

Five Reasons High Crime Rates Occur In Communities

It is commonly known and widely understood that some of the highest ranking contributing factors to crime are lack of education, unemployment, under-employment, personal/family history, mental abuse/stress and socio-economic factors; to name a few. This explains the individual reasons, to a certain extent, but what about crime increasing as a community issue? What about the group dynamic when criminal activity becomes an accepted “norm” or “value” within the given geographic area? How does this occur and why? As an urban planning and urban design firm, Central Place Planning Professionals, LLC (CP3) has committed to the idea and philosophy of going beneath the surface to address issues and impacting factors to scenarios within communities. Furthermore, it is our core commitment to providing solutions and strategies that are practical and innovative. To do so, it is necessary to go beneath the surface and examine the current and past causes for issues to prevent them from reoccurring in the future.

In the next sections, CP3 will examine “Crime” and how and why it occurs in various communities, as well as offer some solutions to the areas identified. With that in mind, let us begin.

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- 1) **Absence of a Collective Moral System:** This is the occurrence of total self-interests; both individual and systemic. This environment fosters a climate of individual values. Each person within the system creates their own standards and values for surviving with a given environment. When this happens, many citizens develop a sense of entitlement to resources within there areas. The “Me-ism” syndrome thrives here. Governmental representatives and elected officials develop negative attitudes towards the citizenry they are to represent and create individualized agendas that, oftentimes, create adversarial relationships with the citizens. This, in turn, creates chaos. Within this chaotic environment, there is no sense of community and negative behaviors spread like a living parasitic organism destroying a host body. Those seeking to engage in criminal activity do so with little or no resistance; due to the lack of community interaction necessary to organize and address impacting issues. Law enforcement develops “battle fatigue” from the increasing crime rates within the areas and ultimately prioritize the responses to crime (*more often than not, leaving perceived minor crimes to feaster into major crime*).
- 2) **Skill Isolation and Mismatch of Opportunities:** Skill Isolation and Mismatch of Opportunities is an area that is grossly overlooked in terms of a causal factor for crime. First, let us explain what is meant by this. In many areas, particularly older “Rust-Belt” cities, the individual skills that sustained and developed the commerce of these areas in the past was heavily tied to physical strength. In our modern technologically advance

society, physical attributes are rarely a determining factor for employment opportunities. Lifting axels, filing paperwork and digging ditches have mostly been replaced by technology. Those possessing the physical skills of the past find themselves isolated outside of the current workforce. When new opportunities are availed, many of these people find themselves wanting to work, but lack the skills necessary to take advantage of the opportunity. Ultimately, as this is repeated, the individual(s) become frustrated and seek alternate means of securing resources; i.e. "Crime". This is a major contributing factor in areas that had relied heavily on manufacturing and physical labor as the primary employment venue for their areas.

- 3) **The Cultural Embrace of Deviant Behavior:** Similar to the contributing elements in the "Absence of a Collective Moral System", this is further along in the time-line of community behavior. As the community begins to realize the devastation of both elements of points "1 & 2" within their given area, there is an embrace of the reality of what resources exists in and for the community. Starting with allowing/participating in "perceived" minor deviant behaviors like allowing "food stamps" to be exchanged for other resources to purchasing stolen items from retail stores; the cultural embrace of deviant behavior creates an environment of crime. This not to say the need to survive should be taken lightly. To the contrary. We believe the growth of a "cultural embrace of deviant behavior" is inextricably linked to the allocation and distribution of the community's resources. Meaning, this phenomena is the result of the leadership within a community failing to communicate a collective plan to address the devastation facing the citizens therein. In addition, those entrusted with the responsibility of developing plans and strategies for utilizing the existing and forecasted resources fail to adequately do so. The combination of these two elements creates an embrace of a culture of deviant behavior and results in increased crime.
- 4) **Devastation and Dis-Investment Within an Environment:** With the elements of "1-3" working, the impact is now felt from the external world. As a matter of community development and growth, areas depend on attracting external business and resources to a given area to survive. Whether that business is tourism or export/import business, the external world plays a major role in a community's future. When a community is experiencing: the Absence of a Community Moral System, Skill Isolation and Mis-Match of Opportunities, as well as a Cultural Embrace of Deviant Behavior; it becomes increasingly difficult to attract any positive development to the area. What does this mean? It means the area starts to die as a community. Business move for a variety of reasons, but retail fraud is amongst the top reasons. Many of the citizens with the financial means to move from the areas do so and take their disposable incomes with them. As this exodus of resources begins, the tax-base follows them.

The result is mass dis-investment. The Dis-Investment is evident in mass vacancy in commercial corridors and once vital residential areas. Over time, as these areas go neglected, once vibrant commercial districts turn into haven and shelters for derelict behavior. The housing stock in these areas becomes the headquarters for criminal enterprises such as drug trafficking and auto theft stripping sites. In essence, the devastation to these areas is comprehensive and complete. Within these areas, attracting new employers or creating stable communities is nearly impossible without a comprehensive plan to address the crime and devastation therein.

