

# Why Not Crime Prevention? A Canadian Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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**M**uch research has confirmed that prevention measures can reduce crime, and can do so more effectively and efficiently than the standard reactionary procedures of police, courts, and corrections. Many scientific studies (Hahn *et al.*, 1994; Olds *et al.*, 1999; Schweinhart, 2005), and several reviews of research (Sherman, 2007; Sherman *et al.*, 2002; Waller, 2006) have confirmed that prevention that targets risk factors related to crime can fundamentally reduce both victimization and offending.

In 1993, the *Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General* (the Horner Parliamentary Committee) in Canada analyzed available data and made several recommendations regarding crime prevention; these recommendations stipulated that at least 5% of the federal budget for police, courts and corrections should be allocated for crime prevention over a five

year period, and also that a senior official should be appointed to take the lead on crime prevention policy and program development (Horner, 1993).

Despite the many advances in policy, overall, little progress has been made in utilizing evidence-based prevention to reduce crime. Furthermore, in spite of an increase in the body of crime prevention evidence as well as multiple meta-analyses of this evidence by prestigious commissions and scientific bodies, the dominant response to crime control in Canada remains deeply rooted in the traditional criminal justice system and its associated concepts of deterrence and incapacitation.

## Evidence of Tackling Risk Factors

Many rigorous evaluations and systematic reviews have identified the importance of tackling risk factors in order to achieve large reductions in crime (see Waller, 2006; Sherman *et al.*, 2003; Welsh and Farrington, 2002; Farrington and Welsh, 2007; Borrows, 2003; Olds *et al.*, 1999; Schweinhart, 2005; Hahn *et al.*, 1994; Wolfe *et al.*, 2005). This has led many authoritative commissions, such as The United Nations (2002) and The World Health Organization (2002, 2004), to review and analyze such evidence, and to conclude that crime can indeed be reduced by tackling the risk factors responsible for its occurrence.

Much of this research, which reveals the effectiveness of prevention, has been validated through randomized control trials or by other empirical evidence (for examples see Olds *et al.*, 1999; Borrows, 2003; Hahn *et al.*, 1994; Wolfe *et al.*, 2005; Schweinhart, 2005). For instance, two commonly cited projects that demonstrate the potential to reduce crime by tackling risk factors include the *Quantum Opportunities Project* and the *Elmira (New York) Prenatal/Early Infancy Project* (Monchalin, 2009). The *Quantum Opportunities Project* is a randomized controlled trial that examined 50 disadvantaged teens (high school students/high school aged students whose families were receiving public assistance) in five different research sites, and assigned 25 of them to a group that received the programming, and 25 of them to a control group which received no programming (Hahn *et al.*, 1994: 6).

The programming included educational, developmental, and volunteer service activities (Hahn *et al.*, 1994: 6); these activities consisted of: computer skills training, tutoring and help with homework, life and family skills training, instruction for planning local events at school, as well as for guidance activities, such as planning for post-secondary education or employment following graduation (Hahn *et al.*, 1994; Greenwood *et al.*, 1996). The teens who participated in the trial were also given a small financial incentive to encourage dedication to the program. The rate was \$1 an hour; however, there were also bonuses of \$100 for completing certain activities, and any money that they earned was matched by the program to put towards a college fund (Hahn *et al.*, 1994; Waller, 2006; Greenwood *et al.*, 1996).

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An evaluation revealed that the teens who received the programming were more likely to graduate from high school, to enrol in post-secondary education, to receive an honour or award, and were less likely to become pregnant and drop out of high school as compared to the groups who did not participate in the program (Hahn *et al.*, 1994: 15). Furthermore, the amount of teens arrested after completing the program was 70 percent below the amount who were arrested in the control group (Waller, 2006: 29). The cost-benefit analysis revealed that for every dollar spent on the program, \$3.68 in benefits was returned (Hahn *et al.*, 1994: 24).

Another commonly cited example is the *Elmira (New York) Prenatal/Early Infancy Project* (for example see Waller, 2006: 26-27; Sherman, 1997: 10-15; Farrington and Welsh, 2002: 26-30; Greenwood *et al.*, 2001). This project was a randomized

controlled trial which took a sample of 400 women in the Elmira, New York area who were low income (85%), unmarried, or younger than 19 years of age (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 53). Public health nurses visited 200 of the high-risk mothers for 75 to 90 minutes on a weekly and/or monthly basis, while the other 200 women were left with to cope with the standard service delivery in their community (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 49). The 200 women who received nurse visits also received information regarding the health and development of their children; moreover, they were assisted in the development of supportive relationships with friends and family and other essential health and human services (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 49).

