

# TOWARDS A KNOWLEDGE-BASED CRIME PREVENTION.

The importance of understanding  
the causes of crime.

by

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# **The problems of creating an effective crime prevention**

Some experiences from studying  
and working with local crime  
prevention partnerships

# MAJOR COMMON PITTFALLS

LACK OF A KNOWLEDGE-BASED FRAME OF REFERENCE

URGENCY; “It has to happen today, or if not, at least tomorrow”

A FOCUS ON ACTION RATHER THAN CONTENT

LET A THOUSAND FLOWERS BLOOM

SPREADING RESOURCES THIN - TOO MANY PROJECTS

TOO REACTIVE

NOT TARGETING FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES



THE MAIN ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS  
SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTATION AND  
DELIVERY, NOT MAKING STRATEGIES  
AND ACTION PLANS

LOCAL RESIDENTS SHOULD HELP  
DEFINE THE PROBLEMS, NOT COME  
UP WITH THE SOLUTIONS.

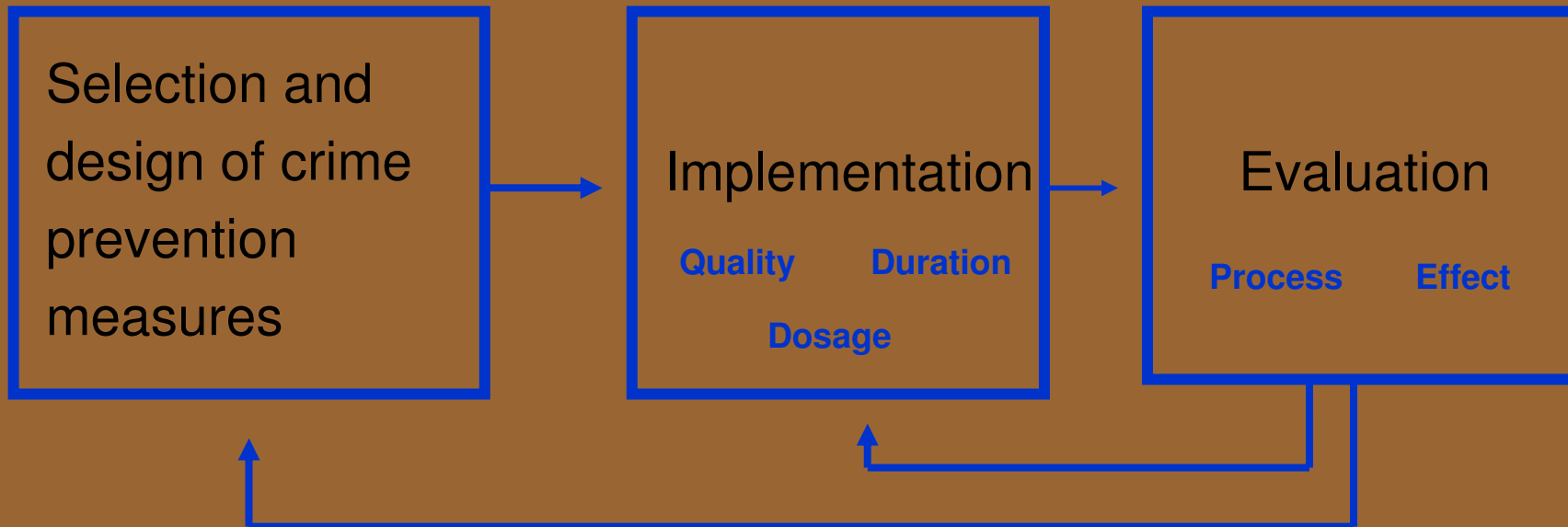
The problem of creating an effective crime prevention

**IS EVIDENCE-BASED  
CRIME PREVENTION  
THE SOLUTION?**

There is an increasing  
acknowledgement of the  
importance of the  
evidence-base  
in crime prevention:

**BUT DID WE FORGET  
ABOUT THE  
KNOWLEDGE-BASE?**

“assessing the existing knowledge on the effectiveness of crime prevention programs. It shows what works, what does not work and what is promising in preventing crime” (Sherman et al,2002)



The first question in crime prevention  
should not be

What works?

but

**How does it work?**



**Outline of the key steps in  
creating a  
knowledge-based  
crime prevention**

## **1. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF CRIME?**

Knowledge base (theory and key findings from empirical research into the patterns of crime) How does it work?

## **2. WHAT ARE THE KEY INTERVENTIONS** that can reduce crime by addressing the causes of crime?

Evidence base (evaluations) What works?

## **3. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO ORGANISE CRIME PREVENTION NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY,** to most effectively deliver these interventions?

