Chapter 10
Situational Prevention Approaches

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Abstract

Like all human behavior, sexual violence and abuse involves interactions between the characteristics and dispositions of the actor (offender), and the characteristics of the situation in which the behavior (offense) occurs. Although this fundamental principle has been recognized in the major theories of sexual offending, research, policy and practice concerning sexual offending continue to be dominated by individual-level, dispositional conceptions of the problem. In this chapter I examine situational conceptions of sexual offending, and show how situational crime prevention concepts and methods may be applied to reducing its prevalence and impact.

*Keywords:* sexual violence and abuse, sexual offending, sexual abuse prevention, situational crime prevention
Situational Prevention Approaches

Sexual violence and abuse encompasses a very diverse range of problem behaviors, including non-contact offenses such as harassment, grooming, distribution and consumption of child exploitation material, indecent exposure, and so on; and contact offenses ranging from furtive sexual touching to violent physical assaults causing injury and sometimes even death. Offenders are generally adolescent and adult males, with wide variations observed in their demographic and psychological characteristics, and in the onset, nature and course of their offending. Victims are generally women and (male and female) children, who similarly vary in their personal characteristics, victimization experiences, impacts and outcomes. This heterogeneity in sexual offending, offenders and their victims has presented serious challenges to researchers, practitioners and policy-makers concerned with understanding and responding effectively to the problem.

Numerous typological schemes have been proposed to identify more homogenous sexual offending subtypes. Such schemes range from simple categorizations based on victim gender (e.g. Prentky, 1999) or the offender’s relationship with their victim(s) (e.g. Williams & Finkelhor, 1990), to complex taxonomies based on offenders’ presumed motivations (e.g. Knight & Prentky, 1990; Knight & Sims-Knight, in press). Although their focus has been on differences in the psychological and behavioral characteristics of offenders, these typological schemes also point to important differences in the contexts in which sexual offenses occur.

For example, although differences in the offending patterns (e.g. onset; persistence) of familial and nonfamilial sexual abusers are often attributed to presumed differences in the psychological characteristics of the offenders themselves, they may alternatively be explained by differences in the situations in which their
sexual offending occurs. As Marshall, Smallbone and Marshall (2014) have noted, family homes typically include a small number of children as long-term residents, and abuse in domestic settings is therefore more likely to involve the repeated abuse of one or two children. So long as it remains undetected, the abuse of individual children may continue over a long period – in some cases over many years. However, the detection and arrest of the familial abuser is likely to cause significant disruption to the situational dynamics that enabled the abuse to occur, thus reducing their risks of re-offending. In contrast, nonfamilial settings such as schools, church youth groups, recreation clubs and the like are places where large numbers of children may come and go over the course of days, weeks and years. These organizational dynamics make it more difficult to abuse a single child over a protracted period, and instead make possible the abuse of multiple children, with individual children likely to be abused over shorter periods of time than is the case in domestic settings. If the organizational abuser moves to another organizational setting, similar situational dynamics there may facilitate or enable further abuse.

In much the same way, the greater prevalence of serial offending among sexual offenders against boys has often been attributed to the presence of stronger deviant sexual interests in these offenders compared to offenders against girls. However in many cases the sexual abuse of boys (rather than girls) may be facilitated by the particular circumstances in which unrelated adult males are involved with boys in their day-to-day routine activities, as was apparently the case in much of the sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic clergy in the United States (Terry, 2008), for example. Similarly, the proliferation of Internet child pornography in recent years has been attributed by some researchers to the existence of an apparently new population of sexual offenders who are more ‘pedophilic’ (though paradoxically less likely to re-
offend) than physical-contact sexual abusers (Seto, Cantor, & Blanchard, 2006). An alternative explanation is that the Internet itself has facilitated the expression of latent deviant sexual interests in otherwise normal adult and adolescent males by increasing availability and perceived anonymity, and decreasing effort and perceived risk (Wortley & Smallbone, 2012).

Variations in sexual offending that are typically attributed to different types of deviant individuals may thus alternatively be explained by features of the specific situations in which sexual violence and abuse occurs. My aim in the present chapter is to consider the role of these situational factors in sexual violence and abuse. My central argument is that, like other human behavior, sexual offenses always involve the interaction of the characteristics or dispositions of the offender, and the characteristics of the immediate offense setting that enable, facilitate, or precipitate the problem behavior. Understanding the situational dynamics of sexual violence and abuse may allow a re-focusing and extension of prevention efforts to target the specific places and situations in which the problem behavior is more likely to occur.