Evaluations of this program revealed that the 200 women enrolled in the prenatal project were less likely to abuse and neglect their children, with a remarkable 80% difference in verified cases of child abuse and

neglect as compared to the control group (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 44; Karoly *et al.*, 1998: 32). Mothers were also less likely to have rapid repeat pregnancies, and because they would have fewer children, they were able to maintain employment more reliably (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 44). They were also found to avoid substance abuse and other criminal behaviours more effectively when compared to the control group (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 44). Furthermore, the children of the mothers who received the visits had 56% fewer arrests than the control group by the age of 15 (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 44; Waller, 2006: 26). These results were replicated by similar programs in an African American community in Memphis, Tennessee, and a Mexican American community in Denver, Colorado (Olds *et al.*, 1999: 46). A cost benefit analysis conducted on the Elmira project revealed a net savings of \$18,611, or more than four times the cost of the entire program (Greenwood *et al.*, 2001: 133).

## Crime Prevention Implementation

As outlined above, existing research reveals that crime prevention can work effectively to reduce crime; however, there is also a growing body of knowledge emerging that offers suggestions concerning the implementation of such knowledge. Many guidelines have been created delineating the defining elements necessary for effective crime prevention implementation and cover many of the components described above (see the UN 2002; WHO 2004; Waller, Sansfaçon and Welsh, 1999; Shaw, 2001; Report by National Working Group on Crime Prevention, 2007; Linden 2000; National Crime Prevention Council, 1996; Waller, 2006). The growing consensus among experts is that different orders of government must mobilize agencies that can develop programs and/or execute other initiatives that can tackle one or more risk factors in a systematic way; these agencies must begin with a diagnosis of the gaps in services, formulate a plan to tackle those gaps, mount a concerted effort to implement programs to fill the gaps, and finally, evaluate the outcomes.

## Where Canada is Today: an Over-reliance on Reactive Measures

Despite the evidence, effective crime prevention has not been implemented to any large degree in Canada. Even though some individual programs are gaining ground, overall implementation has been otherwise minimal.

It was not until the 1980s that crime prevention actually began to achieve greater recognition in Canada. Reports such as Waller and Weiler's (1984) and Waller's (1989) report is what finally motivated the 1993 Horner Parliamentary Committee to recommend crime pre-

vention, and to call for a national crime prevention council (responsibility centre) at the federal level, which, being overseen by a senior official, would work in consultation with provinces, territories and municipalities. The report also echoed Waller's recommendation that 1% of the federal budget for police, courts, and corrections be reallocated to crime prevention over a 5 year period, with a stipulated increase to 5% after 5 years.

This report had a notable impact on the consideration of crime prevention in Canada, and in 1994, the federal government launched Phase I of a National Strategy on Crime Prevention and Community Safety, which eventually led to Phases II following its completion in 1997. In 1998, Phase II involved the creation of the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC); their recent *Blueprint for Effective Crime Prevention* states that they are now focused on the tackling of risk factors for crime in high-risk populations and environments. This new emphasis on risk factors offers reason to be optimistic.

However, the NCPC lacks both a responsibility centre and a key leader as recommended not only by many crime prevention experts, but also by the Horner Parliamentary Committee. Instead, the NCPC is an agency whose primary function is the delegation of funding only to those communities that have the ability to grapple with complex funding proposals. The NCPC's focus on supporting at-risk communities at the very least indicates a step in the right direction.

The NCPC presently receives 70 million dollars per year. At first glance, 70 million dollars appears to be a large sum; but when compared to the sums allocated to federal expenditures of the criminal justice system, the amount is actually quite minimal. This \$70 million is equivalent to less than 2% of the federal expenditures on criminal justice, which is an estimated \$3.6 billion<sup>2</sup>. However, given that the responsibility rests with these at-risk communities to apply for funding from the NCPC, it is no surprise that the traditional reactive modes of crime control have continued to experience sustained trends in government spending, while crime prevention efforts such as those outlined above have waned as they have received much less in the way of meaningful fiscal support.

## Promising Steps: Crime Prevention in Alberta

Despite the above findings, there are signs that crime prevention is being increasingly considered and implemented more substantially by some policy makers. On May 7, 2008, the Alberta government announced that they would be launching a 3 year \$468 million 3-pronged strategy of prevention (25%), enforcement (25%) and treatment (50%) (Alberta, 2008a, 2008c). This includes a responsibility centre with a central leadership figure, an action plan for prevention based on existing evidence, and an evaluation framework (Monchalín, 2009). When compared to other provinces within Canada, this begs the question: What happened differently in Alberta to advance the implementation of crime prevention tactics to any greater extent? Perhaps their utilization of Waller's (2006) vision of "Less Law, More Order" may illustrate some methods to overcome the entrenched resistance to prevention practice that has been historically experienced.