Organisation and implementation (operations research).

## **4. WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO FUND CRIME PREVENTION TO ACHIEVE THE STRATEGIC GOALS?**

The problem of establishing causes

**IS A RISK FACTOR APPROACH  
TO CRIME PREVENTION  
THE SOLUTION?**



## Risk factors and the problem of causation.

“A major problem with the risk factor paradigm is to determine which risk factors are causes and which are merely markers or correlates with causes” (Farrington, 2000)

“Existing research tells us more about criminal potential than about how that potential become actuality of offending in any given situation” (Farrington, 2002)

“Little is known about the causal processes that intervene between risk factors and offending” (Farrington, 2003).

The problem of which risk factors are causes

**The importance  
of establishing  
causal mechanisms  
(processes)**

To specify how the cause produce the effect

## CAUSAL MECHANISMS

“In the natural sciences no event or process is regarded as having been satisfactorily understood unless its actual or possible mechanism has been unveiled.”

Bunge (1999)

“Any hypothesis that does not go on to specify how the effect of risk are carried forward (either through changes in the organism or changes in the interaction between the organism and the environment) falls short.”

Rutter (2003)

**What are the  
causes of crime?**



# Individual, Setting, Situation and Action

## Unit

Individual	Body, biological and psychological make-up, experiences, agency (powers to make things happen intentionally)
Setting	Part of environment to which the individual are directly exposed and reacts to; configuration of objects, persons and events accessible to the individual through his or her senses.
Situation	Perception of alternatives and process of choice (as a result of the individuals intersection with a particular setting).
Action	Behaviour (acts) under the person's guidance.

## ARGUMENT

Peoples' acts (and hence also their criminal acts) are ultimately a consequence of how they see their alternatives (react to the environment) and make their choices (judgements, deliberations).

Individual factors and environmental factors may be regarded as causes (or part causes) of crime to the degree that they can be shown to influence peoples' perception of alternatives and the process of choice relevant to their engagement in acts of crime.

**INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS (Propensity)**

**BEHAVIOUR SETTING**

**ACT**

Monitoring

Deterrence

Executive Functions

Self-control

Choice

Act of Crime (Rule-breaking)

Moral values and Emotions

Moral Judgement

Perception of Alternatives

Other

**SITUATION (motivation)**

Temptation

Provocation

Opportunity

Friction

Mechanisms

# **Cause of crime and crime prevention**

## **BASIC ARGUMENT**

Effective crime prevention are likely to be those measures that ultimately successfully targets the following causal mechanisms:

