1. Introduction

This paper looks at examples of recent violence prevention initiatives in Australia and relates these to the situational prevention model. The situational prevention matrix is useful in classifying existing violence prevention approaches, pointing to new ones and providing a framework for understanding the factors relevant to violence and its prevention. Although there have been a range of efforts aimed at preventing violence the focus here will be on strategies aimed at altering the situation in which violence occurs. Before describing these, a background on situational prevention will be provided and a perspective on violence that focuses on its rational choice dimensions will be briefly outlined.

2. Situational prevention

Situational crime prevention represents a highly pragmatic focused application of both theory of criminal offending and empirical analyses of crime patterns. The model was described by Clarke in 1995 (Figure 1). The theoretical framework is broad and eclectic, principally including routine activities and rational choice perspectives. Situational prevention is not incompatible with many of the broader criminological frameworks such as social learning and control theory. The main advantage is that it focuses the implications and assumptions of those broader theoretical positions in a way that is useful for crime prevention. It is the practical implications of theory for crime prevention that are both sought and tested through situational crime prevention.

Figure 1. The field of situational crime prevention (from Clarke, 1995).
The study of offender decision making complements the analysis of crime patterns to provide a firm base for planning crime prevention. The ways in which offenders process information is the concern of many criminological theories and the specific focus of the rational choice perspective. This perspective is useful in providing a starting point for examining what offenders’ focus on, how they value various factors, and what deters them. Knowing this we are in a better position to design strategies that are likely to be effective in influencing the choice to use violence. The critical question concerns the degree of rationality and predictability of offenders’ behaviour and the degree to which it is amenable to environmental/situational manipulation. This question is taken up in the next section.

The second component of situational crime prevention, methodology, has now been accepted widely as a key to successful crime prevention, this point appreciates that crime problems are social problems and must be approached to maximise natural systems of control, usually by facilitating the responsibility of “handlers”, “guardians” and “place managers” (Felson, 1994). This methodology shares much in common with the problem

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2 Felson (1994) described how the there are three pairs of components to consider for crime prevention in property crime: 1) offenders who are watched, monitored, controlled and influenced to some degree by “handlers”; 2) targets which are watched and controlled by persons who own them or have been assigned responsibility for their safe keeping, these persons are known as “guardians”; 3) places in which crime may occur which are influenced by persons who assume some responsibility or concern for what happens in the place, these persons are known as “place managers”. The inclusion of “place managers” expands the initial routine activity theory.
solving approach to policing promoted by Goldstein (e.g. Goldstein, 1990). The problem solving approach to crime prevention is widely endorsed (e.g. see Home Office, 1993).

Situational crime prevention is often distinguished from social and developmental crime prevention (Bottoms, 1990). Both social and developmental crime prevention can be thought of as criminality prevention and situational prevention as crime prevention (Bright, 1994). While criminality prevention attempts to change individuals so that the propensity to offend is less, crime prevention tries to deal with situations to make offending less likely. Interestingly the focus on situations sometimes draws situational prevention closer to approaches from the far left in criminology such as labelling theory because both of these perspectives do not seek to explain crime through “pathologising” the individual. Both seek to work with situational contingencies including the reaction of others to prevent crime.

The broad focus on crime patterns, complemented with a micro focus on offender decision making provides a useful combination for developing prevention strategies. There have been a number of frameworks developed by environmental criminologists within which to analyze offenders’ decision making. For example Cusson (1994) views the decision making of predatory offending in three stages: “search”, the “precriminal situation” and “tactics”. 3

The centrality of the criminal “search” is also highlighted in the approach taken by Paul and Pat Brantingham who have developed an understanding of offenders’ thinking that underlies the way in which a “committed” offender becomes aware of opportunities and the likelihood of success. The essential skill or training for criminals is a sense for opportunities. The Brantinghams (1993) introduced the concept of a “template” to describe the cognitive device that filters and stores relevant information regarding surveillance and risks and alerts the offender to the presence of an opportunity. Once a template is established the offender may feel “compelled” to offend simply not to miss a great opportunity in the same way that a shopper may buy a “bargain” at a store that they don’t really need rather than pass up a “steal”.

