Community Awareness/Mobilization

Community characteristics can serve as both risk and protective factors for criminal and delinquent behavior. The foundation for this premise dates to research by Shaw and McKay (1942). The authors noted that juveniles are more likely to become involved in delinquent and criminal behaviors when regularly exposed to crime. They pointed out that areas characterized by lower economic status generally have higher rates of delinquency as compared with higher income areas, and that lower economic areas are characterized by a wide diversity in norms and standards of behavior. The theorists suggested that the legitimate social institutions within these communities are not strong enough to compete with illegitimate groups in their ability to attract youth. As a result, criminal activity may appear equally or more attractive to youths as criminal opportunities may be both profitable and readily accessible options for employment or promotion. In addition, within communities composed of varying norms, delinquent or criminal behaviors (e.g., theft or drug sales) may be seen as proper in some groups and improper in others.

More recent research (Hawkins, et. al. 2000) suggests that several community-level factors predict violent and delinquent behavior. For example, being raised in poverty (Sampson and Lauritsen 1994), community disorganization (Maguin et al. 1995), the prevalence of drugs and firearms (Maguin et al. 1995), neighborhood adults involved in crime (Maguin et al. 1995), and exposure to violence in the home and elsewhere (Paschall 1996) all increase the probability of individual criminal or delinquent behavior.

For over a century, social reformers and community activists have attempted to address these "environmental" risk factors, and to reduce juvenile violence in their communities, by mobilizing community resources and organizing various types of "community action" campaigns. Some of the most common community-based strategies include local crime-prevention partnerships and alliances; broad-based community mobilization initiatives (generally designed to improve the overall quality of life and improve opportunities for everyone within the community); and policy change, media, and civil approaches.

Local Partnerships and Coordinating Councils

One of the oldest community-based strategies for combating delinquency is the formation of local partnerships, coordinating councils, and steering committees dedicated to battling crime. Such partnerships may take many different forms. For example, representatives from local police and probation departments may partner with public housing authorities and tenants associations in an

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effort to more aggressively enforce drug laws; for-profit corporations may partner with schools and employers to create vocational training and employment opportunities for poor youth; or representatives from several social service agencies may form a coordinating council to provide more integrated and intensive services to special needs youth.

A number of model programs currently feature such community coordinating councils in their overall program design. For example, Wraparound Milwaukee, and other wraparound programs, relies on interagency steering committees and treatment teams to coordinate the activities of local service/healthcare providers. Such coordinating councils and steering committees have been an important feature of community-based campaigns against delinquency for over a century. Their enduring appeal may, in part, stem from their emphasis on reorganizing or reallocating community resources—an approach which is often more feasible for low-income neighborhoods than introducing entirely new programs or institutions. However, the actual effectiveness of such steering committees and coordinating councils can vary tremendously from community to community, depending upon their objectives, their resources, and local leaders' capacity to collaborate.

Community Mobilization

The purpose of community mobilization is to facilitate change within the community to alter the basic patterns of social interaction, values, customs, and institutions in ways that will significantly improve the quality of life in a community. This sweeping change distinguishes community mobilization from more traditional interventions, which typically attempt to meet social policy goals by using a relatively defined and discrete mechanism (such as a new service or program) to produce desired changes in the lives of targeted individuals. Community mobilization, in contrast, attempts to change the everyday environment in communities in ways that will result in better outcomes for everyone living within a designated geographic area. This crucial difference in strategy poses a new and complex set of challenges and at the same time multiplies and complicates the issues that need to be addressed by those evaluating the initiatives.

Because communities differ significantly, mobilization efforts across communities will differ. Community mobilization reflects a set of community-based strategies, each designed to address different goals, target specific groups or neighborhoods, and work in different arenas of community action. What community mobilization efforts all share in common is communication and outreach. But community mobilization initiatives differ because of their different target audiences and different outcomes. The most common citizen mobilization programs are neighborhood block watch programs and citizen patrols. Neighborhood block watch programs follow from the premise that residents are in the best position to monitor suspicious activities and individuals in their neighborhoods. Evaluations of such programs, however, found little evidence that the programs have a significant effect on neighborhood crime (Lindsay, and McGillis 1986; Rosenbaum, Lewis, and Grant 1986). However, a recent meta-analysis by Bennett and colleagues (2008) did find an overall positive impact on crime due to neighborhood watch programs.

Policy Change

Many communities and States have changed policies and laws governing the sale and use of alcohol, cigarettes, and firearms to affect community-level risk and protective factors (Catalano, Loeber, and McKinney 1999). The theory driving these policies is that by making it more difficult to obtain these items it will be more unlikely that a community will be damaged by it.