**Moral Judgements**

**Self-Control**

**Temptations**

**Provocations**

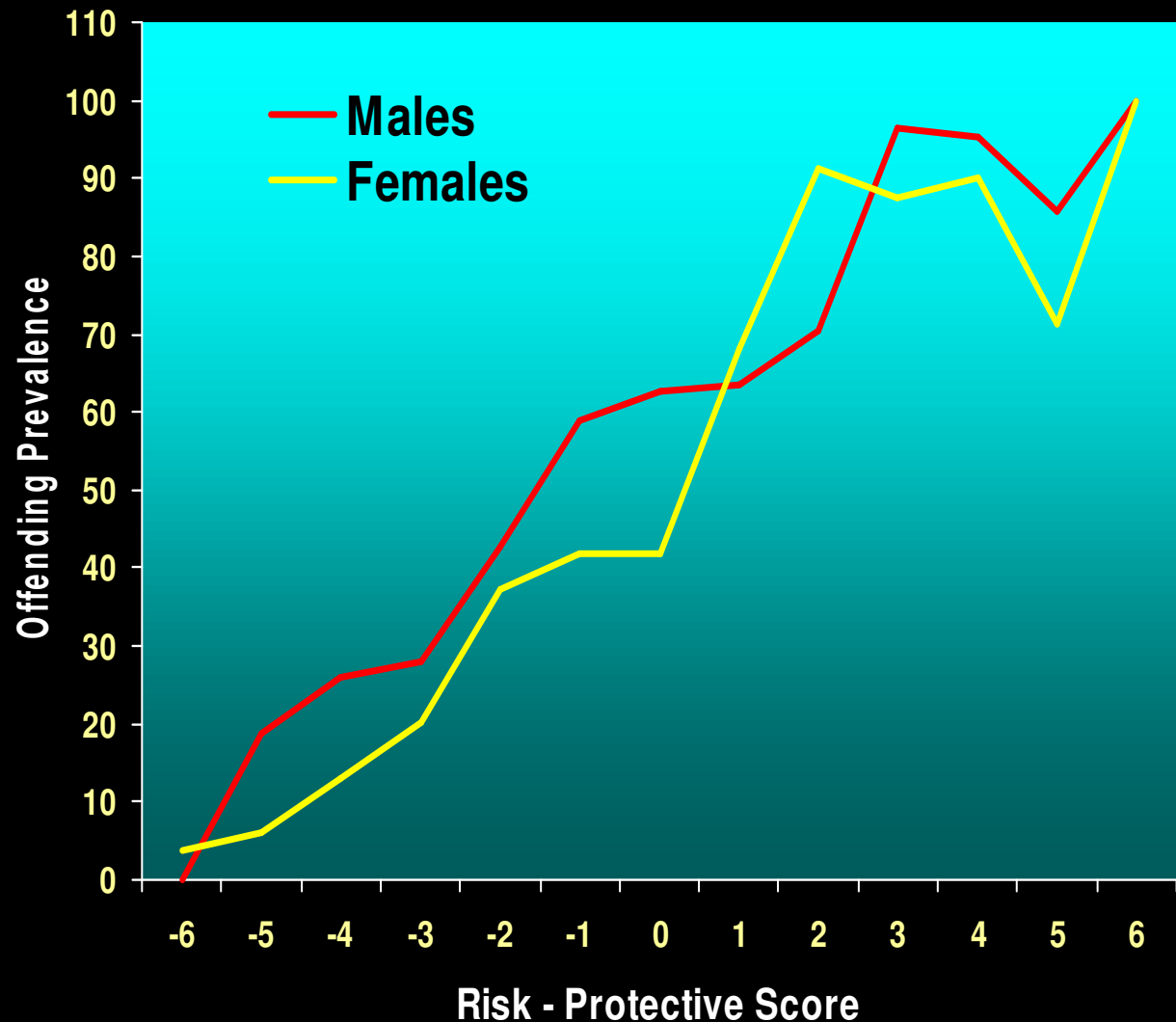
**Deterrence**

**The importance  
of the interaction  
between individuals'  
and their environment**

