



World Bank  
Water, Disaster  
Management, and Urban  
Development Group  
Latin America and  
Caribbean Region

# YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION



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# YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the course on youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Violence is one of the most pressing social problems in the Americas, with far-reaching social and economic costs. These costs include the direct value of goods and services used in treating violence, non-monetary costs such as pain and suffering, economic costs from reduced productivity, lower earnings, and decreased investments, and the social impact on interpersonal relations and the quality of life. Because adolescents and young adults are at a particularly high risk for both violence perpetration and victimization, it is essential that we design and implement effective violence prevention strategies for this age group.

In this module, we will discuss the problem of youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will examine changes in youth violence rates over the last two decades, with examples from the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. We will review some of the major causes and consequences of youth violence and describe best practices and effective programs. Finally, we will explore local efforts to develop comprehensive strategies for youth violence prevention. Two case studies will be presented.

As we point out, there are many causes of youth violence. Because complex problems demand sophisticated solutions, we do not provide simple answers or specific program recommendations, but focus on the importance of understanding the complexities of the youth violence problem and the need for a broad range of solutions. We focus on prevention rather than control, although they are both part of a continuum of action against violence.

### **Goals of this Module**

The goals of this module are to

- (a) provide a general overview of the youth violence problem in Latin America and the Caribbean, including information on types, causes, and trends in youth violence;
- (b) provide a review of effective youth violence prevention programs that address specific risk factors and consider the complexities of perpetration and victimization;
- (c) provide a general framework for collaborative efforts and planning to address youth violence at the local level that emphasizes the multiple levels of influence on children and families across contexts; and
- (d) provide assistance with community strategic planning by illustrating this process in two different settings in the United States and Latin America.

### **Specific Objectives**

At the conclusion of this course module, participants should be able to:

- Describe different types of youth violence
- Describe recent trends in youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean
- Discuss major risk factors, assets, and related prevention programs

- Describe important components of community-based collaborative violence prevention planning
- Describe strategies for developing an action plan for youth violence prevention at the local level

## **Course Overview**

This module should help participants describe and discuss the problem of youth violence at the local level, including the nature of the problem, consequences, agencies and programs involved in prevention, areas most in need of attention, and recommended strategies.

Following a brief introduction, in Section 2 we will discuss the definition of youth violence and types of youth violence, and review data on trends in youth violence. We highlight issues related to assessment and reporting and discuss the critical need for data-based planning at the local level.

In Section 3, we will explore the many causes of youth violence. In order to design the best prevention programs, it is important to understand the causes of different types of violence in different settings. As we shall point out, violence is a multi-faceted phenomenon that does not have a single cause, but rather is related to a convergence of individual and contextual influences that begin even before a child is born.

In Section 4, we discussed a range of "best practices" or effective prevention strategies. We organize these around programs that emphasize children's development, family interactions, peer processes, mentoring, school practices, and community development and change. We also discuss costs of violence as well as costs of prevention.

Section 5 emphasizes putting this information together as part of a comprehensive planning process at the local level. We provide a case study in community infrastructure development to enhance social capital from Cali, Colombia, another example in community service coordination in Riverside, California, U.S.

At the conclusion of each section, we provide some general questions for review and discussion that emphasize application to local conditions. In Section 5, we also provide guidelines for collaborative planning efforts.

## II. OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

### Definition and Types of Youth Violence

#### *Definition*

In order to understand both causes and solutions, we must first explore the different meanings of violence and the type of violence to be addressed.

The term *violence* is used to describe animal and human behavior that threatens to cause or causes severe harm to a target. This harm can vary in nature, and includes physical, sexual, and psychological harm. Violence and aggression are frequently used as synonyms, with violence marked by an extra degree of excessiveness. There are also differences in terms depending on the age of the perpetrator. For instance, children under the age of 12 are usually described in terms of aggression; youth violence typically refers to acts committed by youth between the ages of 12 and 18 (although exact age figures may vary worldwide up to age 29).

