

## **SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION AND CRIME DISPLACEMENT REVISITED: MYTHS AND MIRACLES?: PART 2**

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### **Abstract**

*In 2011 I challenged the criminologically orthodox view of crime displacement: that displacement is not inevitable, is often less than anticipated, and that Situational Crime Prevention (henceforth SCP), initiatives may even lead to a “diffusion of benefits”.*

*This article attempts to review the literature on crime displacement and any possible diffusion of benefits associated with Situational Crime Prevention initiatives from 2011-2022; both in order to assess whether any significant advancements have been made in the detection of crime displacement since the publication of my original research, and whether Rational Choice Theory (henceforth RCT), really does offer the best explanation in terms of criminal behaviour with regard to crime displacement.*

### **Introduction**

In 2011, I submitted my dissertation “Situational Crime Prevention and Crime Displacement: Myths and Miracles?” (Phillips, 2011), and it was subsequently published in the Internet Journal of Criminology. The orthodox view of crime displacement is based on theories of RCT and Routine Activity Theory (henceforth RAT), and makes assumptions about choice structuring properties of offences and the routine travel patterns of offenders. I discovered through a secondary analysis of the published empirical research on crime displacement from crime

reduction initiatives, that displacement was found in 63% of cases, and that studies with offenders indicated displacement in 84.6 % of cases. I therefore questioned the orthodox view of crime displacement, in that evidence to the contrary was being ignored and was based on selective bias. I also argued that most SCP evaluations are crime type specific and only measure spatial displacement in small geographical areas, and therefore fail to measure any possible displacement accurately. In 2015 my findings were presented at an International Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (henceforth CPTED), conference in Calgary, Canada. As a result, a study was undertaken by Hodgkinson et al. (2020), to study crime displacement with a more focused qualitative approach.

My questions now 11 years on are:

1. What advances have been made (if any) in the study and detection of crime displacement?
2. Has the consensus of opinion on the occurrence of crime displacement changed?
3. Does RCT offer the best explanation in terms of criminal behaviour with regard to crime displacement?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, I decided to conduct a review of crime displacement studies published between 2011-2022 and provide a secondary analysis of the findings.

## **Background**

First of all it is useful to look at my original research which explains in some detail the background to RCT and SCP which have previously informed the orthodox view of crime displacement, and I make no apologies for including large parts of it here:

“The basic principles behind SCP techniques are not new. Land owners in medieval Britain protected their castles with drawbridges, moats, and lookouts on the castle walls. More basic SCP techniques have been adopted by the general population in the form of locks and bolts; and these simple target hardening measures have become classified into a framework of opportunity reducing measures as part of the ‘crime as opportunity’ paradigm shift in criminology. Mayhew et al. (1976), argued that crime prevention should encompass physical crime prevention practices and the availability of opportunities for crime, in addition to the social crime prevention studies that had dominated much criminological theory in the past.

However, a major criticism of such physical SCP strategies has been the threat of crime displacement, and the assertion that ‘the foreclosure of one type of criminal opportunity (will) simply shift the incidence of crime to different forms, times and locales’ (Repetto, 1976:167).

Cornish and Clarke (1987), argue that if displacement is viewed from the RCT perspective, displacement is not inevitable as an offender will weigh up the costs, benefits and opportunities of an offence before deciding whether to displace. Eck (1993), argues that when attempts are made to detect displacement, it is often not found and where it is, it is much less than 100%. He therefore asserts that the RCT prediction of criminal behaviour is accurate. In order to fully understand this viewpoint, and the ‘crime as opportunity’ paradigm shift in criminology, it is necessary to explore RCT and SCP theory in more depth.

The RCT of criminal behaviour belongs to the Classical School of criminology, which originated in the eighteenth century. The basic premise is that people will rationally seek pleasure and avoid pain. Classical theorists do not take account of differences between individuals, they make no distinction between children or the mentally ill for instance, nor do they take account of biological, sociological or psychological explanations of criminal behaviour. They also maintain that punishments should be proportionate to the crime committed and should be administered according to the law, ignoring differences between offenders (Hopkins Burke, 2005). These ideas formed the basis of the criminal justice and penal systems of today, based on notions of equality and proportionality. However, these ways of thinking about crime and criminal behaviour largely went out of fashion in the twentieth century. They were replaced by dispositional explanations of criminal behaviour, including the ideas of Lombroso, Marxist criminology, the restorative justice programmes and the welfarist movement in youth justice (Hayward, 2007).

In the late 1970s and 1980s however, these rehabilitative methods became discredited as crime figures continued to rise and Martinson (1974), famously declared that ‘nothing works’. Coupled with the rise of the political right in the UK and USA, criminal activity seen as a consequence of rational choice, and punishment that was seen to be swift and severe, regained popularity. The British Home Office demonstrated much enthusiasm for SCP measures as a pragmatic method of reducing crime and removing the opportunity to offend (Hopkins Burke, 2005). In the 1980s this ‘administrative criminology’ (Young, 1994), fused the RCT theoretical model with the practical crime prevention initiatives of SCP under the leadership of Ron Clarke, a criminologist working at the Home Office (Pease, 2006).

The RCT of explaining criminal behaviour encompasses economic theories of crime and asserts that:

‘crime is purposive behaviour designed to meet the offender’s commonplace needs for things such as money, status, sex and excitement, and that meeting these needs involves the making of (sometimes quite rudimentary) decisions and choices, constrained as these are by limits of time and ability and the availability of relevant information’ (Clarke, 1997:9).

Central to this paradigm has been the incorporation of Routine Activity Theory (henceforth RAT), which argues that the crime setting is ‘the central organizing feature of crime and its absence’ and that criminal acts always have ‘a likely offender; a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian against the offense’ (Felson and Boba, 2010:28). RAT asserts that everyone takes routine precautions to prevent crime in the course of their everyday lives, by locking doors, installing burglar alarms, and avoiding what are perceived to be dangerous places or people. Similarly, commercial organisations routinely safeguard themselves, their employees, and their clients against crime. SCP is seen as the ‘scientific arm’ of these routine precautions that have been developed to make them more effective (Clarke, 1997:3).