# Offending Prevalence by Risk-Protective Score for Males and Females

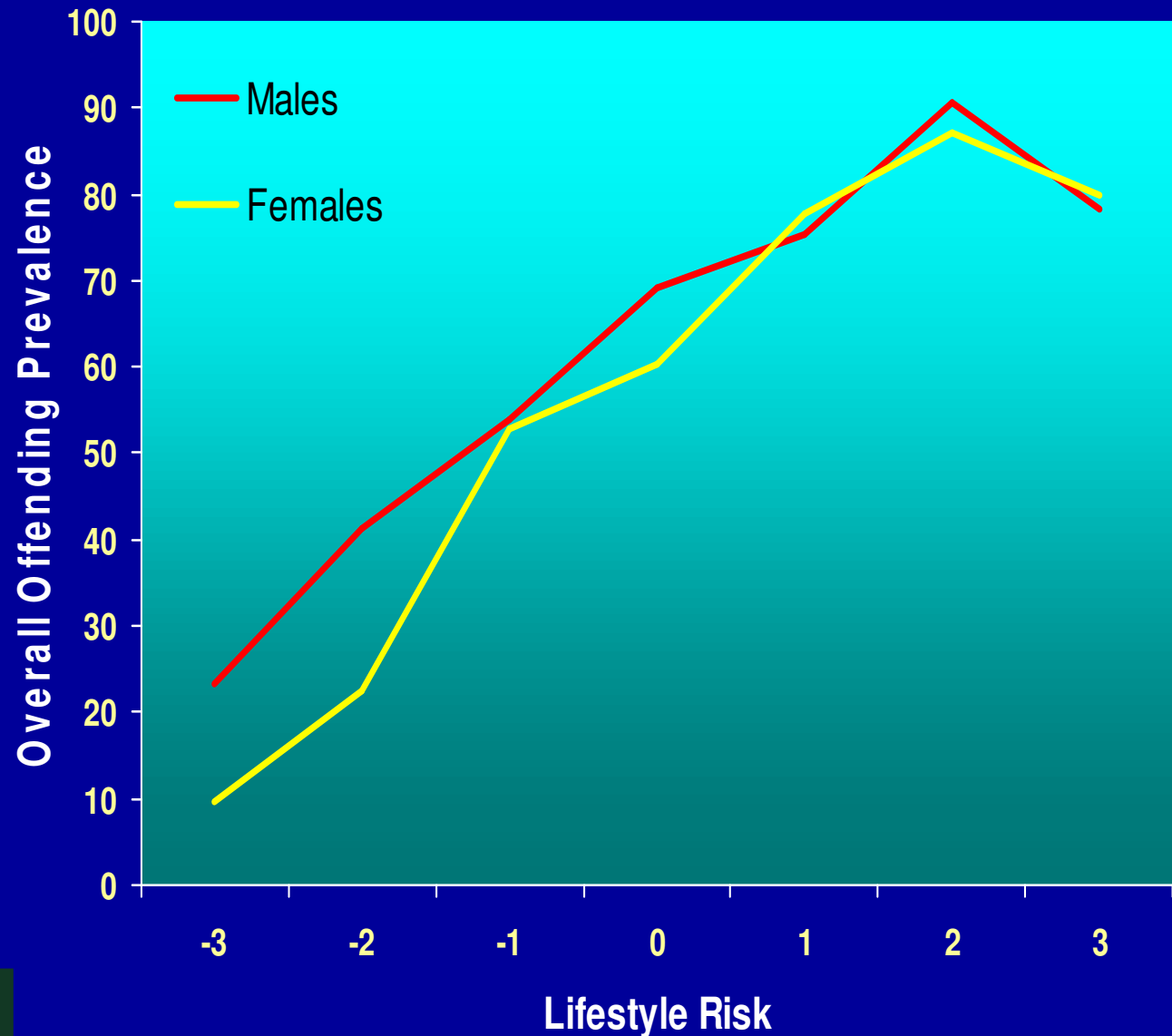
Almost All Youths With a High Risk Score Offend, While Almost None With a High Protective Score Offend

