

Fact sheet: CPTED and awareness campaigns to prevent stealing from person

What does this strategy involve?

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) involves the design and management of the built and landscaped environment to limit opportunities for crime to occur. It can be used to prevent 'steal from person' offences in locations that attract a large number of pedestrians or locations that experience periods of limited pedestrian movement.¹ CPTED includes increasing natural surveillance by encouraging more people to make use of pedestrian thoroughfares, removing obstructions that make it difficult for users of the space to see one another, or improving the overall amenity and creating a sense of ownership among users. Specific CPTED measures include the installation of information booths in underused areas of train stations and redesigning the layout of a shopping area to increase pedestrian movement and improve natural surveillance.

Awareness campaigns can provide potential victims (e.g. tourists and the elderly) with information that will help them, such as by being aware of where their bag is at all times. Awareness campaigns can also provide potential offenders with information about pre-existing security measures (e.g. closed circuit television – CCTV) that are being used in a particular location. This information is usually communicated through:

- large posters placed in visible locations throughout a space;
- media campaigns; and/or
- instructing employees working in an area experiencing high rates of offending to provide people visiting the area with information about risk factors and the location of crime hotspots.

Awareness campaigns can also involve security audits that provide information to the management and staff of commercial premises (such as retail stores or licensed premises), whose customers may be at greater risk of victimisation due to premise design or management practices.

¹ The development of these strategies has been informed by a combination of the best available evidence, a strong theoretical crime prevention framework and practitioner experience. There is strong evidence underpinning many of the strategies that are described in the fact sheets. However, in some of the fact sheets, the evidence in support of the strategies and the case studies used to illustrate them are not particularly recent, which reflects the lack of recent evaluation activity. The evidence in support of some of the strategies is also not as strong as for others and in these cases, the strategies draw more heavily from theory and practice. There is significant scope to improve the evidence base by increasing the amount of crime prevention activity that is rigorously evaluated.

How does the strategy work?

CPTED involves the design, variation and management of physical structures and landscaping to reduce the opportunities for crime, creating safer places that are less prone to being targeted by offenders and making people feel safer. Surveillance can be maximised by installing large windows, increasing the space between stalls in a market and encouraging pedestrian movement through underused areas of train stations by introducing an attraction such as information booths. Areas that are open and allow users to see one another are less appealing to offenders as there is a perceived likelihood that that they will be observed, identified and apprehended.

Awareness campaigns provide information to potential offenders to raise their awareness of measures that are being used in a space to prevent 'steal from person' offences. This information can increase the risk an offender associates with the commission of an offence, which may actually deter them from committing the offence. Awareness campaigns can also encourage individuals (to consider the implications of their actions (e.g. leaving their bags unattended) or inactions and discourage particular behaviours (e.g. enforcing store policies such as customers having to leave their bags at the doors) that create opportunities for steal from person offences to occur.

What does the evidence say?

Few strategies that have aimed to prevent steal from person offences have been subject to rigorous evaluation. However, three studies do suggest that strategies involving an awareness campaign or CPTED can be effective in reducing the incidence of 'steal from person' offences. Conversely, one multifaceted strategy that involved CPTED appeared to result in an increase in 'steal from person' offences. This strategy involved a number of interventions delivered together in a busy central London subway station. It is unclear precisely why the strategy was ineffective, but the increased enforcement and detection rates could have contributed to an increase in offences. The partial implementation of one of the interventions may have diminished the effectiveness of the strategy.

The evidence is unclear as to whether strategies involving either an awareness campaign or CPTED can have a long-term impact on 'stealing from person' offences. An evaluation of one strategy that involved the application of CPTED principles in the redesign of a busy marketplace found that the effectiveness of the scheme actually increased over time.

Where does the strategy work best?

Effective strategies targeted spaces that attract high volumes of pedestrian traffic (e.g. marketplaces and train stations) or locations that experience periods of limited pedestrian movement. These locations were identified as having a problem with 'stealing from person' offences. Effective strategies often targeted areas/facilities that had persistently high rates of offending over an extended period of time.

What will you need to implement this strategy?

The accompanying handbook provides more detailed information on how to implement this strategy, but briefly:

A good understanding of your local problem

The studies reviewed for this project showed that effective strategies targeted locations with high rates of recorded offences, such as train stations or marketplaces. Identifying problematic spaces requires access to information to identify 'steal from person' hotspots, as well as information about the characteristics of these offences, to inform a more targeted approach.