SCP concentrates on the analysis of the circumstances giving rise to specific types of crime and seeks to reduce crime by the manipulation of the settings in which crime takes place, rather than focus on the detection or sanction of those committing the crime. Nor does it seek to remove criminal tendencies by improving conditions in society, but merely seeks to make criminality less attractive to the offender (Clarke, 1997).

SCP comprises opportunity-reducing measures that are directed at specific forms of crime, and proposes that the commission of crime depends on particular environmental opportunities. SCP therefore involves the management, design, or manipulation of the immediate environment. The decision-making processes of the offender are thought to involve a degree of rationality when weighing up the costs and benefits of committing a crime. Therefore, crime can be made to appear more difficult and risky, or less rewarding and excusable. Implicit in this point is the assumption that offenders make an evaluation of the moral implications of certain types of offending, and that this will impose limits on crime displacement (ibid). (Phillips 2011: pp.7-8)

### **Literature on Crime Displacement**

Repetto (1976:167), wrote that ‘---the ultimate value of mechanical crime prevention programmes appears critically dependent on their capacity to avoid large scale displacement effects’. In order to address this ‘need’, and in the absence of comprehensive quantitative research on the subject, Repetto (1976), put forward his theoretical underpinnings for the future analysis of the displacement phenomenon. He outlined five types of crime displacement:

- **Temporal**-committing the intended crime at a different time
- **Tactical**-committing the intended crime in a different way
- **Target**-committing the intended crime type on a different target
- **Spatial**-committing the intended crime type to the same target in a different place
- **Functional**-committing a different type of crime

Barr and Pease (1990), identify a sixth type:

- **Perpetrator**-where a crime opportunity is so compelling that the offence will continue to be committed by a succession of different offenders filling the 'opportunity' vacuum.

Repetto (1976), argues that there are two basic (erroneous) assumptions about offenders: that they are totally deterministic in that they must commit a certain number of offences every day, week, or month, and that therefore, reducing opportunities or increasing the risks, will not lessen the frequency of crimes; and that offenders possess total mobility with regard to tactics, time, target, and area of operation.

According to Eck (1993), different theoretical stances on the causes of criminal behaviour dictate a different reaction to the blocked opportunities presented by a crime prevention initiative. Deterministic theories that cite the causes of criminal behaviour as outside the individual's control- such as unemployment, inability to succeed, or subcultural values, - suggest that attempts to block criminal opportunities will merely lead offenders to explore other opportunities to commit crimes. Determinists therefore, will expect much crime displacement. RCT on the other hand, which holds that crime is the outcome of choices, maintains that displacement is dependent on the relative costs and gains of the alternative offending being considered.

Cornish and Clarke (1987), argue that determinists see displacement as inevitable, and view crime and displacement in the hydraulic sense. However, if displacement is viewed from the standpoint of RCT, it is not inevitable, as an offender will weigh up the costs, benefits and opportunities of an offence, before deciding whether to displace elsewhere. Furthermore, 'If frustrated from committing a particular crime, the offender is not

compelled to seek out another crime nor even a non-criminal solution. He may desist from any further action at all-- -' (ibid: 934).

Cornish and Clarke (1987), propose also that the decision-making processes, and the factors taken into account by potential offenders, vary greatly at different stages of the process and among different crimes. They argue therefore, that the analysis of criminal choice and of displacement needs to be crime specific 'just as reductions in target crimes brought about by situational measures may be modest and difficult to detect---so, too, evidence of displacement may lie concealed within the same overall crime statistics' (ibid:934).

A more promising way of explaining criminal behaviour and displacement is suggested then by taking a crime specific approach, as offenders are not fuelled by a general disposition to offend, but rather specific crimes are chosen for particular reasons. The final decision to commit a crime is influenced by the characteristics of the offender and the properties of the offence, and is a product of interaction between the two. This leads to choice structuring properties of particular offences; and the willingness of an offender to substitute one offence for another, will depend on whether the offence characteristics are compatible with the offender's goals and abilities. This crime specific process of decision-making is crucial therefore when trying to understand displacement (Cornish and Clarke, 1987).

Eck (1993), recognised this need to examine offender choice structures and actions in developing the theory of displacement. Offender choices have been studied to some extent, but have been limited to spatial displacement; Repetto (1976), used two studies with convicted burglars to form his opinion that many crimes are opportunistic, and that if



opportunities are blocked in a familiar location, displacement to other familiar areas is most likely, and displacement to unfamiliar areas is least likely. Repetto also found that older, more skilled offenders are more likely to displace. Cohen and Felson's (1979), assertion that criminal opportunity is often linked to the travel patterns of offenders, which forms the basis of RAT, corroborates this viewpoint. Sherman (1990:10), however put a time limit on these blocked criminal opportunities, stating that offenders are more likely to return to a familiar area once the blocking tactics are understood. He called this the 'initial deterrence decay'. Eck (1993: 537), generalised these findings on spatial displacement to other forms of displacement and hypothesised that displacement is therefore 'most likely to occur in the direction of familiar places, times, targets and behaviours'. He called this 'familiarity decay'.

### **Diffusion of Benefits**

Diffusion of benefits is seen to be the opposite of displacement. A reduction in crime is observed that is not the target of the SCP initiative; this can be a reduction in other types of crime, or a reduction in crime outside the area targeted. Clarke and Weisburd (1994:169), define it as:

---the spread of the beneficial influence of an intervention beyond the places which are directly targeted, the individuals who are the subject of control, the crimes which are the focus of intervention or the time periods in which an intervention is brought.'

Clarke and Weisburd (1994), claim that a preoccupation with the threat of displacement has led to the possibility that diffusion of benefits is being overlooked as an outcome of SCP initiatives, perhaps because theoretical developments of situational and choice factors

were lacking in early SCP measures. An oft quoted example is the Kirkholt Burglary Prevention Project (Forrester et al., 1988), in which it is claimed that the surrounding areas also benefitted from a reduction in crime, even though they were not subject to the same measures as the Kirkholt estate (Welsh and Farrington, 1999). Meanwhile Clarke and Weisburd (1994), claim that the whole estate benefitted from a diffusion of benefits, not just the victims of burglary who were the primary targets of the project.

Other examples are Eckblom (1988), in which it is claimed anti-bandit screens installed in London post-offices also resulted in a reduction in robbery in those premises without screens.