The concept of rational choice often tends to be misunderstood as “logical” or “good” decision making. However, the rationality underlying much offending behaviour is one where short term “gains” are weighed very heavily against long term “pains”. This

3 The “search” concerns all the decision making preceding the finding of an opportunity. This pattern of decision making may be highly conscious and systematic or it may be unconscious. The “precriminal situation” is the set of circumstances immediately preceding the criminal event and “tactics” refer to the actual execution of the crime.
process was illustrated well in Shover and Honaker’s (1992) study of persistent property offenders and other studies of offenders’ decision making. Shover and Honaker showed that the concerns of many of the property offenders were governed by a lifestyle that dictated life should be led as a continual “party”. Offenders would, therefore, continue to offend and disregard long term consequences which were seen as unimportant and irrelevant.

The study of offender decision making draws on a range of theories specifically concerned with understanding motives for aggression and violence. These will be discussed in the next section.

3. Theories of violence

The spectrum of theories on violence can be arranged along a continuum, as in Table 1, according to the degree to which violent behaviour is seen as the result of social forces or individual disposition. At the social end, theories such as the culture of violence (Curtis, 1975), historical analyses (e.g. Gurr, 1989) and cultural spillover theory (Baron and Straus, 1987) focus on the macro social forces. At the other extreme, psychological approaches focus on individual deficits such as: lack of intelligence; personality; self esteem; or social skills. In between the two extremes are a range of theories that see violent behaviour as explicable by an interaction of individual and social variables.

Table 2 Areas of research on violence from the cultural to the individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theories/perspectives</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Cultural attitudes</td>
<td>Beattie (1984), Gurr (1989),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Cultural attitudes</td>
<td>Gartner (1990), Baron &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subculture of violence</td>
<td>Cultural attitudes</td>
<td>Straus (1987)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic interactionist</td>
<td>Offenders’ beliefs</td>
<td>Athens (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social learning</td>
<td>Socialisation</td>
<td>Bandura (1973) ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social structure</td>
<td>Social constructs</td>
<td>Messerschmidt (1993)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 For a recent overview and collation of studies of offender decision making see Cromwell (1996). A number of theories have developed out of studies of offenders, such as Sutherland’s theory of differential association, Cressy’s subsequent elaboration of it and Sykes and Matza’s definitions of neutralisation techniques. These theories take as their point of departure the constructs (beliefs, values and attitudes) of the offender. Studies of violent men (e.g. Toch, 1969; Athens, 1980; Oliver, 1994) are principally concerned with the way violence is construed by the men.

5 Collinson (1996) and more recently Tomsen (1997) have made a similar point examining the lifestyles of many young men engaged in criminal activity.
A decision making approach views violence within a situational, interactional and social context. Explanations are developed that focus on the beliefs and perceptions of perpetrators of violence. For example, Felson and Tedeschi (1994)\textsuperscript{6} argue that all aggression is instrumental, goal oriented behaviour. In particular their approach directly relates situational and interpersonal factors to violence. It is the focus on motives - what attracts offenders into violence - that is a pervading theme of this approach. Understanding the topography of the attractions of violence, its benefits and its values, it is argued, does more to illuminate the relevant precursors of violence than treating it as a compulsion, a loss of self control or a biological drive. Accepting that the act of violence is the result of a decision, helps us focus on what the offender is trying to achieve through this action. However, the conceptualisation of violence as the result of a decision or choice does not, and should not, suggest that the decision making process is optimal.