- 5) **Corruption From Those Entrusted With Leadership:** This has, perhaps, the most impact to any community; psychologically. As alluded to in the previous sections 1-4, community and leadership have an inextricable link to each other. The success and failings of a community are the result of both the citizens and the leadership in all areas. With that said, the leadership in a community is vital to what a community does and how they respond to crisis'. Let's define leadership for the purposes of this list. Leadership, for community, is any entity given the privilege to represent the collective needs and desires of a community. In this regard, a community leader is, but not limited to, an elected official, a religious leader/group, an activist or civic group, law enforcement, business merchant(s) and/or educational leader. This privilege is bestowed on this group with the community's aspirations of being represented, most times, by the most qualified and ethical entities representing them. When this trust is violated by: government corruption (*various forms*), religious indiscretion and hypocrisy, law enforcement abuse, civic group silence, unethical and illegal business practices and mis-allocation of educational resources; the community at-large losses faith in the various systems that were created to represent them. The result is a cycle that leads to the elements of # 1-An Absence of a Collective Moral System. In this environment, low voter turn-out for major election occurs. In this environment, a mistrust for religious leadership occurs. In this environment, a "No-Snitching" policy when working with law enforcement occurs. In this environment, increased drop-out rates occur. In this environment, local retail venues are viewed as a "last resort shopping" option. These all lead to an increase in crime and crime related activity, because the leadership fails, in many cases, to provide the adequate leadership for those seeking guidance. The ultimate result is areas that lack consistent rules, policies and procedures for community and therefore fosters an environment for crime to flourish.

Five Solutions to High Crime Rates In Communities

1) The Absence of a Collective Moral System occurs over long periods of time. To those living within and amongst the system/area and to the casual observer, it may appear to be occurring in small isolated incidents; as the psychological incidents of the phenomenon increase its' frequency. It is the deterioration of civility and enforcement of minor laws and rules. It is a result of citizenry and the governing structure failing to communicate mutual interests.

Identify Areas of Mutual Interests and Work Towards Improving Them – As stated previously, a moral system does not erode overnight and therefore a collective sense of community will not occur quickly, but it can occur. The individuals within a community/area must first begin to understand that they are not alone and isolated with their feelings and thoughts concerning some of the negative elements within their community/area. This can be done by addressing the issues in the community that are easiest to address. The broken street light that are allowing ease of negative traffic. The abandoned house that is a haven for criminal activity. The absence of street signs and signals that is allowing high speed vehicles through the streets. These are all factors, to name a few, that can serve as the catalyst for reversing some of the negative factors impacting the community/area while simultaneously building the community cohesion necessary to eradicate the larger more egregious criminal activity. As this is done, criminal activity will begin to dissipate; as criminal activity flourishes in areas with the least resistance.

2) For **Skill Isolation and Mismatch of Opportunities**, a more involved and long-term strategy must be implemented. This area has more to do with individual preparation and the frustration(s) attributed to this than anything else. Meaning, a persons' lack of marketable skills is a ranking factor that leads to social isolation. To address this requires a mass effort and cooperation on behalf of the impacted community and governing entity of the community/area. This requires **"The Implementation of a Plan of Community Relativism"**.

As stated in #2 of the previous section, "Skill Isolation and Mismatch of Opportunities", this is usually caused by a "mis"-understanding of a current employment market. CP3 suggests the implementation of a plan of "Community Relativism" to address this area. What is meant by "Community Relativism"? Community Relativism, in essence, is the idea or understanding of who the community is and its' capacities; the collective identity. In addition, it is the understanding of this identity and its' relationship to the rest of the world. Oftentimes, as stated in #2 of the previous section, many communities hold on to past identities and refuse to make the necessary changes for the current and future times. Consider the communities in the early 1800's. The communities that produced horse carriages and oil lamps were very successful. These communities were most likely prosperous and were relevant to transportation, home heating and lighting. That was until the late 1800's when the automobile

and controlled electricity were introduced to the world. Overnight, these communities were irrelevant. Their skills were not only not wanted, but not needed. This is what is occurring today and it is a leading factor that leads to crime. By implementing a strategy of “Community Relativism”, a new understanding of the modern identity will be garnered by the community at-large and individuals therein will not feel the isolation of employment failure; as they will seek and create new opportunities consistent with the reality of their time and place. Ultimately, reducing the participants in crime as a frustration option to securing resources.

3) For **The Cultural Embrace of Deviant Behavior**, identified in #3 of the previous section, is perhaps the most difficult area to reduce crime. Difficult, because it is mostly the individual’s behavior that has more to do with characteristics within the personality and not the environment. As urban planners, we do not intend to delve into the field(s) of “Social Work, Psychology or Psychiatry”, but we would like to address the psycho-graphics of some communities. As the human survival instinct is always every present, most “people” will become extreme when faced with scenarios that threaten them in a negative way. Homelessness, perpetual poverty and hunger are areas that will modify even the most moralistic person when faced over long periods of time. In communities, it is no different.

