of crime and more trust in police (Glensor and Peak\*).
- 👆 Sustain support by police and other community organizations, or else crime levels and fear will probably revert to old levels (Glensor and Peak\*).
- 👆 Keep computerized records detailing neighborhood projects and community contacts. It is crucial to keep a paper trail because attrition is often high among residents and businesses in many higher-crime areas (Glensor and Peak\*).
- 👆 Keep other agencies, such as transportation and parks departments, involved (Glensor and Peak\*).

#### **What may not work in neighborhood crime prevention:**

- 👉 Zero tolerance has a mixed record. Cracking down on minor crimes is often useful in the short term, but over time it also makes it hard for arrestees to obtain jobs and can weaken families. It also can alienate residents from police. Zero tolerance programs should be implemented with community input and aimed at strengthening social organizations (such as enforcing loitering laws so a group can meet in a park) (MacDowell, Loftin, and Wiersema\*; Greene\*). In addition, it is imperative to have zero tolerance for illegal gun markets (Reiss and Roth\*; Roth et al.\*).
- 👉 Neighborhood watches are at best a short-term solution. It is better to focus on structural constraints to safety, such as police response to residents' calls (Sampson\*). Neighborhood watches should never try to assume the roles of police (Moore\*).

- Gun buybacks are unproven as a way to reduce gun violence. Although these programs generate publicity, cities such as Seattle that have bought back guns enjoyed no subsequent drop in crime (Kellermann, Fuqua-Whitley, and Rivara\*).

## CRIME PREVENTION RESOURCES: PUBLICATION FINDER



### [350 Tested Strategies to Prevent Crime](#)

*National Crime Prevention Council*

\$39.95 plus shipping and handling

Order online or by phone 1.800.NCPC-911.

A large reference book covering successful strategies in crime prevention. Included are strategies for neighborhood and civic groups, citizens, and local governments. Issues covered include community mobilization, prevention of drug use, youth safety, and creating safe public places. Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1995.



### [150 Tested Strategies to Prevent Crime In Small Cities, Counties, and Rural Communities](#)

*National Crime Prevention Council*

\$29.95 plus shipping and handling

Order online or by phone 1.800.NCPC-911.

A description of promising neighborhood crime prevention strategies, partnerships, obstacles, and contacts, organized by community population and concept (such as community policing). Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 2000.



### [Communities and Crime Prevention](#)

*Lawrence W. Sherman*

This chapter, from Sherman's larger survey of the crime prevention literature, describes several effective strategies communities have undertaken to reduce crime. He emphasizes that communities should pursue strategies that are consistent with their existing resources. Included are descriptions of gang violence prevention, community-based mentoring, and after-school recreation. College Park, MD: Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Maryland, 1997.



### [Case Studies of Community Anti-Drug Effort \(Text file format\)](#)

*Saul N. Weingart, Francis X. Hartmann, and David Osborne*

Case studies of twelve community anti-drug programs that illustrate the need for flexible planning, partnerships with police, and creative use of community resources. Most communities found that anti-drug efforts soon broadened into more comprehensive strategies in neighborhood crime prevention and safety. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1994.



### [Understanding Community Policing: A Framework for Action](#)

*Community Policing Consortium*

This monograph introduces the evolution of community policing, its core components, effective implementation, and assessment.

Chapter 3, Defining the Core Components of Community Policing, addresses the role of community partnerships. Washington, DC: Community Policing Consortium, 1994.



**[Designing Safer Communities:  
A Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design  
Handbook](#)**

*National Crime Prevention Council*

\$21.95 plus shipping and handling

Order online or by phone 1.800.NCPC-911.

A useful source for both practitioners and citizens, this book explains the theory and practice of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). It describes how to start a program, identifying and engaging partners, incorporating CPTED into new development, case studies, and resources for additional training information and technical assistance. Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1997.

**CRIME PREVENTION RESOURCES: WEB SITE FINDER**



**[Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence](#)**

The CSPV is a research institution based at the University of Colorado. It conducts research on the causes of violence, in particular youth violence. Its "[Blueprints for Violence Prevention](#)" project identifies successful crime prevention programs.



**[Community Policing Consortium](#)**

The Consortium is a partnership of five police organizations: International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, National Sheriffs' Association, Police Executive Research Forum, and the Police Foundation. The site contains general information about community policing, a resource toolbox, research, and a collection of success stories.



**[National Crime Prevention Council](#)**

The NCPC is a nonprofit organization that disseminates strategies for making neighborhoods safer and promotes public-service campaigns against violence. They offer [publications](#) and information on their various [crime prevention projects](#).



**[National Criminal Justice Reference Service](#)**

NCJRS is an office in the U.S. Justice Department that conducts research on violence and acts as a clearinghouse for research on justice and substance abuse prevention and treatment. They maintain an exhaustive [publications list](#) on topics such as law enforcement statistics, juvenile crime, substance abuse, and crime victims.

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