Although many regard violent crime as largely dominated by impulsive and poorly planned outbursts, there is an underlying fabric of rewards and punishments which largely explain the spatial, temporal and demographic distribution of violence. The view that violence is non rational is most clearly debunked in those studies that show that the targets of violence are almost always those who are perceived by the perpetrator to be able to be coerced by violence (e.g. Felson, 1996). Even angry men do not generally “explode” against a superior force. Criminal violence is almost always an exploitation of a strategic physical advantage and is, therefore, “rational”. In contrast support for the frustration-aggression hypothesis and the view that violence can be “irrational” largely comes from laboratory research and may have limited application to prevention of violent crime (see Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1993).

The decision making approach to violence is compatible with, and can be seen as applying and extending, aspects of social learning theory, control theory and rational choice theory which themselves are highly related. The social interactionist position on violence draws together the range of social and individual factors that influence the

\textsuperscript{6} Felson and Tedeschi (1993) label their approach as “social interactionist”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rational choice</th>
<th>Decision making</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social skills</td>
<td>Cognitions</td>
<td>Dodge et al (1990), Novaco (1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self control</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Piquero &amp; Tibbetts (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Baumeister et al (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration-aggression</td>
<td>Psychological process</td>
<td>Berkowitz (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>Daly &amp;Wilson (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>Lorenz (1966)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
decision to use violence. However, these all largely depend on the configuration of certain situational elements. Indeed, violence is all about situations. The major works on criminal violence from Wolfgang’s seminal work on homicide to Luckenbill’s (1977) famous analysis of homicide as a situated transaction have been drawn to the dynamic and highly charged nature of the situation in which violence occurs. Understanding violence as a function of situations provides the ground for the situational prevention of violent crime. Savittz, Kumar and Zahn (1991) found that Luckenbill’s characterisation of homicide as being a “contest of wills” could be reasonably applied to 60% of homicide cases in Philadelphia. The same escalation effect seems to occur in domestic homicides as explained by Katz (1988). Katz argues that many of lethal actions of killers occur because offender and victim are trapped in a script which, at its culmination, demands a “last stand” to protect the killer’s honour. The killing itself, Katz argues is often justified by the killer as a “sacrifice” that must be made.

Phenomenological approaches consider violence as a functional response to the pressures and demands of a situation as the perpetrator perceives it. Violence is preceded in almost all situations by the offender’s perception of a significant and immediate threat (this mostly involves attacks on character, masculinity and/or social status). Furthermore, many violent offenders are under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs which may reduce the amount of complex information they can process including the ability to perceive alternative actions and/or strategies in the situation.

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7 Important here is the clinical work that examines the distorted perceptions and cognitions of violent offenders (e.g. Dodge, Price, Bachorowski and Newman, 1990, Hollin and Howells, 1989). Some of the particular cognitive distortions typical of violent men in a violent interaction were outlined by Novaco and Welsh (1989) who argued that the cognitive processing associated with violent behaviour can be viewed in terms of five areas of distortion. First, being generally angry disposes a person to see aggression everywhere in much the same way that a hungry person sees food everywhere (“attentional cueing”). Second, the more someone has been exposed to aggression, the more readily he or she will perceive aggression. Third, a tendency to perceive the behaviour of their victim preceding the assault as a result of a natural aggressiveness of the victim rather than a product of the violent situation (“attribution error”). Fourth, a deficiency in an ability to adopt alternative roles and a corresponding tendency to be sure that acting violently is the right way to act in a particular situation (“false consensus”). Fifth, a tendency to continue to believe one’s first impression concerning the other’s intentions rather than adjusting them as the situation changes (anchoring effect). This tendency is maximised by high arousal such as anger which tends to block the incorporation of information which may mitigate the offender’s original impression.

8 Luckenbill broke down the exchange of messages that occur in the escalation to the “showdown” to five crucial steps (1) the victim presents to the offender a set of actions or non compliance relevant to the offender (2) the offender interprets the victims actions as offensive (3) the offender retaliates with a challenge or violence (4) the offender retaliates or resists the offenders direction (5) both parties are committed to the confrontation.