### **Benign and Malign Displacement**

Barr and Pease (1990), take a slightly different and more pragmatic view of crime displacement. They propose that displacement can be viewed as benign, in which a prevented crime is displaced to one of less seriousness; or as malign, in which the displaced crime leads to the commission of a more serious one.

An example of benign displacement is given by Mayhew et al (1976), in which steering column locks were introduced on all new cars. The introduction displaced car crime to older cars which did not have steering column locks. Barr and Pease (1990), argue that this is benign displacement, as the financial losses are less with older cars than with new ones.

On the other hand, malign displacement occurs when crime is changed in ways that are deemed to be socially undesirable. A study by Schumacker and Leitner (1999), found spatial crime displacement following the redevelopment of an urban area in Baltimore, USA; increased security personnel, improved street lighting, and increased pedestrian

traffic resulted in a significant drop in the crime rate. However, crime rates in the city remained high, and an analysis suggested that crime was displaced to other areas of the city. The authors argue that the benefits of redevelopment did not reach all the city's residents, and that those living outside the redevelopment area have suffered as a result of redevelopment through an increase in crime rates.

The review by Barr and Pease (1990), has been used to support the theory that crime displacement is not very widespread, despite the fact that only one of their studies showed no displacement at all. This is presumably because the focus of the study was to demonstrate that displacement could be benign or malign. Examples of benign displacement are promoted as a 'desirable' outcome of SCP initiatives, and displacement should be used as a tool with which to work towards a 'distributive justice' (ibid: 285).

They argue that displacement would only render a crime prevention initiative undesirable if the substitute crimes were as serious as, or more serious than, the target crimes; implying that a deflection of crime to alternative targets, in a different place, at a different time, may be socially acceptable in redistributing crime more equally among victims.

This assertion however, begs the question, more desirable for whom? The victim of a displaced crime may not view the experience as benign, despite assurances that the original intended crime would have been more serious. There is also the danger in this perspective that in this post-modern era of increasingly pluralised policing practices, protection and security will be the preserve of those who can afford to pay for it. Moreover, the relatively rich who can afford ever more sophisticated target hardening strategies, will retreat into so called 'gated communities', leaving the poor to bear the brunt of displaced crime and a reduced police force (Newburn and Reiner, 2007).

### **Consensus of Opinion**

The generally accepted theory of crime displacement is one heavily influenced by RCT as can be demonstrated in the following quotes: ‘Studies of displacement tend to assume rational decision making on the part of the offender’ (Hesseling, 1994:199).

‘(W)hen attempts to detect displacement have been made, it is not often found, and, if found, it is far less than 100%. This suggests that rational choice theories provide a better description of criminal behaviour than deterministic theories’ (Eck, 1993:528-529).

‘We know from research that, in general, displacement is less likely than it is assumed to be, and although it may happen there is usually a net reduction in offending, bearing in mind that in some cases there may be an increase in seriousness’ (Laycock, 2005:681).

‘(D)isplacement theory generally neglects the important causal roles of temptation and opportunity, and that ‘those who assume displacement is inevitable overestimate its capacity to occur’ and ‘Rational Choice Theory predicts that offenders will displace their prevented crimes when the benefits for doing so outweigh the costs. They will not displace their crimes when the costs outweigh the benefits’ (Felson and Clarke, 1998:26-27).

‘Empirical studies have generally concluded that fears of displacement have been exaggerated (Hesseling, 1994). In some cases, none has been detected and complete displacement appears to be very rare within the limits of practical measurement’ (Tilley, 2009:118).

‘Diffusion (of benefits) is viewed as a common result of crime prevention activity’ (Clarke and Weisburd, 1994:169).” (Phillips, 2011: pp.10-13).

### **Problems of measuring displacement**

In my original work I outlined the problems of measuring crime displacement accurately thus:

“the accurate measurement of crime displacement is beset with problems, many of which stem from the methodological difficulties and flaws which are present in the evaluation of SCP initiatives.

Existing evaluations use a wide range of methods and whilst they all seem to point to the positive benefits of SCP techniques in general, Knutsson and Tilley (2009:2), insert a word of caution in terms of ‘publication bias-the well-known tendency for positive findings to be published rather than negative ones’, as discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, installing SCP techniques without prior and thorough evaluation of the problem, or the situation in which they are used can lead to ‘mindless application’ such as the almost blanket coverage in the UK of CCTV (ibid). Clarke (1997), recognises that more appropriate evaluation is required to take into account that each SCP measure is highly specific, not only to the crime or problem under consideration, but also to its circumstances, and that what works in one situation will not always work in another.

There are many attempts to measure the effectiveness of SCP initiatives, and in a summary of thirty-seven years of research into SCP efforts, Guerette (2009), found that of 206 initiatives evaluated, 75% claimed to be effective. However, of these 206 studies only 102 measured crime displacement effects. How could this be and why should this be so?

Difficulties with the measurement of displacement were recognised quite early on; Cornish and Clarke (1987:934), state that research which ‘merely analyses crime patterns, is likely to yield only limited information about displacement’. Barr and Pease (1990), concurred,

and argued that because there are so many types of displacement, it is almost impossible to measure accurately, because instances of it are likely to merge into overall crime figures, or fall outside the types of crime being studied. They acknowledge that the methodological problems of measuring displacement are unlikely to be resolved stating that 'The wider the scope of the study in terms of types of crimes and places, the thinner the patina of displaced crime could be spread across them; thus disappearing into the realm of measurement error'(ibid:293).

Eck (1993:535), also recognised that methodological problems in measuring displacement may well prevent the ability to 'categorically state that displacement is not a problem', citing small sample size and random fluctuations in crime which may cloud the results.

So, what are the limits in terms of crime type, time and area for measuring displacement in an open-system social environment, as opposed to the laboratory settings used to measure much in the natural sciences? SCP evaluation initiatives may seek to measure crime in the area of operation as well as areas bordering it, but where should the imaginary lines be drawn in looking for the evidence of displacement?