A community’s embrace of deviant behavior as a norm or culture only occurs when the resources, real or perceived, are no longer present. As a result of the lack of resources attained by legal/acceptable means, other areas become viable alternatives for survival. Otherwise law-abiding citizen engage in minor to major crimes when this occurs. A solution or strategy to address this is the “**Re-Defining and Re-Distribution of Existing and New Resources**”. This means, the community becomes educated as to what their resources are and what their resources could become if utilized correctly. Everything from the taxes collected in their community/area to the spending habits of the citizens within the community could and should be identified and tallied to illustrate the existing resources. There are few communities in the United States that are perpetually “poor”. Most are poorly educated, advised and managed. By understanding the amounts of resources expended in communities through spending outwardly and inwardly; as well as how the tax resources are allocated, communities can become empowered to control their financial destinies through small and simple modifications to their individual and collective behaviors. By doing so, the community will increase their productivity and reduce the amounts of criminal activity performed by those who would otherwise not engage in the culture of deviant behavior.

4) Heavily associated with the aforementioned #3 of this section, the **Devastation and Dis-Investment Within an Environment** is largely the result of the community and governing entity failing to address behaviors and factors leading to the high rates of crime within it. Essentially, this occurs when the

citizens and the governing body fail to understand or become apathetical about the causal factors for the negativity with a community/area. To address this requires the implementation of humility from both the community and the government.

When an area has reached the levels of dis-investment and devastation, the perception of devaluation has already spread beyond their geographic boundaries. The “world” through investors and potential visitors has made the determination that the area is not worth consideration for future visits and/or investment endeavors. One of the main reasons for this is a high crime rates. These crime rates send a clear message to these investors and potential visitors that these areas lack the community controls necessary to protect the investment and their person and therefore should be avoided as dangerous. Unfortunately, this fact tends to evade the impacted community.

For various reasons, usually past glory, these communities/areas refuse to believe they have declined to the levels in which outsiders view them and fail to make the necessary modifications to address the problems; perceived or real. As a result, the disinvestments and community devastation increases. Most notably and visible is the crime rate. To address this requires an act of mass humility on behalf of community leaders and the community at-large; **A Breaking Down to Build-Up**. As discussed in the previous section, the carriage building communities had to modify their collective behaviors and change their industry to keep up with the new automotive industry of the 1800's. The same is true today. Those communities that may have experienced great success of the past, must adapt to the ever-changing world of the present. Continuing to depend on the re-emergence of these industries is exercises of futility. The factors that led to those industries locating in the various communities/areas have most likely changed or no longer exist. To rely on this sends clear messages to the external world that these areas lack the sophistication to perform self-assessment and therefore these types of communities, consequently, will not understand why they are, for this exercise, plagued with crime. The Implementation of Humility and Self-Assessment helps with this perception, but moreover it affords the community with the opportunity and empowering strategy of creating a “new” identity. By working together to become a new type of community, the participants are less likely to engage in criminal activity, because they will be invested in the process of building their new community. When this happens, crime is reduced and the devastation begins to be curtailed; as well as the creation of new opportunities for investment.

5) **Corruption From Those Entrusted With Leadership** is perhaps the worst and has the most devastating effect on the community at-large. When those entrusted to lead fail to do so for reasons of corruption, the impact is felt in many areas; none more than in criminal enterprises.



The local elected officials, the religious leader and the civic advocate play key roles in message dissemination. When these groups or individuals participate in corrupt/questionable activities it violates the trust afforded them by the community, it gives credence to those seeking to engage in negative behaviors; the message is crime is acceptable. There may exist other solutions for this, but the only method known to work is the implementation of a **“Zero Tolerance for Corruption Policy”**. This means, the tolerance for this from leadership is “zero”. How does this happen?

The burden for this is the responsibility of the community and those seeking to be leadership; simultaneously. The community must accept the burden of selecting better, more competent leaders that reflect the collective needs and desires of the community. The potential leaders have the responsibility of being honest with themselves to understand their competency levels to perform the duties required from the leadership position. Many times, corruption occurs when the person lacks the understanding of the roles, core competencies and expectations of the positions in which they lead. Politicians find themselves in corrupt scenarios when accepting favors from potential vendors and contractors, then awarding those same entities contracts based on the relationship. Religious leaders find themselves under investigation from co-mingling religious financial contributions with personal activities. Civic advocates lose their public respect and credibility when they receive financial donations from entities that violate the public's safety, then remains silent against the specific benefaction perpetrators. The message becomes clear, “Get your resources at any cost”. This translates to crime and rises in crime rates due to the hypocritical lack of leadership. The implementation of a **“Zero Tolerance for Corruption Policy”** for public corruption addresses this.

The **“Zero Tolerance for Corruption Policy”** is not to say the public has condemned the entity for life, but the entity can never represent the community in the area(s) that require public trust. Leadership is a privilege and honor. To violate it for personal gain is a violation of the most sacred of elements that establishes our societies. Without competent and incorruptible leadership, communities become festering territories of criminal behaviors. The promotion of those possessing “true” leadership qualities is a prerequisite for stable communities. Without it crime is inevitable.

These are summaries of the thoughts and ideas of Central Place Planning Professionals, LLC regarding crime and how to address it. For specific implementation strategies, please contact our office at (866) 546-2722. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

TOLL FREE (866) 546-2722

Info@CP3Plan.com

FAX (866) 370-0466

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