The situational approach to violence demands that we examine all the factors that contribute to the situation in which violence occurs. It would be impossible to do this without examining the significant role of many victims in escalating or failing to defuse heated confrontations. Toch (1986) argues that violence should be seen as a transaction undertaken by a buyer and seller of this commodity and depends on both a victim and offender making themselves available. The role of victim is obviously not chosen but a choice to enter a violent transaction is.

4. The prevention of violence

Violence prevention in Australia has received a large degree of support with the launch earlier this month (June 1997) of the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (NCAVAC). Announced as a three year $13 million initiative, NCAVAC has actually been operating for about a year and has funded projects on the fear of crime and violence-prevention. Overshadowing this, the Federal government has allocated $500 million to buy back firearms and $6 million for associated training programmes, police information systems and a national public education campaign. The Federal government has also recently announced the allocation of $18 million towards a national suicide prevention strategy. Apart from these national initiatives each state has also launched many crime prevention plans as well as specific schemes aimed at particular forms of violence particularly domestic violence.

Although there is much motivation for the prevention of violence evaluation of the results of these initiatives will be quite challenging. Despite the enthusiasm for violence prevention, it may be some time before we are able to properly assess the results. In particular, as Mukherjee (1997) recently points out, it will be particularly difficult to isolate which components have had what effect on certain measures of violence. This will be discussed further in the section on gun control.

Many of the programmes developed in Australia focus on community or between education programmes for perpetrators or potential perpetrators of violence. Only a few actually work with the situation in which violence occurs and attempt to change factors relevant to violence. For example of the 57 programmes receiving violence prevention awards in Australia featured in a recent Australian Institute of Criminology publication (Mugford and Nelson, 1996) only 6 (10%) involved actual changes to the environment. However, these attempts tend to be evaluated, have a clear type of behaviour that is targeted and also can demonstrate results in reducing this behaviour. Two specific examples that will be discussed below concern controlling alcohol related violence in public places and reducing the availability of weapons. Another area (not featured in Mugford and Nelson, 1996) that has shown considerable success concerns reducing the amount of violence in transport systems. Carr and Spring (1993) reported a 42% decrease

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10 Fourteen involved educational programmes, 16 involved interventions with offenders Four concerned bullying (Mugford and Nelson, 1996). Bullying prevention programmes operate in many ways along the principles of situational prevention by removing rewards for bullying and removing disinhibitors.
in violent offences on Victoria’s public transport system after initiating a comprehensive situational preventing programme. This follows a similar experience in Holland (Hesseling, 1995). In Table 2 some of the recent Australia programmes are placed in various components of the situational crime prevention matrix.

4.1 Reducing drinking related violence

The first example concerns a common form of “street” violence in Australia that occurs in Australia. It is common and, one could argue somewhat traditional, in Australia, for males to congregate in licensed premises, particularly on a Friday or Saturday night and become intoxicated. Often part of the “night out” is to get into a fight with other males (Tomsen, 1997). This has led to violence “hot spots” in entertainment districts. As violence becomes more predictable many of those wanting to avoid the violence “transaction” stay away and the concentration of those interested in violence intensifies.

Table 2 Situational violence prevention in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increasing perceived effort</th>
<th>Increasing perceived risks</th>
<th>Reducing anticipated rewards</th>
<th>Controlling disinhibitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Restraining orders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflecting offenders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Transportation arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* The “patrol”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Controlling facilitators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Gun control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Alcohol control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arrest of DV perpetrators</td>
<td>Encouraging women to leave violent relationships</td>
<td>Advertising campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better services to victims</td>
<td>Limit access to children Fines/damage payments</td>
<td>Changes to the law - new offences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More encouragement for victims to report</td>
<td>Clearer sentencing and more vigorous prosecution</td>
<td>Sentencing and treatment programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This problem has been met with a strategy aimed at a whole area and enlisting the cooperation of licensees, police and local authorities. This arrangement has seen success in
reducing violence at a number of locations in Australia. The best known and documented are in Surfers Paradise near Brisbane and Geelong near Melbourne in Victoria. The key elements in the approach (known as the accord in Geelong) are to improve police services, get licensees to form an agreement about the control of alcohol availability and plan ways to avoid conflicts developing and escalating. Homel and his colleagues evaluated the impact on levels of violence and found substantial and significant reductions (for a recent summary see Homel, 1997). An evaluation of the Geelong accord is about to be released.