Many evaluations of SCP are based on the assumption that offender populations are 'rigid, fixed in space, and comprise individuals who specialize in one form of crime' (Gabor, 1990:43), and will therefore only look at the particular crime type being targeted and in the surrounding areas. Assumptions about offender behaviour however can be problematic. If we look at the RCT view of offender mobility, which has been briefly discussed in 4.1, Cohen and Felson (1979), argue that offender mobility is often linked to routine activities such as travel to work, school or leisure. Gibbens and Garrity (1962), found that mobility of offenders is not only limited geographically, in terms of the ability to travel and

knowledge of a local area, but also in terms of choices made about offence type, which can be linked to personality. In terms of age, younger offenders have fewer skills and tend to be less mobile than older offenders, and they tend to steal a less wide variety of goods because of problems with disposal. However, Repetto (1974, cited in Gabor, 1990), found in a study of adult burglars that a quarter were willing to travel over 24 hours to reach a target. We cannot therefore assume that offenders are limited to a particular area of activity. Indeed, Gabor (1990), argues that offenders are far more adaptable than formerly thought, and that offender mobility varies greatly from one crime type and offender category to another. Furthermore, Schneider (2005), refutes the assumption that offenders tend to specialise in one type of offence, although it is recognised that they may move from one type of offending to another throughout the course of a criminal career. Schneider's research has clearly shown that 'criminals operate outside their perceived boxes', and that, prolific burglars regularly committed shoplifting offences in order to 'boost' their income (ibid: 399).

In his review of SCP evaluations, Guerrette (2009), found that of those studies that did measure displacement; 77% examined spatial displacement; 27% examined target displacement; 15% offence; 10% tactical, and 5% temporal. None of the studies evaluated examined perpetrator displacement (percentages add up to more than 100% as several studies examined more than one type of displacement). It is evident therefore that most evaluations of displacement concentrate on spatial displacement.

Guerette (2009), concluded that in the future the analysis of displacement should be incorporated into the research design of SCP evaluations, so that the overall outcome of the initiative can be measured accurately. In addition, analysis of displacement should include

all forms of it rather than concentrating on spatial displacement. ‘Few examinations of displacement---have explored or tried to measure the myriad ways displacement might behave’ (ibid: 50).

In assessing the problems outlined above Hamilton-Smith (2002:12), states that ‘---the theoretical foundations of displacement have been well developed--- (but there is) --- limited application of this theory to the development of theoretically-informed measurement strategies’. Moreover, displacement and diffusion of benefits have been evaluated via the comparison of crime figures in project areas with neighbouring geographic areas on the basis of rigidly applied criteria and unspecified or loosely applied principles. He provides a useful summary of these problems thus:

1. If offenders do employ rational decision making when offending, and if they operate in an environment with a large supply of criminal opportunities, predicting any possible displacement will be problematic.
2. Offender studies have shown that most offenders do not specialise in one type of crime and will change their criminal behaviour to take advantage of different opportunities.
3. Both offenders and victims are increasingly mobile.
4. Any evaluation of crime prevention projects that is spread too thinly across time, space, and offence type, will encounter difficulties in distinguishing the effects of the project from natural variations in crime rates.
5. Similarly, it may be difficult to distinguish the effects of the project from other influences in the area” (Phillips, 2011: pp. 23-25).



## **Method**

An Internet search using Google Scholar and inserting the terms “crime displacement” and “diffusion of benefits” was undertaken on 11/5/22 to identify any relevant research studies which had taken place between the dates of 2011 and 2022. Some studies were not accessible to me as I am no longer attached to an academic institution; therefore, the studies used were necessarily limited, but those numbers were quite small, and I felt that enough of them were available in order to form an opinion about the current state of research into crime displacement.

## **Secondary Analysis of Displacement Studies 2011-2022.**

**Table 1: Meta Analyses:**

Study	Displacement Found?	Type searched for	Diffusion of Benefits?	Comments
Telep et al. (2014)	No statistically significant evidence	Spatial	No statistically significant evidence	Larger scale geographical areas; larger than hot-spot policing.
Sidebottom et al. (2018)	No	Spatial	Yes	Focus on burglary only
Piza et al. (2019)	Yes	Spatial	Yes	CCTV surveillance.
Blattman et al. (2018)	Yes	Spatial	No	Place based interventions at scale.
Braga et al. (2018)	No	Spatial	Yes	Focused deterrence strategies.
Braga et al. (2019)	Yes	Spatial	Yes	Disorder policing.
Bowers et al. (2011)	No	Spatial	Yes, but “non-significant”	Geographically focused police initiatives.

Hinkle et al. (2020)	Yes	Spatial	“Suggested”	Review of POP initiatives.
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### **Narrative results**

Telep et al. (2014), specifically look at the problem of measuring only nearby potential displacement / diffusion effects following a crime control measure. They conducted a meta-analysis of studies which looked at “medium or large size” geographical areas than would normally be associated with hot spot policing operations. They found in a review of 20 studies that “The meta-analyses found no significant overall evidence of displacement or a diffusion of benefits” (ibid:515).

Sidebottom et al. (2018), conducted a review of studies in which alley gating was used as a method to reduce burglary. They found that the method did produce a reduction in burglary in the treatment area; that no significant evidence of spatial displacement was found, and that a diffusion of benefits was evident in some surrounding areas.

Piza et al. (2019), in their meta-analysis of 76 studies from all around the world, studying the effects of CCTV on crime over 40 years, found modest, but significant reductions in crime, together with the following relative to specific locations:

Car Parks: of 8 studies only 4 looked for displacement (spatial); 2 found none, 1 found displacement and 1 found a diffusion of benefits.

City and town centres: of 33 studies, 23 found no significant effects on crime; 23 examined displacement/diffusion and 13 found no evidence of either; 3 found evidence of displacement; 6 found evidence of diffusion of benefits, and 1 found both.

Housing complexes: of 10 studies only 2 found a statistically significant reduction in crime; 6 looked for displacement/diffusion effects and none were found.

Residential areas: of 16 studies, 5 reported statistically significant reductions in crime; 11 looked for displacement/ diffusion: 4 found diffusion of benefits; 1 found both, and 6 found neither.

Public transport: of 4 studies, none found a statistically significant effect; 2 looked for displacement/diffusion:1 found displacement and 1 found diffusion of benefits.

Other settings: of 5 studies that did not fit into any of the above categories, only 1 found a statistically significant reduction in crime; 4 looked for evidence of displacement/diffusion: 3 found diffusion of benefits, and 1 found no evidence of either.