The Relationship Between Risk and Protective Scores and the Prevalence of Offending Holds for Both Males and Females



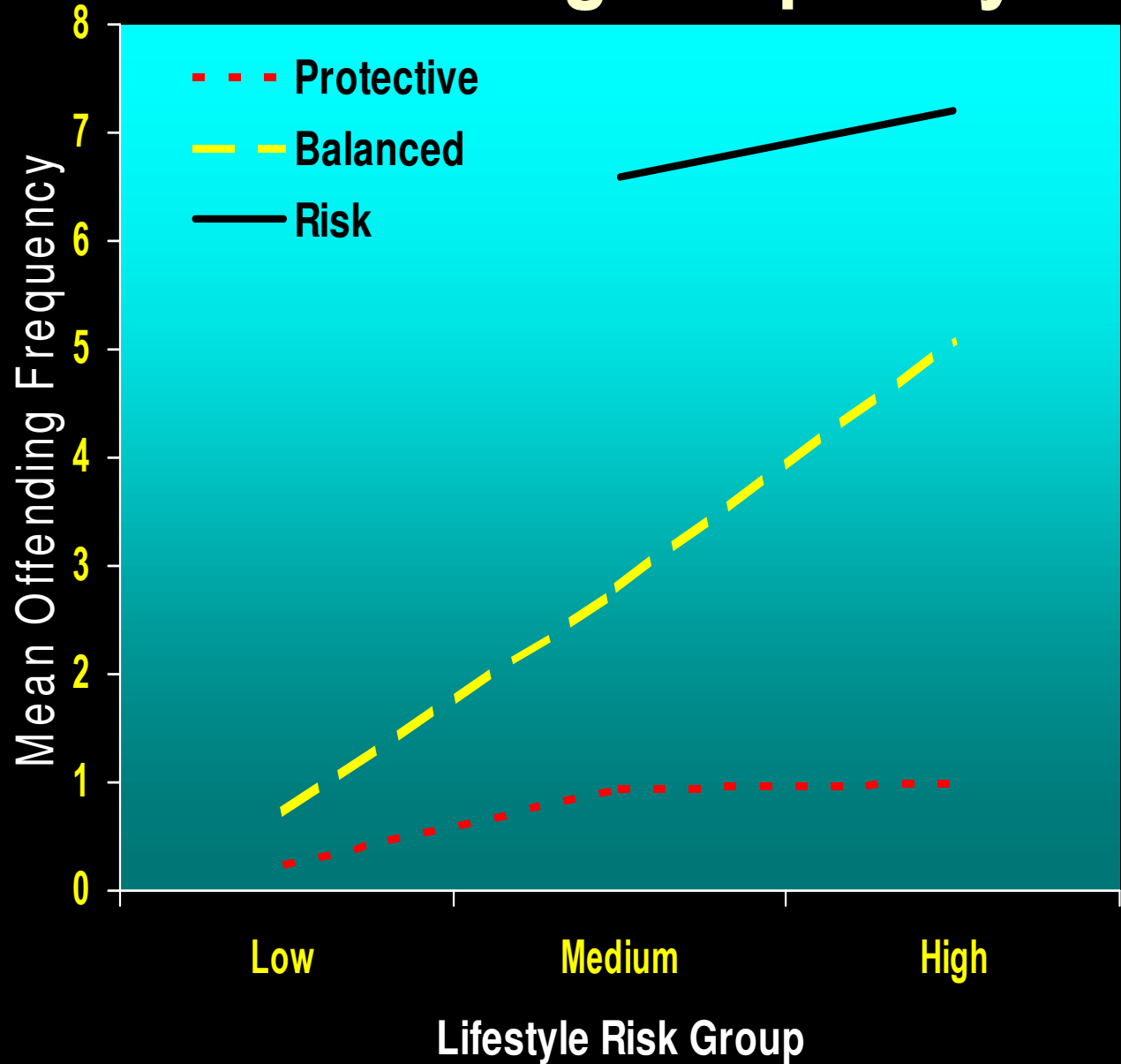
# Offending Prevalence by Lifestyle Risk Group and Gender