In Perth, Western Australia, there have now been a number of “accords”, the best known is in Fremantle. Homel’s evaluation of the Surfers Paradise scheme found that once these areas get cleaned up more people feel comfortable coming into the entertainment zones and businesses prosper. Although we will have to wait for a full evaluation of the Fremantle Accord there are some promising early signs with a 14% drop in the total number of offences in Fremantle in the most recent quarter for which figures are available (May-June-July 1996) compared to the same quarter in 1995 before the accord began and a similar drop in the number of calls requiring police attendance. This despite the fact that part of the Accord arrangement was an enhanced police service to licensees including a direct line for police support. Offence report statistics compiled by the Fremantle police on their category “assault related offences” in Fremantle show the number of offences for the first 5 months of 1997 (9) were only 15% of the number in the first 5 months of 1996.

The accord was structured around, amongst other things, the principles outlined in Table 2 that clarified roles and expectations particularly for staff in licensed premises.

**Table 2 Some basic principles of the Fremantle Accord.**

| 1. Hotel and club staff to monitor and control intoxication levels. |
| 2. Discourage the excessive consumption of alcohol. |
| 3. The promotion of alcohol to be discouraged. |
| 4. Promote alternatives to alcohol - non alcoholic drinks, water, food. Lower alcohol beers to be sold at a cheaper price. |
| 5. Security of patrons of licensed premises recognised as the responsibility of the licensee as it is for controlling disorderly behaviour, noise, etc. |
| 6. Crowd controllers were also expected to help out in dealing with disturbances in the vicinity of the licensed premises. |
| 7. The establishment of an incident report register to monitor all incidents in or around the licensed premises. |
| 8. Police more actively involved with business managers - regular meetings to discuss issues and areas for co-operation etc. |
| 9. Security staff to be trained in communication and conflict resolution skills. |
| 10. More stringent checks for underage drinkers. |

**4.2 Community Patrols**
Another area in which there has been signs of success concerns remote areas where Aboriginal drinking and violence is a major problem. This method involves patrols operated on a voluntary basis by members of the Aboriginal community intervening with individuals who are intoxicated and likely to be involved in disruptive behaviour. The concept of a patrol began in the Northern Territory but there are now 15 patrols operating in various parts of Western Australia. Broadly these are community based and run to address Aboriginal street drinking, violence and other problems. Harry Blagg (1995) at the Crime Research Centre has documented the development and success of these patrols:

The emergence of Aboriginal citizens patrols is one of the most dramatic developments in the Aboriginal justice field since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and could be a watershed in Aboriginal-police relations. The patrol model has the capacity to neutralise a number of the core elements of over-policing and the conflicts that stem from them.

The patrols are made up of volunteers from the local community who patrol areas around the small desert towns and Aboriginal settlements where alcohol related violence usually occurs. Those on the patrol intervene directly to remove intoxicated and disruptive individuals. Intoxicated persons are taken to a safe place (for example a sobering up shelter if one is available). In some cases where fights break out the community holds a meeting the following day to establish what happened and admonish those responsible. The patrols, therefore, deflect a common form of violence and a common source of Aboriginal-police tension for the criminal justice system.

There have been fairly dramatic reductions in arrests and detentions of Aboriginals in the rural areas since the patrols have been initiated (see Figure 2). Blagg (1995, p. 77) notes one town (Halls creek) recorded a reduction in the annual detention rate from 200 to 44 between June 1994 and June 1995 after the Patrol was introduced in 1994.