Blattman et al. (2018), looked at place-based interventions by police and city services on crime in Bogotá, Columbia by measuring the effects of double police patrols, greater municipal services, both or neither on 1,919 streets. They found that although “more intense state presence deters more crime” (ibid:2), most crime appears to displace to nearby streets, especially property crime, although violent crime may not. Moreover, they argue that the overall effect of increased patrols did not result in a statistically significant reduction in crime.

Braga et al. (2018), conducted a meta-analysis of focused deterrence strategies in 24 quasi experimental evaluations and found a statistically significant, but moderate crime reduction effect. They found a variation in the effect depending on the programme type and these effects were smaller in those areas with a more rigorous research design.

Braga et al. (2019), conducted an analysis of disorder policing strategies versus traditional law enforcement action, i.e., whether community policing and problem solving is more effective at reducing crime than zero tolerance and order maintenance policing. They found that policing

disorder through community based and problem-solving methods resulted in an overall reduction in crime, whilst traditional, aggressive or zero tolerance methods did not. 15 of the 28 studies examined also measured crime displacement/diffusion effects, and the authors state that “the overall effect size favors a diffusion of crime control benefits impact over a crime displacement effect impact; the overall effect size is small but statistically significant” (ibid:23).

Bowers et al. (2011), conducted a review of 44 geographically focused policing initiatives, 16 of which were included in a meta-analysis. The results showed that where pre and post treatment measures of crime in target and catchment areas, there was a reduction of crime in the treatment areas and a trend, albeit not statistically significant, in favour of diffusion of benefits to surrounding areas.

Hinkle et al. (2020), in a review of 34 studies which measured the effects of problem-oriented policing (POP) initiatives found a reduction of crime and disorder in 34% of cases. 13 studies tried to measure displacement/diffusion effects (21 did not test); 4 provided no evidence of displacement; 8 found displacement, 1 found benign displacement and 2 suggested diffusion of benefits.

**Table 2: Single displacement studies:**

Study	Displacement Found?	Type searched for	Diffusion of Benefits?	Comments
Tompson et al. (2022)	Yes	Spatial/ Temporal	Yes	Street lighting.
Chalfin et al. (2020)	Yes	Spatial/ Temporal	No	Street lighting.
Ladegaard (2018)	Yes	Spatial -within cyberspace	No	Digital drug markets.
Soto & Summers (2018)	No	Spatial	Yes	Macro brothels in Spain.
Park et al. (2012)	No	Spatial	Suggested	CCTV in South Korea.
Massa & Fondevila (2021)	Yes	Spatial	No	Kidnapping in Mexico.
Hatten & Piza (2021)	Yes	Spatial/ Temporal	No	Robbery.
Collazos et al. (2021)	No	Spatial	Yes	Hot Spot policing in Columbia.
Wang et al. (2019)	Yes	Spatial	No	Burglary in China.
Sorg et al. (2014)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Boundary adherence of police officers.
Hodgkinson et al. (2020)	Yes	Spatial/temporal	No, but malign displacement found	Larger scale geographical areas in Canada.
Rossmo & Summers (2019)	Yes	Spatial, temporal, target, tactical, functional	Possible	Interviews with offenders.

**Narrative results**

Tompson et al. (2022), studied the effects of switching off street lighting in the Thames Valley police area. They found that switching the lights off at midnight was associated with a reduction in night time theft from vehicles. However, thefts from vehicles during the daylight hours increased in those areas, suggesting temporal displacement, and night-time thefts from vehicles increased in adjacent roads where the lights were left on, suggesting spatial displacement.

Overall, there was a reduction in the crimes of burglary and violence both in the treatment areas and adjacent streets suggesting a diffusion of benefits.

In an earlier study Chalfin et al. (2020), studied the effects of 300,000 street light outages in Chicago. They found significant increases in crime in the surrounding lit areas, particularly robbery (7%), presumably because people are reluctant to walk in poorly lit areas and thereby increasing the number of potential victims in the adjacent lit areas; also, vehicle thefts increased in both the affected areas (9%) and in the adjacent areas (6%). Both of these findings are suggestive of malign displacement.

Ladegaard (2018), measured trade before and after the arrest of the biggest online seller of the drug MDMA in the Netherlands. The study suggested that whilst there may have been a temporary reduction in digital markets, other MDMA sellers eventually stepped in and even increased turnover and profits, suggesting that crime in cyberspace might be very resistant to conventional crime control practices.

Soto and Summers (2018), measured crime rates in Barcelona after the closure of two macro-brothels. They did not look for any prostitution displacement, but concentrated on other crimes to test the hypothesis that brothels are 'crime attractors' (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995: 8).

The results indicated that a reduction in property and violent crime was observed both in the treatment areas as well as buffer areas, and the authors claim that this shows a diffusion of benefits. However, they explain that an increase in drug and driving related offences in the treatment areas is due to an increase in police presence driving up the reporting of such crimes.

Park et al. (2012), measured the effects of CCTV in South Korea. They found a significant crime prevention effect in that robbery and theft decreased by 47.4% in areas covered by CCTV. No

displacement was found in neighboring areas, rather there was a decrease in crime rates in these areas as well suggesting a diffusion of benefits. However, CCTV was only marginally effective in reducing violent crime, and in some areas incidents of violent crime increased.

Massa & Fondevila (2021), studied the effects of direct state intervention in cases of kidnapping in Mexico City. They argued that criminal displacement is more likely to occur with highly organised criminal groups and that most studies of crime displacement focus on small areas in which to look for any displacement. They found that as a result of interventions by an anti-kidnapping force in Mexico City, that kidnapping increased in the two neighbouring states of Morelos and the State of Mexico indicating spatial displacement.

Hatten & Piza (2021), found compelling evidence of both spatial and temporal displacement of the crime of robbery as a result of increased foot patrols in Newark, New Jersey. They also found that place-based characteristics such as bus stops and general stores are crime attractors or generators.

Collazos et al. (2021), attempted to measure crime displacement and diffusion of benefits using a US based model of hot spot policing in Medellín, Columbia. The results showed a short-term increase in security perceptions; a reduction in car thefts and assaults both in the target areas and surrounding areas, but interestingly no measurable effects on other crimes. They argue therefore that context is important when adopting police-based interventions and that what may work in the US, will not necessarily work in other locations. See Blattman et al. (2018), above.