**Situational Conceptions of Sexual Offending**

The question of whether human behavior is better predicted by the particular characteristics or dispositions of the individual concerned (cross-situational consistency), or by the characteristics of the situation in which the behavior is enacted (situational specificity), is often said to have been resolved by the person x situation interaction paradigm (Mischel, 1968). According to this paradigm, sexual violence and abuse, like other human behavior, will always involve interactions between the characteristics of the offender, and the characteristics of the situation in which the offense occurs.
The importance of the person x situation interaction has been recognized in the major theories of sexual offending. Finkelhor’s (1984) Four Preconditions model of child sexual abuse, for example, recognized that even an already-motivated offender (precondition 1) who overcomes his internal inhibitions (precondition 2) will not abuse a child unless he is able to overcome external constraints (e.g. the presence of a capable guardian) (precondition 3), and ultimately the reluctance or resistance of the child (precondition 4). Marshall and Barbaree’s (1990) Integrated Theory of sexual offending similarly proposed that underlying dispositions to sexual aggression require the presence of certain situational factors (e.g. opportunity; intoxication; low risk of detection) to be expressed as sexual offending behavior. Both Finkelhor’s and Marshall and Barbaree’s models thus recognize that situational factors exert a powerful influence on whether or not an incident of sexual abuse occurs, even when the motivation to do so is already present.

In our own iterations of Marshall and Barbaree’s theory, my colleagues and I (Smallbone & Cale, 2015; Smallbone, Marshall, & Wortley, 2008) have tried to give a more explicit emphasis to the person x situation interaction as the most proximal, and therefore most theoretically and practically relevant, causal mechanism. In our formulation, as in Marshall and Barbaree’s original model, the offender’s motivation does not require the presence of any specific psychopathology, sexual or otherwise, because human males in particular are assumed to possess a universal, biologically-based propensity for self-interest and sexual aggression. Thus sexual violence and abuse does not need to be learned; rather, what needs to be learned is the ability and willingness to exercise self-restraint so as to observe laws and social rules concerning appropriate sexual behavior. Both self-restraint (e.g. through the development of emotional self-regulation, moral reasoning, empathy, and so on) and sensitivity to
social restraints (facilitated primarily through positive personal and social attachments) are usually acquired through the processes of social cognitive development. Developmental experiences will vary widely, of course, and individual propensities to engage in sexual violence and abuse will accordingly vary. But we assume nonetheless that all adolescent and adult males are capable of enacting such behavior. Highly disposed offenders may actively create or manipulate situations in order to offend, but may also take advantage of suitable opportunities as and when they arise. Persons with no unusual disposition may also offend, but in a more restricted range of circumstances, perhaps where the situation itself precipitates abuse-related motivations, where the offender is able to rationalize and excuse the behavior, and where the risks of detection and punishment are perceived to be low.

Our conception of sexual offense situations draws from rational choice (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) and routine activities theories (Cohen & Felson, 1979), and from Wortley’s (2001) conception of situations as crime precipitators. According to the rational choice approach, all other things being equal, an offense is more likely to occur when a would-be offender judges a criminal opportunity as likely to deliver a desired reward, to require little effort, and to involve a low risk of detection and punishment. According to routine activities theory, crime and victimization generally occur during the course of the routine day-to-day activities of offenders and victims. Thus offenders generally do not go far out of their way to find criminal opportunities, but rather tend to recognize and grasp opportunities as they present themselves. Similarly, abuse victims usually do not need to do anything or be anywhere unusual - sexual victimization, like other crime victimization, tends to occur during the ordinary routines of life. Neither the rational choice nor routine activities perspectives require any special explanation as to why criminal motivations exist; crime is understood
simply as an illegitimate means of achieving ordinary goals. In other words, crime, including sexual crime, is intrinsically rewarding. Offenders, like everyone else, desire money, material goods, status, excitement, social and intimate relationships, sexual gratification, and so on, and it is these ordinary desires that motivate criminal behavior, including sexual offending.