The work of Aboriginal Patrols has been facilitated by the development of structures and facilities such as sobering up shelters. There is value in approaching this kind of social problem from a health rather than a policing perspective. In taking drunken Aboriginals to a sobering up shelter we are deflecting offenders - that is firstly defining the situation in such a way that helpful, rather than controlling, intervention is required and then attending to the psychological/social issues involved. Not only is the initial disruption not defined as a crime but the way it is handled does everything to ensure that it does not escalate (as typically occurs with traditional methods of urban policing). This could also be seen as working with inhibitors to violence.

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11 One of the first patrols was the Julalikari night patrol started in 1989 in the Aboriginal community of Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. A similar programme (the Tangentyere night patrol) began in 1990 around Aboriginal settlements near Alice Springs.
Figure 2. Number of drunken Aboriginals in Fitzroy Crossing Lockup by Month (1994-1996)

Note: Patrols in Fitzroy crossing began in mid 1995.

All of this improvement cannot be attributed to the Patrols. Structural changes took away many of the incentives for the police to intervene, arrest and detain drunken Aboriginals. Thus at the same time as the Aboriginal community was becoming more organised and the patrols being developed there were also increasing incentives placed on the police to move away from this area. Another reason for the likely success of the patrols was that the emphasis from the Aboriginal perspective was not on policing, control, deterrence and so on but in caring for those involved and solving problems within the community. Traditional western concepts of urban policing applied in the remote areas were (and are) simply not appropriate.

The Patrol approach to crime control can be contrasted sharply with the approach to preventing domestic violence through arrest. As Sherman (1993) has since documented, this approach seems to work well with those offenders who have a lot to lose through the arrest - that is those with a stake in conformity. However, for those at the bottom margin arrest seems to exacerbate the problem. Sherman (1993) developed his “defiance” theory.

12 The meal allowances paid to the police to cover the costs of providing meals to prisoners were stopped. It was widely believed that these meal allowances more than adequately covered the actual costs of providing meals and provided a direct financial benefit to the police involved. Also more documentation was required for both arrests and detentions and more scrutiny was required on detentions. Therefore in terms of policing interventions the rewards were reduced, the costs and efforts increased. This perhaps suggests that the situational prevention model can be applied to all parties to the violence transaction - including “victims”.
to explain the attitude and response of many of the recalcitrant violent offenders. This is relevant to understanding the success of situational prevention of violence in Aboriginal communities. Violence is prevented by removing the availability of participants interested in a violence transaction and involving those with credibility in offenders’ eyes who have an explicit interest in removing confrontation. For Aboriginals in remote areas there is little deterrent effect associated with arrest and detention on the part of a system that is largely seen as the enemy. Returning to Toch’s notion of the violent transaction traditional policing of drunken Aboriginals often brings together parties that to varying extents are open to the transaction. For many Aboriginals confronting police and even getting arrested was not a problem but a solution to a problem. Certainly violence is an unsurprising result to a confrontationalist style of policing.

Because of the difficulties associated with alcohol availability Aboriginal communities have agitated for changes to the liquor licensing laws. Restricting the hours that alcohol is available has led to reductions in alcohol consumed, hospital admissions and crime. The reverse has also been documented recently in Perth (Chikritzhs, Stockwell and Masters, 1997) in a study released into the effect of extended trading permits which showed significant increases in the rate of assaults and disturbances following the granting of extended trading permits.

4.3 Summing up on preventing alcohol related violence.

The general lessons from the success of the Accord and the Patrols seems quite clear. Firstly the community is involved in managing the issue and the interventions. Second an approach is taken which quickly normalises and neutralises disputes seeking to defuse and deflect rather than confront and exacerbate. Further a common quality of both approaches is that they contain a web of expectations requiring certain behaviour and thus intervene at a point often well before an actual offence has been committed. In Cusson’s language this is precriminal situational prevention - preventing crime by dealing with the precriminal situation. In intervening this early the efforts can actually be thought of as preventing the establishment of disinhibitors as rowdy and confrontational situations are likely to act as a cue to many potential offenders that forceful assertion of the self (violence) is required.