Wang et al. (2019), looked at the displacement effects of crime interventions on the specific crime of burglary in a city in China. They found overwhelming evidence confirming that geographical displacement did occur, stating that most displacement occurred about 5km away.

They use RAT theory to suggest that offenders are more likely to displace to areas that they are familiar with.

Sorg et al. (2014), studied geographic data gathered in post-experimental focus groups and highlighted the practice of boundary adjustment by police officers. All officers reported policing outside of their delineated areas. The study concluded that boundary problems could cause researchers to incorrectly identify a diffusion of benefits; underestimate immediate spatial crime displacement, and also underestimate treatment effects.

### Qualitative studies

Only two studies were identified:

In a study conducted as a direct result of the issues raised in my original work in 2011, Hodgkinson et al. (2020), used a mixed methods approach to evaluate the effects of the removal of a fast-food restaurant in a downtown area of a Canadian city which had been identified as a crime hotspot. They examined data both at the micro-geographical level at the street segment around the site of the former store, and also city-wide micro-level changes in crime patterns, rather than just in a buffer zone around the treatment area. In addition, researchers conducted a series of interviews with police officers and community safety officers to obtain qualitative data. They found significant displacement to other areas of the city (and in some cases malign displacement), by offenders who were identified by police officers and community safety officers as frequent offenders at the location of the demolished fast-food restaurant. This study raises the question of unmeasured displacement in other studies which focus solely on buffer zones around the target area and assume that any displacement of crime or diffusion of benefits would only occur “around the corner”.



Rossmo & Summers (2019), interviewed 200 offenders convicted of burglary, robbery and theft and found that 85% admitted that they had engaged in at least one type of crime displacement.

The subjects were also given a list of standard crime prevention measures and were asked to comment on their effectiveness. 41% of these measures were thought to have no effect at all.

Finally, on being given a scenario involving a particular crime control measure and crime type, they were asked what their response would be. The table below is reproduced from the study:

Desistance and displacement by crime type (N = 1,378 survey evaluations).

Crime	Spatial	Temporal	Target	Tactical	Functional	Desist
Auto theft	48%	3%	29%	16%	0%	4%
Commercial burglary	44%	3%	23%	11%	0%	15%
Commercial robbery	46%	2%	24%	12%	0%	7%
Residential burglary	37%	4%	40%	11%	0%	7%
Shoplifting	49%	2%	17%	19%	0%	10%
Street robbery	39%	2%	14%	14%	0%	30%
Vehicle burglary	53%	7%	26%	5%	0%	7%
Total	45%	4%	28%	12%	0%	9%

# Percentages do not add to 100% for each crime type as some responses involved a combination of displacement and/or desistance options and were excluded from this table. (ibid: 387)

Overall, the study showed that offenders were deterred by SCP measures in roughly 50% of cases, but only for that day, and that they favoured other displacement options rather than desisting altogether.

The study also highlights the problem of looking for displacement in the area immediately surrounding the crime control measure as it showed that offenders are willing to travel relatively large distances in order to commit their crimes. “For those subjects who provided a specific distance estimate during their interviews, 31% stated they had gone to a location within a mile of their original target area, 46% between one and five miles, 13% between five and 10 miles, and 9% more than 10 miles. The mean distance between the original and the new crime location was 4.5 miles, and the median distance was 3 miles.” (ibid: 384).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

#### **Have the problems with measuring crime displacement been addressed?**

Johnson et al. (2014), in their attempt to evaluate what is known and not known about crime displacement acknowledge that some forms of displacement have not been adequately studied and that many studies of SCP and policing initiatives are not and historically, were not, designed to detect crime displacement or diffusion of benefits. Even where those studies were designed to detect displacement, most of them are only designed to measure nearby geographical displacement. They concede that much less is known about “intermediate or distal crime movement” (ibid: 550.)

However, in the studies identified above which did aim to look beyond small geographical areas: Hodgkinson et al. (2020), found significant evidence of displacement to other areas in the city; Massa & Fondevila (2021), found displacement into neighbouring states in Mexico; Wang et al. (2019), found significant evidence of displacement 5km away from the treatment area, all of which suggest that that offenders are highly likely to choose to offend much further than “around the corner”.

Ladegaard (2018), in the study which focused on digital drug markets highlighted another area which may be problematic with traditional methods of analysing crime displacement, and Ladegaard states “Hot spot policing in cyberspace might produce temporary results, but is arguably ineffective in the long run, as actors use information and communication technology’s unique capacities to reorganize” (ibid: 113).

Evidence from increased surveillance in the form of CCTV has decidedly mixed evidence both in terms of reducing crime, and in looking for any possible displacement as can be seen in the results from the study by Piza et al. (2019). Similarly, in considering terrorism, Stein & Levi (2020), argue that surveillance techniques are unlikely to have an impact on acts of terror as terrorists are not generally concerned with apprehension after the act (martyrdom), but are more likely to be deterred by physical checks at security gates which prevent the act being committed in the first place.

Also, as pointed out in my original research (Phillips, 2011:27), Johnson et al. (2014), admit that there are still very few ethnographic studies of offender behaviour as a response to crime reduction initiatives. In the only study that I could identify that engaged with offenders directly, Rossmo & Summers (2019), found overwhelming evidence that offenders are highly likely to choose to offend much further than treatment areas and are also likely to switch quite readily to other types of offending.

In the overwhelming majority of studies in which an attempt to measure crime displacement is made, the following paragraph from my 2011 evaluation is still pertinent:

“it would seem that, as recommended by Cornish and Clarke (1987), and in line with RCT theory, most SCP evaluations of crime displacement are crime specific and concentrate on

spatial displacement. These views of displacement are thus bounded by crime type or area, and therefore fail to measure all the ways in which crime displacement may be manifested.” (Phillips, 2011:25).

It can clearly be seen from the results of the studies outlined above from 2011-2022, that most SCP initiatives are still only measuring spatial displacement in small areas surrounding the treatment or target areas. Whilst there has been more acknowledgment of the difficulties of measuring crime displacement, there is still very little evidence of trying to measure anything other than spatial displacement.