The rational choice and routine activities approaches conceive of criminal situations primarily in terms of opportunities that are presented during the course of everyday life, that a motivated offender weighs up in terms of likely reward, effort, and risk. However, as Wortley (2001) has argued, situations also contain highly dynamic properties that can precipitate criminal motivations that may otherwise not have arisen, at least not at that particular time and place. Situations can present cues that prompt a criminal response; they can exert social pressure to conform to situational norms or expectations; they can weaken moral restraints, and so permit a criminal response; and they can induce emotional arousal and thereby provoke a criminal response.

The idea that situations themselves can in some circumstances give rise to criminal motivations and behavior may be a difficult or uncomfortable proposition for some readers, especially when applied to sexual violence and abuse. It is important to bear in mind that attributing dynamic or ‘causal’ properties to situations does not equate to excusing the sexual offender from personal responsibility, just as it does not excuse other kinds of criminal behavior. Recognizing human propensities for aggression, and understanding that aggression is more likely in some situations than in others, does not, for example, excuse homicide or other criminal violence. Indeed it is precisely because of these human propensities for violence, exploitation, self-interest and so on that laws are required to prohibit and constrain such behavior.
The significance of situational factors is especially easy to overlook in clinical and legal settings, where the individual offender becomes the sole point of focus and where situational attributions may be seen as excusing or minimizing the offender’s personal responsibility. But the causal role of situations becomes much more difficult to ignore in circumstances where offending is no longer an individual, isolated case. The role of the situation becomes especially salient in circumstances where large numbers of otherwise ordinary people engage in sexual violence and abuse.

Examples of serious ‘outbreaks’ of sexual violence and abuse have been documented in a range of specific circumstances, including conflict zones, remote and marginalized communities, and institutional settings (Rayment-McHugh, Smallbone, & Tilley, 2015). In one of the most alarming examples, an astonishing 350,000 (mainly Tutsi) women and children are estimated to have been raped during the civil conflict in Rwanda, over a period of just a few years in the early 1990s (Bijleveld, Morssinkhof, & Smeulers, 2009). In that same decade, an estimated 25,000 to 50,000 (mainly Bosnian Muslim) women and girls were alleged to have been raped during the civil conflict in the former Yugoslavia (Snyder, Gabbard, May, & Zulcic, 2006). Similar problems have occurred, and in some cases continue to occur, in other conflict zones in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, and other parts of the world (Arieff, 2009).

Endemic sexual violence and abuse has also been observed in some small remote communities, including some Australian Aboriginal communities (Wild & Anderson, 2007) and in isolated island communities such as Pitcairn Island (Marks, 2008). Numerous inquiries and reports have also uncovered extensive abuse of children, including sexual abuse, in some organizational settings. The worst and most extensive abuses seem to have occurred in so-called ‘closed’ institutions such as
orphanages and other residential institutions (Ford, 1998), although in a case that has attracted particular public attention more than 10,000 people, mostly children, were allegedly sexually abused by some 4,000 Catholic Clergy in the United States, particularly in the 1960s and ‘70s (Terry, 2008).

It is simply not plausible that these outbreaks of sexual violence and abuse were caused by hundreds or thousands of peculiarly disposed rapists or pedophiles arriving at the scene at the same time. Rather, it seems there was something peculiar about the situational context itself that caused large numbers of ordinary people to commit serious sexual offenses. A common feature of these otherwise very different settings seems to be a breakdown in the social norms that in usual circumstances are very effective in constraining the potential to engage in sexual violence and abuse. In such circumstances, the usual social norms seem to be replaced with situational norms that instead permit, enable, and facilitate such behavior. A situational perspective of sexual offending assumes that these same mechanisms are involved, albeit perhaps in a less concentrated way, in the more familiar kinds of sexual offenses encountered in the day-to-day work of police, child protection, courts, corrections, forensic mental health, and youth justice services.

**Situational Prevention of Sexual Violence and Abuse**

Situational crime prevention (SCP) is a methodical problem-solving approach that involves the situational analysis of specific crime problems in specific settings and, on the basis of that analysis, the modification of the potential crime setting so as to: 1) increase the effort required to commit such offenses; 2) increase the risk of detection and punishment (as perceived by the would-be offender); 3) reduce the rewards associated with offending; 4) reduce temptations or provocations; and 5) remove excuses for offending. Applied to sexual violence and abuse, as with other
crime problems, SCP is best suited to very specific problems in specific locations. Thus the particular measures required to prevent the sexual abuse of children in schools are likely to be very different to those required to prevent the online distribution of child pornography, for example. Even within particular types of setting different approaches may be required – for example the specific SCP interventions that might make sense in a wealthy urban private school may be quite different to those required in a small, impoverished school in a remote location where many other social and behavioral problems exist.

