



Knowledge and skills needed for successful management of crime prevention strategies

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To cite this article: Teresa Silva (2018) Knowledge and skills needed for successful management of crime prevention strategies, *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention*, 19:1, 113-114, DOI: [10.1080/14043858.2018.1450011](https://doi.org/10.1080/14043858.2018.1450011)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14043858.2018.1450011>



Published online: 11 Mar 2018.



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Knowledge and skills needed for successful management of crime prevention strategies

The necessity for effective crime prevention measures to reduce criminal activity and increase public safety is being recognized as a priority in many countries. Intervention at a population-level through community-based prevention methods (Homel, Freiberg, & Branch, 2015) has come into the spotlight as regards academics and policy-makers with an imperative need to reinvent policing strategies (Lum & Hagin, 2017). In the frame of this international context, a new national crime prevention programme has been implemented in Sweden in 2017.¹ Based closely on the cooperation between public and private sectors, it also pursues the participation of the community, with a commitment to ‘combating crime together’. The importance of prevention science is well perceived in many areas such as medicine or risk management. When comes to crime, however, policy-makers and the public in general tend to point out law enforcement as being solely responsible for reducing crime rates in a reactive rather than preventive approach. The new national programme hopes to turn this view around. Its ultimate goal is to find better cost-effective and evidence-based solutions and to reinforce the feeling of safety among the population beyond exclusively policies of law and order. It aims at applying a new strategy to an old problem, namely that all the effort and financial resources spent on law enforcement agencies and justice systems fail to take perpetrators off the streets and deter crime (see Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014; Gabor, 2016; Holmgren, Holmgren, Kugelberg, Jones, & Ahlner, 2008).

Although the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention is the main organization responsible for coordinating the programme at a national level, the county administrative boards are the agencies who have the responsibility for putting crime prevention procedures into practice at a local level. The underlying plan of action is to decentralize the preventive interventions, since the local needs for such interventions may differ from one region to another. The programme was designed by experts and is rational and wise. However, one concern arises when it comes to its application, namely the lack of professionals at a local level with competencies and skills required to address crime prevention measures in a proper way. It is foreseeable that the national programme will fail in its essential goals if the human resources who coordinate its enforcement and take responsibility for putting into practice-specific crime prevention plans are not educated in many areas of criminology through the higher education system. It is not enough to promote the development of specific skills among local practitioners through short-time limited training activities such as the national programme contemplates. Knowledge of the theory of criminology and research methods is required.

Individuals who plan crime prevention initiatives must be competent to answer essential questions such as *What are the underlying causes of offending?* The essence of the problem to be solved should determine the solutions (Sutton, Cherney, & White, 2014). To achieve a good insight into the nature of whatever crime-problem there is to be solved, relevant data have to be collected, analysed, and interpreted, which requires proficiency in the use of scientific methodology. The subsequent selection of key objectives and responses to the particular crime issue requires a knowledge of the accumulated evidence of successful programmes (Sutton et al., 2014). It is, therefore, essential that crime prevention practitioners are familiar with: (1) crime patterns, (2) offender modus operandi, (3) risk and protective factors, (4) theories of crime, (5) what causes

of a specific type of crime can be manipulated, (6) how particular prevention methods reduce a particular crime problem and (7) the effectiveness of specific prevention methods in particular contexts. Furthermore, crime prevention practitioners need to develop skills in formulating plans of action and getting them implemented. Negative side effects of interventions must be predicted and dealt with beforehand, and cost–benefit analyses need to be carried out afterwards. To summarize, the development of any crime prevention plan should be carried out through problem-solving approaches and systematic planning (Ekblom, 2010).

The new national programme itself recognizes the complexity of the crime prevention discipline, since it points out that an overarching area required to implement effective crime prevention work is knowledge. The programme is committed to ensuring that an evidence-based approach is adopted when it aims at reinforcing the link between research and practice and encouraging the county boards to seek collaboration with universities. There are no doubts that problem-oriented and evidence-based rather than practice-based professional experience is the wisest approach (Gilling, 1996). We consider that the competences required to execute such tasks are the product of years of study and groundwork. It would be almost impossible that professionals who do not have a training in criminology at least at bachelor level can acquire the essential expertise to develop successful and efficient interventions. In conclusion, the new national crime prevention programme might fail if it obviates the most essential principal, namely that good strategies and planning in this area require professional criminologists to design them and put them into practice.

Note

1. Version in English (summary of the Swedish version) can be downloaded from <http://www.government.se/information-material/2017/06/combating-crime-together--a-national-crime-prevention-programme/>. Integral version in Swedish can be downloaded from <http://www.regeringen.se/49550c/contentassets/d0b212f61d0d49828e5e257f47e892ad/tillsammans-mot-brott---ett-nationellt-brottsforebyggande-program-skr.-201617126>.

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