The Higher the Youths Lifestyle Risk the More Likely They Are to Have Committed a Crime





# Life-Style Risk and Risk-Protective Score Interactions: Overall Offending Frequency



# Interpretation of Adolescent Offender Categories

Risk-Protective Group	Lifestyle Risk	Interpretation
Risk	Little Additional Influence	Propensity Induced
Balanced	Strong Influence on Frequency of Offending	Lifestyle Dependent
Protective	Influence on Occasional Aggressive Crime	Situationally Limited



## KEY QUESTIONS

**Why** would this intervention prevent crime?

For **whom** would this measure prevent crime?

and in **what context**?

**The importance  
of having a  
developmental  
perspective**

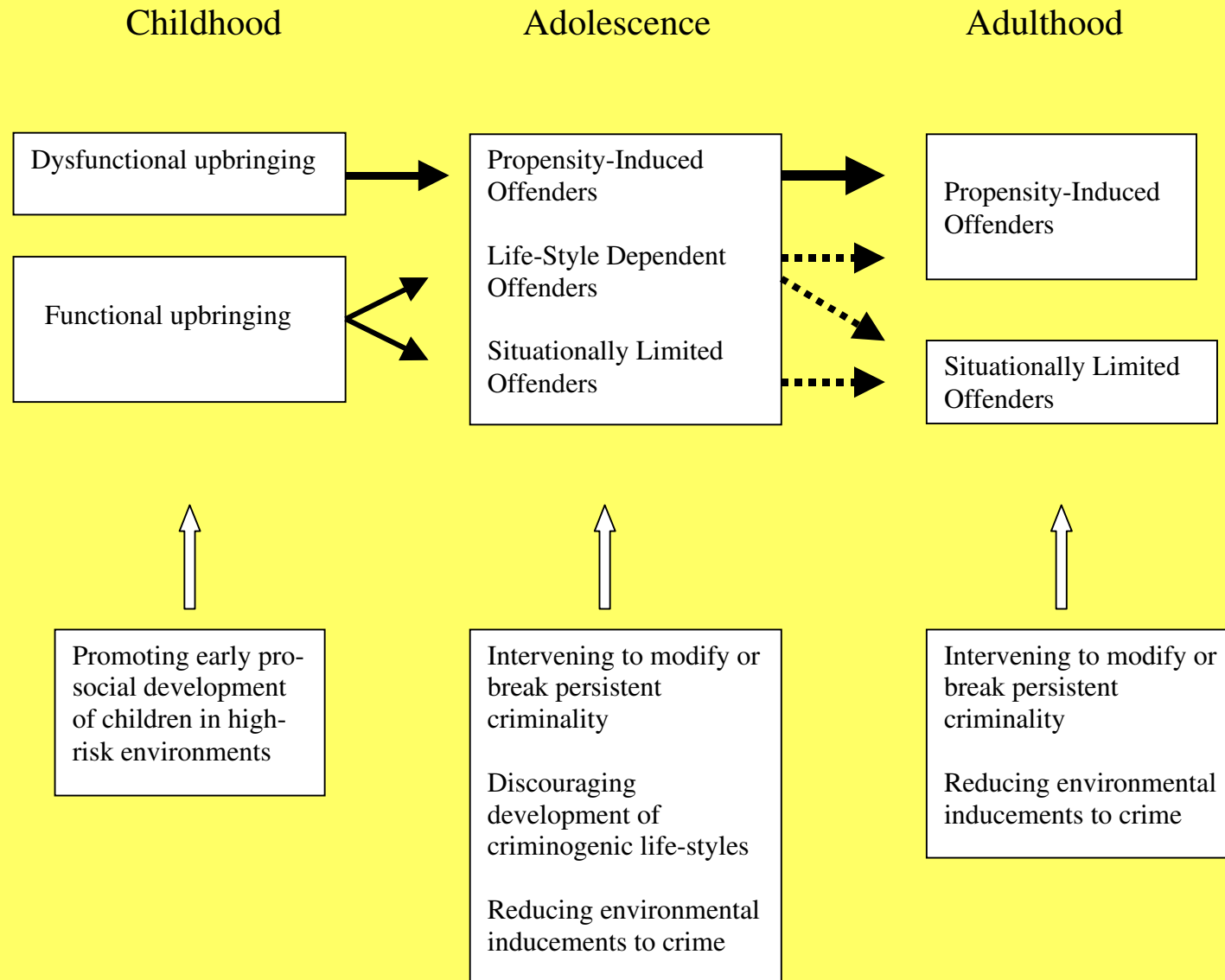
## SUGGESTED STRATEGIC GOALS

### REDUCING SERIOUS OFFENDING BY

1. Promoting early pro-social development of children in high-risk environments to reduce the risk of later sustained careers of criminal involvement.
2. Intervening to modify or break criminogenic cognitive and behavioural patterns of already persistently criminally active individuals.

### REDUCING “EVERYDAY OFFENDING” BY

3. Discouraging the development of criminogenic life-styles.
4. Reducing environmental inducements to crime.



*Tentative outline of links between strategic goals and local interventions*

Strategic Goal	Target Context	Target Developmental Phase	Key Local Actors	Key Types of Interventions	Specific Programmes*
<b><i>Reducing serious offending by</i></b>					
A. Promoting early pro-social development of children in high-risk environments to reduce the risk of later life sustained careers of criminal involvement.	Disadvantaged neighbourhoods Dysfunctional families	Prenatal, Childhood	Family Day-care Primary school Health care Social welfare	Home visits/parenting programmes Child social skills (cognitive and behavioural) programmes Psychiatric care (parents) Alcohol and drug treatment (parents) Psychiatric care (child) Truancy and bullying programmes Early identification of dysfunctional families	
B. Intervening to modify or break criminogenic cognitive and behavioural patterns of already persistently criminally active individuals.	Dysfunctional individuals	Adolescence, Young adulthood	Criminal justice Social welfare Health care	Multisystemic therapy programmes	
<b><i>Reducing everyday offending by</i></b>					
C. Discouraging the development of adolescent criminogenic life-styles.	Functional families	Late childhood, Adolescence	Family Secondary school Police Local Authority Community	Parent information programmes Teachers information programmes Parent-teachers programmes After-school pro-social activities programmes Bullying and truancy programmes Alcohol and drug consumption programmes Youth gang and recruiter programmes	
D. Reducing environmental inducements to crime.	Crime hot-spots	Adolescence Adulthood.	Police Private companies Local authority Private households	Situational techniques of crime prevention	

\* Preferably evidence-based.

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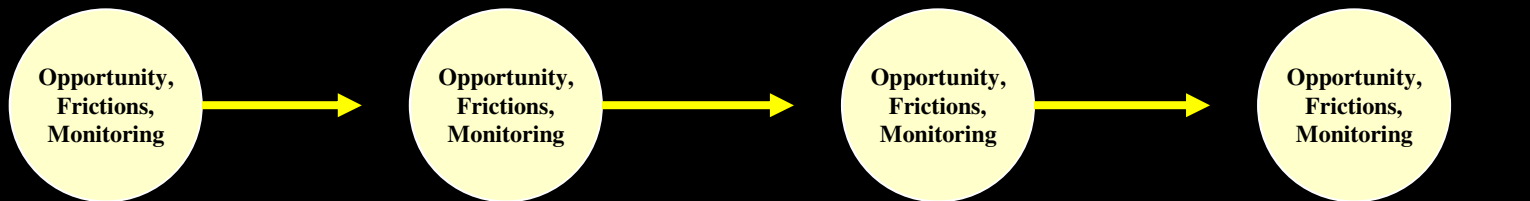


THE END

—————> = Development/Stability and Change Mechanisms  
 .....> = Influence/Situational Mechanisms

**ACTIVITY FIELD**

(The settings the individual participate in)