4.4 Gun control

In Australia on the 26th April, 1996 a disturbed young man armed with a military style rifle shot 35 citizens, in and around, a famous tourist site in Tasmania. This prompted a huge acceleration of the stalled gun reform process. Although certain members of the government and administrative community had been agitating for tighter gun laws, in the memorable words of one Premier, “It will take a massacre in Tasmania” to bring gun law reform. After the tragedy in Tasmania there has been considerable public support and bi-partisan political support for restricting the availability of guns. The Government thus embarked on a massive campaign to buy back licensed firearms, to grant an amnesty on unlicensed firearms and to publicise the new laws.
At last glance (13th June 1997) almost half a million firearms had been returned and the Federal Government had paid out about $212 million for these.\(^\text{13}\) As noted earlier the evaluation of this initiative will be hard to undertake. Gun related homicides and suicides have actually remained the same or decreased as a proportion of the total figure over the last 80 years in Australia. In particular firearm suicide and homicide rates have decreased since 1992 (Mukherjee, 1997). Given this decreasing trend the particular contribution of the recent reforms will be particularly difficult to measure.

The literature on the gun availability-violence link is extensive.\(^\text{14}\) Highlighting the importance of weapons are a number of recent works from the United States. Lynch (1995) makes a strong case that rather than social structure or a “culture of violence” what best explains the differences between the homicide rate in the US and Canada is the availability of firearms, in particular, hand guns. Similarly a number of studies (e.g. Blumstein, 1995) have pointed out that trends in homicide in the US are very much influenced by handgun murders.

Examining trends over the past 20 years Blumstein (1995) demonstrates that although the adult murder rate in the US has been declining juvenile murder, particularly those committed with guns has escalated sharply since 1985. Further this increase was more pronounced amongst African - American juveniles. Blumstein explains this trend as a result of the changing drug marketing arrangements and legislation that, because it is lighter on juveniles, encourages the use of juveniles as armed go-betweens in drug deals. The distribution of homicide, therefore, can be partly explained through an analysis of the costs and benefits for violence. This is illustrated most cogently by the finding that mandatory sentencing enhancements for those convicted of using a gun in a crime are effective in reducing the homicide rate (McDowall, Loftin and Wiersma, 1992). This study, based on the homicide rates in six cities in three states of the US reinforces the point that patterns in violent behaviour conform to a logic of costs and benefits at an individual level.

5. Conclusion

This brief consideration of the theoretical basis for applying situational crime prevention to violence and recent examples in Australia shows the value in attempting to change the situation rather than relying on education and treatment alone. Situational prevention helps to focus on specific situations in which violence occurs and prevent those situations gravitating or escalating to the point where violence is more likely.

\(^\text{13}\) The gun buy back scheme has a home page: http://www.gun.law.gov.au

\(^\text{14}\) For recent reviews see Cook and Moore (1995) and Reiss and Roth (1993).
This approach can be thought of as comprehensive in that the range of factors in the environment which contribute to, or support, the expression of hostility are addressed. Creating a safer environment demands that we attend to the situations in which violence occurs and work to create human environments that mitigate against escalation to violence. In this endeavour violence prevention helps diminish the acceptability and use of violence by all parties and thus is likely to assist in the general reduction of the use of violence in society as a whole. The other lesson to emerge from studies of successful violence prevention programmes is the importance of re-establishing and supporting roles and responsibilities amongst those that can exert, in whatever small way, a guardianship capacity. Part of this process requires that the community see violence prevention as “safety maintenance” and as part of its responsibility and act in ways to promote pro-social behaviour and an atmosphere that is antithetical to the kind of acrimony and hostility characterising violent confrontations.

References