### Malign Displacement

The problem of possible malign displacement as a result of situational crime prevention measures is barely ever mentioned at all in previous studies of crime displacement. However, in the studies I have reviewed for this article, several found examples of significant malign displacement.

Hodgkinson et al. (2020), found that the removal of a fast-food restaurant which had been a criminal hotspot resulted in not only spatial displacement to areas adjacent to the site, but also to other areas of the city where malign displacement occurred in the form of increased incidences of incivility and violence.

Chalpin et al. (2020), found malign displacement where street light outages resulted in an increase in crime surrounding lit areas where robbery increased by 7%, and vehicle theft by 6%. They also found that vehicle thefts increased by 9% in the areas directly affected by the outages.

Ladegaard (2018), found that by arresting the biggest online seller of MDMA, other sellers eventually stepped in and increased turnover and profits.

Park et al. (2012), in measuring the effects of CCTV in South Korea noted that although robbery and theft decreased in the affected areas by 47.4%, incidents of violent crime increased in some areas.

There is therefore still a huge need for more qualitative data and studies with offenders to ascertain what their reaction to various types of crime prevention strategies might be, together with studies that look for displacement outside small geographical areas and which look at other types of displacement, rather than just spatial displacement. The very real and significant problem of possible malign displacement also needs to be studied adequately and in much more depth than previously.

Therefore, the problems of measuring displacement accurately which I outlined in my original research have still not been adequately addressed.

**Has the consensus of opinion on crime displacement changed since the publication of my original work in 2011?**

Statements from some of the meta-analysis studies 2011-2022 above:

Telep et al (2014), whilst acknowledging in their study outlined above, that any evidence of diffusion of benefits was not statistically significant, state “displacement is not a common occurrence at larger units of geography and a diffusion of benefits is more likely to occur” (ibid:515).

Blattman et al. (2018), state that their study outlined above, together with the one conducted in Medellín, Columbia by Collazos et al. (2021), which produced similar results, give “reasons to question the consensus view that, on average, place-based interventions have positive spillovers (a diffusion of benefits)” (ibid:48).

Braga et al. (2018), state that no significant crime displacement was found, but rather a general diffusion of benefits into nearby areas. Despite the fact that, on closer examination, only 5 of the 24 studies examined displacement specifically, they claim that "focused deterrence programs tended to generate diffusion of crime control benefits that extended into proximate areas and socially connected groups that did not receive direct treatments." (ibid:238).

Braga et al. (2019), make a statement about a small but statistically significant finding of diffusion of benefits over crime displacement in a study on disorder policing. However, a closer examination of the findings reveals that of the 15 studies used, only 4 reported any spatial displacement whilst 5 reported a diffusion of benefits. All 15 measured outcomes in very small geographical areas around the treatment zones.

Bowers et al. (2011), again use a statistically insignificant "trend" (ibid:35) to state that a diffusion of benefits is more likely than displacement whilst measuring effects in a small geographical catchment area.

Hinkle et al. (2020), Despite their findings, where only 13 of 34 studies tried to measure displacement, and in which 4 found no displacement; 8 found displacement, 1 found benign displacement and 2 suggested diffusion of benefits; they claim that "We find no evidence of significant crime displacement as a result of POP and some evidence for a greater likelihood of a diffusion of crime control benefits." (ibid:2).

In another study Johnson et al. (2014), state that "theoretical and empirical research suggests that displacement is far from inevitable and that a diffusion of benefits is at least as likely" (ibid: 549).

The studies show that as already stated, not only is possible displacement still being measured in small geographical areas, but also that statistically insignificant results are being used to support the criminologically orthodox view of crime displacement. Studies with offenders or those which measure displacement over larger geographical areas do find significant evidence of displacement, but despite this, it would seem that the consensus of opinion about crime displacement hasn't changed at all since 2011.

**Does RCT offer the best explanation in terms of criminal behaviour with regard to crime displacement.?**

Hodgkinson et al. (2020), not only found evidence of displacement, but they also found evidence of malign displacement rather than a diffusion of benefits. They state that “The presence of displacement may not contradict opportunity based rational choice theories, but it certainly confronts the view that displacement is benign or non-existent. It also introduces the real possibility that malign displacement is more common than once thought” (ibid: 215).

It can be argued that crime reduction techniques such as removing the target as in Hodgkinson et al (2020), only reduces the criminal opportunity for a particular type of crime in a particular place. Ladegaard (2018), states that “Actors are---not operating in the absence of capable guardians, but rather in the presence of incapable guardians” (ibid: 114).

In an article about counter terrorism, Stein & Levi (2020), outline problems with measuring successful outcomes of “Deterrence by Denial” strategies such as airport security measures. They posit that the accepted theories about crime displacement and diffusion of benefits have been transferred to such strategies which assume that would be terrorists are “rational actors”.

They also argue that terrorist groups are difficult to infiltrate and therefore it would be difficult to find out what their acceptable level of risk might be.

They also ask the question whether organisations might react differently to cost/benefit rational choice decisions than individuals would, citing analyses by Varese (2006, 2011), in which convicted Mafia members relocated to two areas in the north of Italy, and who were subsequently successful in infiltrating and setting up cartels in one area (Piedmont), but not in another (Verona). In Piedmont there was a large illegal labour force, a lack of trade unions, and an economy centered around construction work. The Mafia were able to provide protection services which the state could not, then they infiltrated the construction industry and eventually went into local politics. In Verona much of the economy relied on skilled craftsmen, the workforce was highly organised and well represented by trade unions. Varese therefore argues that organized crime does not automatically displace to new regions when an opportunity is denied in familiar areas. Displacement will only succeed if the attributes of the new area are amenable to infiltration and take over by such criminal groups because of a lack of organised deterrence strategies/ groups already in place. Such knowledge might only be available to large organised groups such as the Mafia rather than individual actors.

There is clearly no “one size fits all” theory for understanding crime displacement, and it is clear that trying to make RCT and RAT fit the bill is not working. Furthermore, RCT and RAT theories are not applicable when trying to understand certain types of crime (or their possible displacement) e.g., digital crime, terrorism or drug crimes.