It is not possible to cover the vast number of potential permutations of the problem here, and indeed any practical application would require a careful analysis of the particular circumstances of the problem at hand. Instead, in the remainder of this chapter my aim is to illustrate in general terms how SCP might be applied to the broad types of settings in which sexual violence and abuse occurs – domestic settings; organizational settings; public settings; and ‘virtual’ settings. Although SCP principles can be applied to both child-victim and adult-victim sexual offenses, to make the present task a little more manageable I restrict the focus here to child-victim offenses.

**Domestic Settings**

By all accounts it is in domestic settings - typically the victim’s or offender’s home - that most physical-contact child sexual abuse occurs (Colombino, Mercado, Levenson, & Jeglic, 2011; McKillop, Brown, Smallbone, & Pritchard, 2015; Snyder, 2000; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). This appears to be the case for both youth-perpetrated and adult-perpetrated sexual abuse (Kaufman, Hilliker, Daleiden, 1996; McKillop et al., 2015). Abusers within these settings usually have a familial relationship (e.g. biological father; step father; sibling or step-sibling; grandfather;
uncle) or some other kind of social relationship with the child (e.g. boyfriend; family friend; babysitter; foster sibling; neighbor). Some abusers may deliberately cultivate relationships with caregivers for the purpose of engaging a child in sexual abuse; however it seems much more typical that the abuse first occurs after the offender and child have already known one another, often for many months or years (Smallbone & Wortley, 2000).

The main practical challenge to applying SCP in domestic settings is that homes are by definition private spaces, with little or no direct oversight other than by residents themselves. If child protection, youth justice, community corrections, or other authorities have already become involved with a particular family, opportunities to systematically apply SCP principles are likely to arise. Indeed safety planning, monitoring and risk management by such authorities may be significantly bolstered by a systematic, case by case approach to SCP analysis and intervention. However for primary and secondary prevention purposes the challenge is to find ways to engage with residents themselves as prevention agents. This requires universal dissemination of valid and practical information about the situational dynamics of sexual abuse, together with more targeted approaches with more vulnerable caregivers or families.

**Increasing effort.** One of the likely reasons sexual abuse is so concentrated in domestic settings is the ready and sustained access to children these settings provide. SCP aims to make the abuse more difficult to enact; in other words, to increase the effort required to abuse a child and get away with it. Establishing rules such as ‘open door’ policies, designing communal play areas that have direct line-of-sight, and requiring privacy when older children are bathing are some potential measures. To prevent nonfamilial abuse in domestic settings it may be helpful to limit or supervise the involvement of (particularly male) friends, neighbors, acquaintances, casual
intimate partners and so on in routine intimate care-taking activities such as bathing, dressing, and preparing for bed. Careful reference checks on tutors, babysitters, and so on, have also been suggested as prevention measures (Kaufman, Mosher, Carter, & Estes, 2006).

**Increasing risk.** Sexual abuse is very unlikely to occur in circumstances where a would-be abuser, particularly a first-time abuser, judges they are likely to be observed, reported, and arrested. Increasing perceived risk is therefore a key prevention aim. One way this problem has been approached has been to engage with children themselves, often in school-based programs, to teach them to recognize sexual abuse and to report it if it were to occur. Though there is no evidence that such programs actually prevent abuse, there is some limited evidence that they can produce modest increases in reporting of abuse that has already occurred (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000). Fundamentally, of course, it is the responsibility of adults to protect children. Adults can increase risk of detection in homes principally through vigilance and observation, and by cultivating relationships with their children in which the child feels able to talk about personal concerns.

**Reducing rewards.** While preventing abuse from occurring in the first place is the most desirable prevention goal, if abuse does occur it is important that it is detected early. One reason is that prolonged abuse is associated with worse outcomes for victims (Hebert, Parent, Daignault, & Tourigny, 2006). In SCP terms, early detection is perhaps the best way to reduce the rewards of offending. This is linked to increasing perceived risks, because would-be abusers are less likely to abuse in the first place if they judge that they are likely to be caught.