Strategies need to be targeted at specific types of 'stealing from person' offences, such as bag theft or pickpocketing. Prior experience suggests that busy locations that attract large numbers of pedestrians are particularly attractive to pickpockets. This is because large crowds can be used as cover for pickpocketing and makes pursuit difficult. At the same time, busy spaces are also distracting, which means that people using that space are not paying close attention to their belongings. This is particularly the case in social venues, such as pubs and nightclubs where patrons may be intoxicated or distracted by loud music and talking to their friends. In this situation, the problem may involve the theft of unattended belongings, such as handbags.

Involving key stakeholders

It is important that the people who will be involved in providing surveillance and/or modifying the layout of an area are involved as early as possible, as it is important that they are both enthusiastic and committed to the strategy. For example, public transport workers can ensure that surveillance points (i.e.. information desks) in public transport facilities are manned at all times. Similarly, retail store owners and staff will be responsible for ensuring that lines of sight in retail stores are not obscured. Local government has an important role in facilitating the involvement and ensuring the commitment of these stakeholders. They should be involved in the early development of the strategy and on an ongoing basis.

CASE STUDY 1: Oxford Circus Station

This multifaceted strategy was implemented in a busy central London subway station that was experiencing high rates of 'steal from person' offences. Interventions delivered as part of the program included:

- the replacement of the walls in the room used by train station operators with waist length glass windows so that station workers could see commuters and vice versa;
- the installation of four information booths around the station;
- the installation of 34 passenger alarms the majority of that were monitored via CCTV;
- 24/7 monitoring of CCTV cameras; and
- frequent British transport officer patrols.

An evaluation of the scheme found that during the one year post-intervention period, recorded 'steal from person' offences increased from 380 incidents (per year) to 407. Although this may have been the result of increased enforcement and higher rates of detection as a result of the numerous measures, the evaluators partially attributed this to the absence of a measure focused on raising awareness of potential offenders (and victims). Further, the evaluators noted that only one of the information booths was manned at any point in time. This strategy highlights the importance of effective implementation. Given that only one of the four information booths was manned at any one time (when it was planned that all four were to be manned at once), the overall effectiveness of the strategy was diminished.

CASE STUDY 2: Birmingham marketplace

This strategy was targeted at a popular marketplace in Birmingham (United Kingdom) that was experiencing high rates of 'steal from person' offences. During the early design and implementation stages of the strategy, the program developers conducted an in-depth analysis of the site's crime problem. In particular, they wanted to know the actual size of the 'steal from person' problem, the location of theft hotspots and who was being targeted by thieves. The analysis found that theft from customer's shopping bags was of primary concern for the community and stall owners.

The strategy focused on redesigning the layout of the market space. In particular, narrow passageways were widened from two to three metres and the stalls were rearranged to allow for more space between them. This additional space allowed for easier pedestrian movement and natural surveillance opportunities. In addition, the building's interior and exterior lighting were upgraded.

An evaluation found that in the two year post-intervention period, 'steal from person' offences in the marketplace decreased by almost 70 per cent. Further, there also appeared to be a slight diffusion of benefit effect; 'steal from person' offences also decreased in areas adjacent to the intervention site.

CASE STUDY 3: Southport Marketplace

This strategy was targeted at a busy shopping strip in Southport (United Kingdom) that had recently experienced an escalation in 'stealing from person' offences, especially those involving older victims. During the early stages of the design and implementation of a response to this issue, the local police consulted with the community about the problem of bag theft through community meetings and other consultation processes. Community members expressed concern about the age of victims and made it clear that they would support an initiative to reduce bag theft in the marketplace.

The strategy involved a number of interventions, which included a poster campaign that provided locals and tourists with information about how to avoid becoming victims of crime. Further, the local council published crime prevention tips for locals and security personnel conducted a series of security audits of local businesses to identify crime risk factors. An evaluation showed that stealing from person offences decreased from seven reported incidents in the pre-intervention period to zero during the post-intervention period. While these numbers are small, they suggest the strategy, which had a relatively low cost, had a positive impact.

Endnotes

Case Study 1: Webb B & Laycock G 1992. *Reducing crime on the London underground, an evaluation a three pilot projects*. London: Crime Prevention Unit, Home Office
http://www.popcenter.org/library/scp/pdf/189-Webb_and_Laycock.pdf

Case Study 2: Poyner B & Webb B 1992. Reducing theft from shopping bags in city center markets, in Clarke RV (ed), *Situational crime prevention: Successful case studies*. Albany: Harrow and Heston

Case Study 3: Fairbrother G & Sowerbutts A (nd). *Reducing theft from elderly victims in shopping areas*. Southport: Merseyside Police.
[http://www.popcenter.org/library/awards/goldstein/2010/10-24\(F\).pdf](http://www.popcenter.org/library/awards/goldstein/2010/10-24(F).pdf)

Further reading

For further reading in this area, refer to the accompanying handbook and literature review.

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