As already pointed out, the orthodox view of crime displacement is heavily influenced by RCT and RAT, but the studies with offenders explored above show that many displaced crimes are committed outside of routine activities and quite a distance from the original target. Are



criminologists therefore in danger of using RAT not only as a ‘post-hoc truism masquerading in the literature as a pre-crime causation’ (Sutton, 2018: 1), but also as an excuse for a theory of explaining and measuring crime displacement?

Crime prevention techniques are obviously essential, and theories which seek to explain criminal behaviour are important tools when attempting to predict what criminal offenders might do in a given set of circumstances. However, when evaluating crime prevention strategies, it is important to accurately measure crime drops or increases accurately in order to demonstrate their effectiveness. Current strategies for measuring possible crime displacement are not accurate enough or wide reaching enough to measure displacement whether it be benign or malign. Until we can measure displacement accurately, there must always be a question mark over the strategy's effectiveness and also therefore, whether RCT and RAT really do offer the best explanation with regard to criminal behaviour and crime displacement.

Not only is a more robust and accurate approach required for measuring possible crime displacement, but subsequently, I would also recommend a review of the theories which seek to explain it.

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**Peer Review**

Review of Catherine Phillip's article – Situational Crime Prevention and Crime Displacement

Revisited: Myths and Miracles? Part 2

Catherine Phillips' study tackles the persistent claim by researchers focused on situational crime prevention (SCP) that crime displacement is not an issue, or it is a minor one. She makes the claim, and provides a robust examination of the supportive data, that the displacement-is-not-an-issue claim is at best unfounded, and at worse it's a serious problem with confirmation bias in the literature. This is an important and ground-breaking study and Phillips deserves to be heard.

In short, her study outlines that the technical problem facing displacement research is the size of the measured displacement area (a problem overcome in at least one Canadian study by Hodgkinson revealing significant malign displacement). As she states, it is difficult to locate actual displacement when it is measured in small geographical areas.

She also uncovers a more vexing problem – insignificant statistical results. “Statistically insignificant results are being used to support the criminologically orthodox view of crime displacement.”

That is the crux of the study. But it is her nuanced story that provides the most fascinating findings.

The study begins with the theories behind the displacement debate, specifically rational choice theory, routine activity theory, and SCP. It is worth noting that these theories focus primarily on the location and opportunity for crime and not on the motives that cause it in the first place.

There is long debate in criminological circles about whether attacking the location of crime, and not the actual causes of crime, makes sense. It comes down to what happens to the criminals once they are confronted with preventive strategies that deny them the opportunity to offend with impunity (for example: by inserting “guardians” to protect property; by hardening potential crime targets with technology; by installing lights in dark areas to deter assaults).

Does displacement exist to the point where crime is simply bounced around the urban fabric like a perverse whack-a-mole game at the circus? The earliest criminologists who embarked on this theoretical journey suggested something else. As Phillips points out:

“Mayhew et al. (1976), argued that crime prevention should encompass physical crime prevention practices and the availability of opportunities for crime, in addition to the social crime prevention studies that had dominated much criminological theory in the past.”

But, as Phillips intimates, the key for this debate is the latter comment: “in addition to the social crime prevention”. Did opportunity reducing theories actually include social strategies in subsequent years?

Presumably, with motive reducing social prevention there would be no reason for displacement since motives are resolved through substance addiction counselling, family violence mitigation, peer support for delinquent youth, and so forth. However, as Phillips points out, tactics in situational prevention have come to mean that crime is reduced by cutting the physical opportunities for it or by limiting the logistical situations that create easy offending (e.g.: restricting spray paint can sales to cut graffiti). Opportunity tactics do not address the social crime prevention programs described in 1976. That raises the spectre of crime displacement and reveals why the current study is so important.

Later in the study the author discusses what is known about displacement. She suggests the displacement measurement problem is the distance of the displacement or the difficulty of measuring it. It seems to me Phillips might have raised the bar a bit on her critique. The bigger question is not simply a technical measurement issue, but rather the quality of the displacement itself. Specifically, is the displacement benign or malign? How often does malign displacement arise? Are there certain crimes more vulnerable to malign displacement and, if so, what might the prevention practitioner do about them?

Phillips describes the Hodgkinson displacement study which discovered malign displacement and how it exacerbated the crime situation. In other words, displacement made things much worse. This malign/benign distinction is a significant point and I think Phillips might have spent more time on this dilemma. It is a major challenge to SCP and routine activity theory.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend uncovered by Phillips is highlighted in one of the meta-studies examining problem-oriented policing. She points to the tendency by some writers to claim there is no displacement or there is minimal displacement when the data does not prove any such thing.

One example in her article: Hinckle et al's work from 2020 that claims no evidence of "significant crime displacement" but then admits only 13 of their original dataset of 34 studies actually measured displacement. And, of those, Hinckle et al found displacement in 8 studies. In other words, displacement showed up in 60% of the studies they examined – rather meagre support for the displacement-is-not-a-problem argument. True, the Hinckle study focused on problem-oriented policing strategies and not on crime displacement (they dedicate only 3 paragraphs to the topic). But Phillips is right in raising the question whether this type of research tells us anything useful about displacement.

In summary, Phillips has written an excellent study that challenges the conventional thinking of crime displacement. This study is a must-read for those involved in working to prevent crime and those who research it.

I found a few minor quibbles such as her reference section that lists 37 citations, but less than half published within the previous ten years. Perhaps this is understandable since theories on displacement emerged decades ago and this remains an understudied area of criminology.

Fortunately, there are 19 more current studies cited listed under "Meta Analyses for table 1 and

2”. Those should probably be included within her overall reference citations since they clearly inform the debate on her points as much as the dated research.

This article challenges the findings of many displacement studies and it reveals that conclusions at this point in time are, at best, tentative. We simply must know more about how crime displacement works because, as we learn in this article, we do not know half of what is claimed in the literature. On one hand, crime opportunity theories have assisted the crime prevention field in many ways. But on the other hand, as Phillips makes abundantly clear, the displacement nemesis of opportunity theory has not gone away in spite of claims to the contrary.

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Author Amendments

With many thanks to Gregory Saville, I have added a section under the heading Malign Displacement with findings from the studies 2011-2022 in part of my Discussion and Conclusions.

I have included the lists of studies in tables 1 and 2 in the references but have kept them apart from other references as I feel it is useful to see these post 2011 studies separately.

Catherine Phillips. April 2023.