The research evidence of preventing antisocial behavior by juveniles through policy change is promising. For instance, policies limiting the availability of alcohol tend to reduce both the

consumption of alcohol and the problems associated with alcohol use. Specifically, studies on raising the minimum drinking age to 21 (O'Malley and Wagenaar 1991), taxes on alcohol (Grossman, Coate, and Arluck 1987), and the licensing of establishments to sell alcohol (Holder and Blose 1987; Wagenaar and Holder 1991) all seem to reduce the prevalence of alcohol use. Similarly, studies of laws regulating the purchase and sale of firearms have revealed positive results (Brewer et al. 1995). For example, studies comparing rates of violent crime suggest that laws restricting the sale and purchase of handguns prevent gun-related crime (Sloan et al. 1988; Loftin et al. 1991). Finally, mandatory sentencing laws for felonies involving firearms appear to prevent homicides involving firearms (McDowall, Loftin, and Wiersema 1992; Loftin, McDowall, and Wiersema 1993).

Media Intervention

Media campaigns attempt to change public attitudes and standards, educate community residents, or support other community interventions. The advantage of media-based communications is that they can rapidly reach large numbers of people. In addition, some mediums (such as radio) allow you to target your audience very specifically, while others (such as television) permit you to reach a more diverse audience. In general, there are two types of media-based communications: free (e.g., articles in newspapers or on television or radio covered as a news story), and paid advertising. "Free" media is sometimes called "earned" media, because of the effort it takes to presenting one's group and its activities to reporters and news editors as a newsworthy event. Advertising, while sometimes costly, has the advantage of communicating without interpretation and commentary by intermediaries, such as reporters and editors, who may quote opposing views in a story about your event. A well-known media intervention is the truth® Campaign. It is a national smoking prevention campaign that uses advertisements with anti-tobacco messages targeted at youths ages 12 to 17 who are most at risk of smoking. Evaluations of the campaign found significant declines in smoking prevalence and smoking initiation (Farrelly et al. 2005; Farrelly et al. 2009). Other evaluations show that media interventions can be effective when used in conjunction with other interventions, such as curriculums to prevent smoking or other substance abuse (Flynn et al. 1992; Flynn et al. 1995; Goodstadt 1989; Pentz et al. 1989; Perry et al. 1992; Vartiainen et al. 1986, 1990).

Civil Remedies

Civil remedies use procedures and sanctions specified by civil statutes and regulation to prevent and reduce criminal problems and incivilities (Mazerolle, Price, and Roehl 2000). Many civil remedy actions seek to reduce signs of physical (broken windows, graffiti, trash, etc.) and social (public drinking, loitering, public urination, etc.) incivilities to break the cycle of neighborhood decline and decrease victimization (Mazerolle, Price, and Roehl 2000). Other civil remedies (e.g., youth curfews, gang injunctions, ordinances controlling public behavior, and restraining orders) concentrate on reducing social incivilities and preventing the opportunity for crime. Specifically, civil remedies generally aim to persuade nonoffending third parties (e.g., landlords and property owners) to take responsibility and action to prevent criminal behavior through the use of code enforcement, neighborhood cleanup, and nuisance and drug abatement statutes.

While the use of civil remedies as a crime prevention strategy is relatively new, it is growing rapidly in popularity. One reason is that civil remedies, unlike traditional criminal sanctions, attempt to resolve the underlying problems of criminal misconduct (Hansen 1991) and enhance the quality of life (Rosenbaum et al. 1992). In addition, they offer an attractive alternative to traditional criminal remedies because they are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement (Davis and Lurigio 1996). Finally, they also offer opportunities for frustrated community members to become involved in the process by documenting problems and pressuring the appropriate authorities to take action (Davis et al. 1991).

An excellent example of a civil remedy strategy is the Beat Health program in Oakland, Calif. The program uses civil remedies to control drug and disorder problems by teaming police with city agency representatives to inspect drug nuisance properties and coerce landlords to clean up properties, post "no trespassing signs," enforce civil law codes and municipal regulatory rules, and initiate court proceedings against property owners who fail to comply with civil law citations (Mazerolle, Price, and Roehl 2000). An evaluation of the program examined the impact of the program on calls for service for violent, property, drug, and disorder call incidents. The evaluation found a statistically significant difference for drug calls between the control and experimental groups. Specifically, it found a 7 percent decrease in the average number of drug calls per experimental site, while the average number per control group increased 54.7 percent. The authors conclude that the Beat Health sites improved relative to the control sites (Mazerolle, Price, and Roehl 2000). The study found improvement in drug problems in the areas surrounding the experimental residential sites. By contrast, the control treatment (patrol response) led to significant increase in drug problems, particularly at commercial properties.

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