First, the Alberta government created a committee entitled *The Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force* (Alberta, 2008b). This task force was then provided with recommendations that were presented in an easily assessable format; in other words, the report (from the Institute for the Prevention of Crime, 2007) assessed their current crime situation and described solutions using simple terminology. They were also referred to "Less Law, More Order" (Waller, 2006), which is a book that communicates the effective crime prevention research in a language that both policy makers and voters can understand.

Second, the taskforce was provided with clear and practical recommendations. It is amazing that of all the provinces in Canada, Alberta, a province which is heavily dominated by a rightist government, choose to invest such large funds to crime prevention. This can be explained, at least partly, by the fact that they were given recommendations that were realistic and attainable, with projected goals that interconnected well with the realities of their current crime situation.

Third, the vision proposed by Waller (2006) shifts the public debate in criminology from one that focuses on the workings of the criminal justice system to one that focuses on vic-

tims by aligning victims of crime with taxpayers. Instead of questioning the system and its underlying mechanics, Waller focuses both on what can be done for victims and what will actually make a difference to various levels of crime.

Fourth, the vision put forth by Waller does not endorse radical recommendations such as eliminating police, corrections or courts; instead he proposes how much of the funding of the massive criminal justice budget should be re-allocated to prevention in order to make a difference in reducing the number of victims.

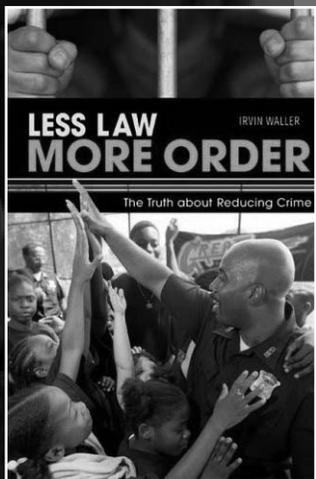
Finally, these recommendations were communicated at a time when there was a special task force. In Canada, the major commissions chaired by Archambault, Ouimet and Fauteux all resulted in major reforms of criminal policy in Canada. Even though not all of the recommendations become implemented, governments tend to adopt new laws and invest new funds related to these proposals. The Alberta task force, for example, used evidence-based research to interpret a public opinion survey and political concerns; as a result, all of their 31 recommendations, which were proposed just before an election, became government policy following the election. It remains to be seen over the next few years how successfully the recommendations will be implemented.

In conclusion, perhaps utilizing the vision put forth by Waller (2006) and reframing the question in criminology to a victim-focused debate may be one of the first steps in reducing crime through prevention.

<sup>2</sup> The federal budget for police, corrections and courts is estimated to be about \$3.6 billion. This includes \$1.9 billion to the police in 2006 (Beattie and Mole, 2007: 11), \$1.69 billion to corrections in 2005/2006 (*Corrections and Conditional Release Overview*, 2007: 25), and \$90 million to the courts in 2000/2001 (Taylor-Butts, 2002: 7).

# Less Law, More Order: The Truth about Reducing Crime (2006)

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Each year 24 million Americans are victims of crime. U.S. taxpayers spend more and more each year on police, prisons and judges—a record \$200 billion at last count. They incarcerate more and more persons each year—two million plus. Yet prestigious commissions show not only that this standard way of responding to crime is ineffective but that there is scientific proof that many projects that tackle risk factors that cause crime are effective. Rather than sending more people to jail or hiring more and more police, the author, and the research, shows that addressing problems in the community does more to prevent crime. This timely book illustrates in convincing detail what needs to be done to prevent crime and keep people out of prison.

Here, Waller shows that hiring public health nurses and investing in helping youth at risk to complete school and get job training is better than hiring more police; preventing family violence, banning hand guns and dealing with drugs through public health saves more lives than incarceration; getting close neighbors to watch out for us and better industrial design are more effective than criminal courts; smarter policing is better than more police; paying for services to support victims and guaranteeing them rights is better than more rhetoric. Addressing the social issues that lead to crime, rather than addressing crime after it happens, or putting stiffer penalties in place, will contribute to creating a safer society and to keeping kids and adults from taking the wrong path toward a life of crime.

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