**Actions**

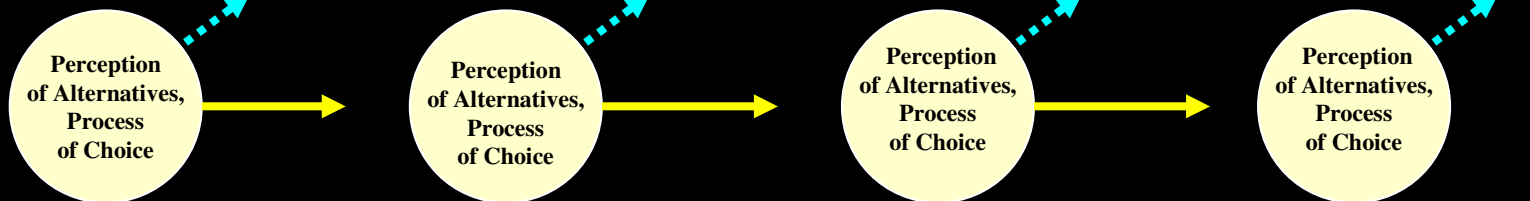
**Actions**

**Actions**

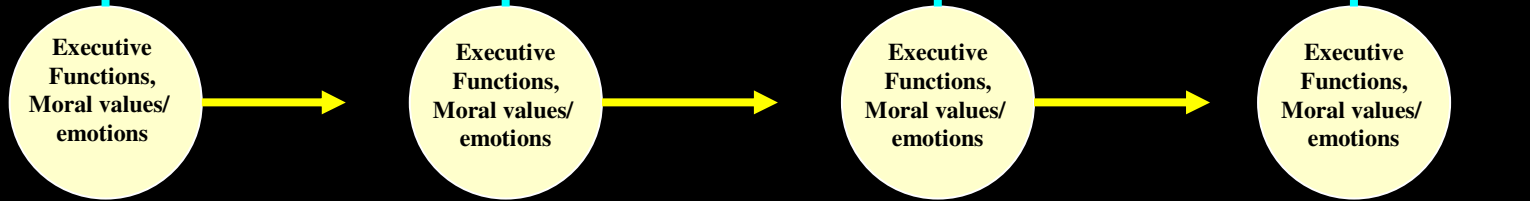
**Actions**

**SITUATIONS**

(Intersections of individual and setting)