**Reducing temptations.** My colleagues and I (Smallbone & Cale 2015; Smallbone et al., 2008) have theorized that sexual abuse often involves the conflation
of care-giving, care-seeking, and sexual motivations, noting that abuse incidents often first occur in the context of routine intimate care-taking interactions. House rules that limit unsupervised access to children’s intimate routines such as bathing, dressing, and going to bed, may serve to reduce temptations to see the child in sexual ways. This may involve, for example, requiring doors to be closed when children are in the bathroom, discouraging nakedness in the presence of non-primary male caregivers, and generally encouraging healthy boundaries in verbal and physical interactions with children.

**Removing excuses.** Though we might expect it would go without saying that sexual abuse is inexcusable, offenders are nevertheless able to organize their thinking in ways that give themselves permission to abuse. This is clearly illustrated in the examples of endemic sexual violence and abuse outlined in the previous section. Establishing and reinforcing norms and expectations concerning personal boundaries may be important. It may also be important that any process of boundary slippage that may be a prelude to grooming and abuse be observed and interrupted. It may be feasible to intervene if, for example, a resident or visiting male is overly affectionate with a particular child, or persists with physical contact despite the child’s awkwardness or discomfort.

**Organizational Settings**

Organizational settings usually comprise a defined set of buildings and grounds that serve as a location for a range of specific activities (e.g. work; recreational; educational; entertainment; religious; commercial activities). The kinds of organizations of particular concern for our present purposes are child- and youth-serving organizations (e.g. schools; churches; residential institutions; out-of-home care; sporting clubs), since it is these places in which groups of children are
supervised and cared for by unrelated adults, away from the direct care of parents and other primary guardians. In SCP terms, child-serving organizations may thus present convergence settings for potential abusers and potential victims.

For the most part, individuals who sexually abuse in these settings are affiliated with the organization in some way, and include both youth and adults – usually but not always males. Youth-perpetrated sexual abuse in organizational settings seems to occur most commonly in school and residential care settings where routine activities bring children of varying ages into contact with one another for regular and sustained periods of time, sometimes with limited adult supervision. In these settings youth sexual abusers tend to abuse younger children (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Chaffin, 2009; McKillop, Brown, Wortley, & Smallbone, 2015). Adult abusers tend to be either paid employees or volunteers.

Whereas primary prevention in domestic settings relies to a large extent on indirect interventions (e.g. by educating and informing parents and others), organizational settings allow for a much more direct level of control over the design and use of the particular space. In this respect, organizational settings are especially conducive to situational prevention.

**Increasing effort.** One way to increase effort in organizational settings is to control access to the children within the organization. A common approach to this is to screen new or prospective employees and volunteers with criminal history and sometimes additional background checks. These schemes are likely to identify previously convicted offenders, but not undetected active offenders or persons who have not yet offended but may do so for the first time in the course of their involvement with the organization. Nor do these schemes generally apply to young people, who in organizational settings may be the most likely group to perpetrate
abuse against other children. Attention therefore needs to be given to designing and operating organizations in ways that minimize risks that those already in the organization may abuse or be abused. For adults, this may be achieved by well-designed and functional policies; careful recruitment and induction; clear, sensible codes of conduct; training in the identification and reporting of concerning behaviors; good supervision systems and practices; and a culture in which reporting of concerns is expected and rewarded. Building resilience in children, ‘cocooning’ those with particular vulnerabilities, and maintaining a culture in which children are personalized, valued, and feel encouraged to report concerns, may minimize risks of victimization. Older children may benefit from responsible relationships education and bystander training.

**Increasing risk.** Sexual abuse incidents are probably least likely in places where the would-be abuser thinks others could observe and report it. For organizations, an open environment that allows easy line of sight to all activities involving children, through the routine movements of responsible adults, is very desirable. This facilitates natural surveillance and extended guardianship, thus increasing perceived risks for would-be abusers. The aim should be to balance risk reduction with maintaining a friendly, nurturing environment for children, and a pleasant environment for adults. Extreme approaches such as ‘no touch’ policies, or inadvertently creating a culture of suspicion, may significantly reduce the amenity of the organizational environment and possibly even cause other problems for children. The term ‘child safe, child friendly’ nicely captures the idea that it is the well-being of children, and not just controlling risks, that is the central aim of prevention.

**Reducing rewards.** Organizational settings allow for adults to be purposely trained to recognize problem behaviors. This is very advantageous, because it
becomes possible for early signals of abuse-related problems to be detected, rather than waiting for abuse itself to occur. Though grooming may not be so common in peer-to-peer abuse, it is a common prelude of abuse involving adults. Interrupting early grooming behaviors, such as favoring or spending time with individual children, developing ‘special’ relationships with children or their parents, and so on, may reduce the rewards associated with these behaviors, thereby preventing an escalation of problems that may ultimately lead to sexual abuse.

**Reducing temptations.** As in domestic settings, limiting exposure by (mainly) adult and adolescent males to potentially tempting situations is likely to have a preventive effect. Once again, this is much more feasible in organizational settings because of the direct control that can be exerted through rule setting, monitoring and supervision, and the design and use of spaces. Many practical issues may need to be worked through; for example, in schools, prohibiting teachers from walking into students’ change rooms may be sensible, but on balance this may be more desirable than presenting an opportunity for the students themselves to engage in sexual bullying and other abuse of peers away from adult supervision.

**Removing excuses.** Organizations are particularly well placed to establish a local culture in which sexual abuse is not tolerated. Clear statements about the issue, and about the organization’s commitment to child safety and wellbeing generally, can be placed in job advertisements, position descriptions, internal policies, and on the organizations website, and can be reinforced in job interviews, staff and volunteer inductions, training, and supervision. There are many historical examples of offenders having been able to exploit ambiguities about organizational values, especially in residential institutions that have de-valued and de-humanized children, or in organizations that have ignored or covered-up reports in order to protect their own
reputation. There are many signs that this is changing, and the application of SCP principles offers a much more systematic and thought-through approach to further improvement.

**Public Settings**

Public settings are communal locations that are accessible to the community at large, and include parks and other open spaces, thoroughfares, commercial precincts and premises, entertainment areas, and so on. Sexual abuse in public settings is comparatively rare (Colombino et al., 2011; Smallbone & Wortley, 2000). Public places may be used as locations for abuse by domestic or organizational abusers, perhaps as a way to avoid risks of being observed. However, compared to domestic and organizational settings, abuse in public places is more likely to involve a stranger. Incidents involving strangers are unlikely to involve emotional involvement or protracted grooming (with the possible exception of ‘online’ grooming), and more likely to be abrupt. Though stranger offending may be more likely to involve abduction, such extreme cases are thankfully rare. Rather, stranger abuse incidents are often short in duration and, though varying in degree of intrusion and physical harm, typically involve single sexual acts such as indecent exposure or touching. Many are attempted rather than completed sexual acts (Gallagher, Bradford, & Pease, 2008), presumably because public places are not conducive to protracted abuse.

Public settings are very conducive to SCP because, like organizational settings, government and corporate authorities can make decisions about the design and use of spaces and provide significant oversight and guardianship. However, because of the low overall prevalence and the vast number of places where sexual abuse might conceivably occur, targeting of preventive interventions in public settings faces something of a ‘needle in the haystack’ problem. Prevention of other kinds of
crime (e.g. theft; robbery; street violence) relies on identifying spatial and temporal concentrations of specific crime problems – so-called ‘hot spots’ and ‘hot times’. In some circumstances it may be possible to identify hot spots for sexual abuse that allow specific prevention activities to be focused (see e.g. Tilley, Rayment-McHugh, Wardel et al., 2014), but generic approaches can also be employed in the types of places where the problem may be encountered.

Increasing effort. Although some abuse in public settings may involve groups of children (e.g. indecent exposure), arguably the most concerning kinds of abuse in these settings involves the singling out of a particular child and perhaps luring or taking the child away to another place away from potential guardians. This may best be prevented by careful and close supervision by adults or older children. Place managers (e.g. security personnel, pool supervisors) may be trained to watch out for people loitering in public areas, and to detect suspicious behavior involving an adult or youth approaching a lone child. Children themselves may be taught basic personal safety behaviors such as not accepting lifts with strangers, or, if others are nearby, calling out if someone they don’t know tries to take them away.