**INDIVIDUAL**



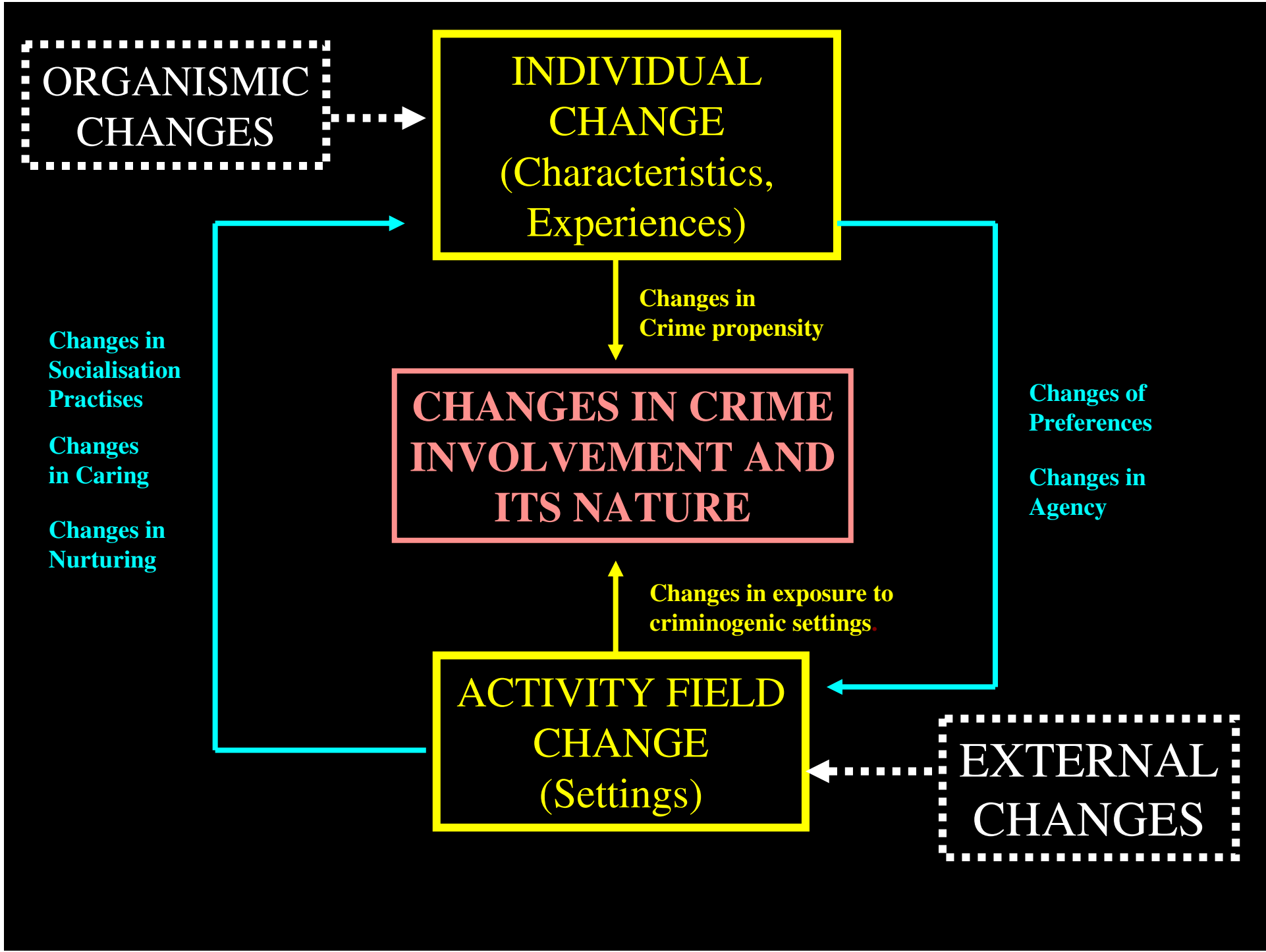
**Infancy**

**Childhood**

**Adolescence**

**Adulthood**

**HOW TO START  
TO SORT AMONG  
ALL SUGGESTED  
CRIME PREVENTION  
MEASURES**



Individuals engagement in acts of crime is ultimately a question of their

## **Moral judgements and Self-control**

as applied to the

## **Temptations and Provocations and The Risk of Punishment**

they perceive in the setting in which they take part

Self-control only comes into play when an individual considers an act of crime

Moral judgements are made, and self-control is exercised in a setting in response to temptations and provocations and the risk of punishment.

# Problems of Crime Prevention

**“One finds it difficult to imagine that advances in modern medical practise would have been achieved were every local practitioner to have been a problem solver with his or her patients. Nor would the advances in public health have been achieved with a myriad of untested programs **lacking sound causal inference of how to produce the effects**”**

**Albert J. Reiss Jnr  
Professor Emeritus  
Yale University**

# Problems of Crime Prevention

**“Most interventions to prevent crime are based on untested ideas rather than upon systematic basic or applied science research demonstrating the interventions produce the intended effects and that they are cost-effective. They are rarely conceived and implemented by scientists or specialists in human and organizational engineering. Rather, they are conceived and initiated by administrators and practitioners of private organizations and government agencies who base them on their assumptions about what cause crime, what interventions will affect those causes, and how to organize and implement the intervention”**

Albert J. Reiss Jnr  
Professor Emeritus  
Yale University

**INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS (Propensity)**

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Perception of Alternatives

Other

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Temptation

Provocation

Opportunity

Friction



**Some  
key concepts  
in crime prevention**



- What is Crime?

- What is Prevention?

- What is Crime Prevention?

Human beings are rule-following agents

Moral rules are rules that stipulates what is right or wrong to do (or not to do)

Criminal law is a set of moral rules, but not all moral rules are criminal laws

What distinguish a law from a moral rule is mainly the formal sanction that is associated with a breach of the rule

**CRIME** is an act breaking a moral rule defined in law.

- **There is a close link between the concept of prevention and the concept of causation**
  - **Prevention is to stop something from happening that else would have happened.**
  - **Prevention is an intervention**  
**that removes the cause**  
**or**  
**that change or modify**  
**the relationship between two events**  
**so they are no longer**  
**causally related**

Preventing a crime is to successfully intervene and stop an individual from breaking a moral rule (defined in law) that he or she else would have committed.

**Crime prevention** is interventions that successfully hinder the breaking of a moral rule (defined in law) that else would have occurred.

# QUESTIONS

Why do individuals'  
break moral rules  
(defined in the law)?

How do we prevent individuals'  
from breaking moral rules  
(defined in the law)?

## CAUSES



Correlation

Time-ordering (directional)

**Mechanism**

An effective way to test a potential cause is by studying the effect of **manipulating** the cause, for example by an intervention aimed to remove the cause or modify or change the relationship between (the mechanism linking) the cause and the effect . **Interventions to prevent crime may be regarded as testing theories of causal relationships.**

- Prevention is theory testing

- Avoid tool-kits - integrated strategies.

- To what extent is motivation situational

- To what extent is engagement propensity driven

- Creating habits

- Breaking habits

- Influence choices

- Focus on fewer but more well-resourced (and designed!) evaluations

- Focus on fewer but more well-grounded measures (knowledge based)