Increasing risk. Offenders are more likely to select specific locations where the supervision of children is absent or inadequate, and where there seems to be little risk of being interrupted or apprehended. A generic prevention strategy is therefore to improve surveillance, particularly in out-of-the-way places. Police, security guards, or CCTV can be employed in locations of concern. Other place managers such as pool attendants, shopping mall staff, or park maintenance workers may also play a role. Attention can also be given to the design of otherwise secluded places such as park areas, toilet blocks, and so on, to minimize blind spots and to allow line of sight to passers by. Techniques may include installing better lighting, trimming vegetation
that obscures line of sight, and regulating the flow of pedestrian traffic to increase natural surveillance.

Reducing rewards. Interrupting attempts to take or lure a child away from a public place is one way to reduce the rewards associated with sexual abuse. Perhaps ideally this would involve a formal response such as a police warning or arrest. If an offender does succeed in taking a child, early detection becomes critical. Some Australian states have introduced public abduction alerts, often involving radio and television announcements, and while these seem mainly to involve cases unrelated to sexual abuse (e.g. an aggrieved parent involved in a child custody dispute), such alerts may also be used in abuse cases. Immediate reporting of suspicious incidents may facilitate a quick police response, hopefully leading to the location of the child before a sexual incident itself occurs.

Reducing temptations. Once again, close supervision of children in public places is important for reducing the temptations to engage a child for sexual purposes. As in other settings, the kinds of places or situations that may be tempting are those where children are involved in activities such as dressing, bathing, and so on. This suggests there is a particular need for close supervision in places such as pools and beaches areas, change rooms, and public toilets. Though controversial for some, discouraging older girls, for example, from engaging in risky behaviors such as behaving flirtatiously, drinking, or going to secluded places without adults or responsible peers, may be important.

Removing excuses. There is some evidence that, compared to other settings, young people who sexually abuse may be more likely than adults to abuse in public places (McKillop, Brown, Smallbone, & Pritchard, 2015). This may be because young people have less control over the use of domestic and organizational settings.
In any case, there may be a need to focus particularly on the risks of children and young people being abused by peers or older youth in public (and other) settings. One way to approach this is to engage young people in sexual ethics (Schewe, 2007) and responsible bystander programs (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007), both of which typically include components designed to clarify rules concerning consent, and thus to remove excuses for sexual violence and abuse.

**Virtual Settings**

The Internet and related technologies represent a relatively new frontier for sexual abuse prevention. Internet-related sexual abuse includes the production, distribution, possession and use of sexually abusive material. The Internet is also used as a mechanism for meeting and grooming children for the purpose of exchanging sexual material (for example having the child share naked photos) or to arrange personal meetings to facilitate physical-contact sexual abuse.

Unlike other settings, the virtual setting is a largely unregulated space. Individuals can upload, download or view material with little effort and while remaining apparently anonymous, and can disguise their identity while interacting with others. At the same time, the Internet and related technologies are highly conducive to SCP: legislators, law enforcement agencies, Internet service providers, domain name registrars, web-hosting companies, nongovernment organizations, workplace managers, banks and credit card companies, advertising companies, parents, children, and concerned citizens, can all play a role in the prevention of Internet-facilitated sexual abuse.

**Increasing effort.** Problem behaviors associated with the Internet, including sexual abuse, are to a large extent driven by the ease with which online problem behavior can be enacted – often with a simple click of a mouse, in the privacy and
comfort of home. Making the problem behaviors more difficult to enact is one way to
target prevention activities. Some non-government agencies such as the Internet
Watch Foundation monitor Internet sites, reporting the existence of suspicious or
illegal material to law enforcement agencies, who can in turn issue ‘take down
notices’. Internet service providers may also remove problem sites. Internet filters are
also increasingly being used, both at the server level and user level. Parents, schools,
libraries and other workplaces may install filters to restrict the types of sites that may
be accessed. Another approach is to de-register domain names, which can prevent
access to relevant sites even if server hosting arrangements are changed.

Increasing risk. Problem behaviors associated with the Internet are also
driven by perceptions that the behavior is anonymous and therefore risk-free. One
way this can be countered is to conduct stings. This might involve police operating
undercover in suspect chat rooms, news groups, and peer-to-peer networks, and so on,
or to establish bogus websites and capture details of individuals who seek to access
the supposed illegal material. In reality, these strategies result in comparatively very
few arrests, but the wider purpose is often to create the perception that the illegal
activity entails significant and real risks. Publicizing stings can contribute to this by
engaging with a much wider audience than the individuals identified in the operations.
Another approach is for Internet service providers and mobile phone network
providers to require verification of the identity of their clients. Workplaces, schools,
and other organizations can introduce and enforce responsible codes of conduct, and
can carry out occasional audits of Internet use. In homes, sensible house rules can be
introduced to govern the use of computers, mobile phones and other devices. To
target more active and determined offenders, tighter regulation of remailers and
encryption software may be needed to increase actual and perceived risks of detection.

**Reducing rewards.** For most Internet offenders the desired reward is sexual gratification. For others (e.g. commercial producers and distributors of child abuse images) it may be money. Purchase of abuse images can be countered by tracking the flow of money, and by blocking payments for illegal material. Banks and credit card companies can use keywords and web crawlers to identify illegal transactions. Pressure can also be applied to companies that store or provide access to illegal material by withdrawing advertising from problem websites and peer-to-peer networks. Strategies designed to increase effort and increase risk, discussed above, can also reduce rewards associated with problem Internet behavior.

**Reducing temptations.** Users of Internet child pornography no doubt vary in the strength and exclusivity of their interests in sexual images of children, and individual offenders who begin as casual or ambivalent users may well become more involved over time. We know little about how users first encounter such material, but some may first encounter links to illegal sites while using legal adult pornography. This is especially problematic because they may already be sexually aroused when they encounter the opportunity to view illegal material. Reducing the availability of illegal images embedded in legal sites may therefore be important. On another front, teenagers could be educated about their own risky online behaviors to reduce perceived provocations for would-be online groomers. Police monitoring Internet chat rooms could, in addition to looking out for potential offenders, also intervene with young people who may be engaging in risky behaviors.

**Removing excuses.** Publicizing arrests for the various online offenses—a mainstay of general deterrence—is one way to periodically remind the community at
large that such behaviors are unlawful and socially unacceptable. Customers of Internet service providers can be required to agree that they will not use the service for illegal activities, and web-hosting companies can similarly require customers to agree that they will not accept illegal material on their servers. Such requirements serve to remind people that engaging in such conduct is unacceptable. At a local level, organizations can introduce codes of conduct that clarify rules about the use of the Internet and specify behaviors that would lead to disciplinary action or reporting to police.

Conclusions

Research, policy and practice concerning sexual offending have historically been dominated by individual-level, dispositional conceptions of the problem. The main focus has been on understanding the characteristics of detected offenders, and on developing therapeutic and risk management responses to these offenders. There has been comparatively little attention to the situational dimensions of sexual violence and abuse, and how this problem behavior might be prevented in the first place.

A situational analysis of sexual violence and abuse points to features of specific settings that may enable or facilitate the problem behavior to occur. Such an analysis allows the application of preventive interventions designed to alter these features to make the problem behavior, so far as the would-be offender sees it: 1) more difficult and inconvenient to enact; 2) more likely to be detected and punished; 3) less rewarding; 4) less tempting; and 5) less excusable. In the present chapter I outlined how these situational aspects might be addressed in the four general types of setting in which sexual violence and abuse occurs: 1) domestic settings; 2) organizational settings; 3) public settings; and 4) virtual settings. In practice, a
situational analysis of a specific setting would be undertaken to assess how particular behaviors of concern may be prevented.

Sexual violence and abuse always involves interactions between the characteristics or dispositions of the offender, and the characteristics of the immediate situation in which the offense occurs. Dispositional and situational conceptions of the problem should not therefore be understood as competing paradigms. Rather, the challenge is to understand how individual characteristics and situational characteristics interact to produce specific problem behaviors. Situational factors may not be more theoretically important than dispositional factors, but the great practical advantage of focusing on situational factors is that, in most circumstances, it is much easier to change situations than it is to change people. This is especially pertinent for primary and secondary prevention because, before an offense has occurred, it is very difficult to know who may develop the disposition to commit it. It may be much more practical to focus prevention efforts on the places in which such behavior is more likely. Indeed, crime is much more predictable according to its location than by the identity of individual offenders. As Sherman (1995) questioned some 20 years ago, “why aren’t we thinking more about wheredunit, rather than just whodunit?” (pp. 36-37).
SITUATIONAL PREVENTION APPROACHES

REFERENCES


doi:10.1177/0093854808314339