There has been much controversy about the term violence and just what actions should be covered. Some have offered more limited definitions based on constraints such as intentionality, legality, and nature of targets. Each limitation provides a more specific definition with associated advantages and disadvantages. Most public efforts to address violence focus on *physical and sexual violence*. However, it should be noted that this definition does not extend to *psychological violence and intimidation*.

Limiting the definition of violence to “illegal behaviors” that cause harm or injury is consistent with legal guidelines. Such a definition is useful from a policy and control perspective because it covers actions generally considered as violent, including *forcible rape, armed robbery, aggravated assault, gang violence, and homicide*. A problem with this definition is that the same behavior may be judged illegal or legitimate depending on specific cultural and historical conditions. From this perspective, a behavior would only be considered violent if there were official sanctions against it.

Some definitions of violence include only behavior that is designed to harm others (or animate beings). This focus emphasizes the antisocial and immoral nature of violence as an act against society. However, it excludes the self as a target of harm and injury, which is inconsistent with public health definitions. Indeed, more people die from suicide than homicide. In the United States, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for youth ages 15-24; mortality rates are 1.7 times greater for suicide than homicide. Still, most local violence prevention strategies emphasize violence against others in the context of community safety.

***For the purposes of this course, we will define violence as intentional behaviors that threaten to cause or cause harm to others. We also note that in official data, homicide rates typically are the most frequently-used indicators.***

#### *Types of Youth Violence*

Violence is not one behavioral pattern but several. The multi-faceted and complex nature of violence has led to a number of proposed guidelines and classification schemes. Behavioral scientists and others have worked to develop classifications by grouping together meaningful categories of violence that share common characteristics related to causes and purpose.

One approach has been to classify violence according to the underlying motivation of the aggressor. A frequently used distinction is between *hostile* and *instrumental* motivation. In hostile violence, the major goal is to inflict harm or injury. In other words, hurting is an end in itself. In instrumental violence, actions may cause harm but are not motivated by the desire to cause harm per se. Rather, they are motivated by goals such as taking resources.

This distinction has proved useful. Certain types of violence such as armed robbery, murder-for-hire, and terrorism generally are well planned, goal-directed, instrumental actions. Offenders are acting to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. Many prominent models of criminal behavior emphasize the rational choice component of crime.

This type of planned behavior is distinguished from more impulsive and hostile violent actions often characterized by loss of control, irrationality, and rage. Such impulsive violent behaviors are frequently labeled emotional violence and are linked with emotions such as anger and fear. Biological models of violence have identified distinct neural patterns that characterize each type of violence. For example, the “low-arousal” aggressor more likely to commit instrumental violence is underreactive and responds sluggishly to stressors. In contrast, the “high-arousal” aggressor who is more prone to hostile violence tends to be hypervigilant and easily frustrated.

Another distinction between classes of violence that bears some similarity to the hostile/instrumental classification is the difference between defensive and offensive violence. This distinction has been fundamental to animal studies of aggression, with defensive and offensive aggression linked to stimulation of different areas of the brain. In humans, instrumental aggression is roughly analogous to predatory aggression although it is limited to intraspecies behavior. In other words, when humans kill animals for food it is generally not considered offensive violence in the same sense as killing a rival gang member. Similarly, emotional or hostile aggression in humans could be considered the analogue of defensive aggression in response to a threat or perceived threat.

Different classification schemes serve different purposes. In everyday usage, violence is often divided into distinct classes based on criteria useful for description, dialogue, and public policy. Violence can be grouped into categories based on variables such as the agents of violence (e.g., gangs, youth, collective groups), the victims of violence (e.g., women, children, minority groups), the relationship between aggressor and victim (e.g., interpersonal, non-related), perceived causality (e.g., psychopathological, situational, learned), and type of harm (e.g., physical, psychological, sexual).

Some efforts have focused on developing classification systems that can guide prevention, intervention, and control efforts. Tolan and Guerra (1994)<sup>2</sup> describe four types of youth violence: *situational, relationship, predatory, and psychopathological*. This classification scheme has been proposed to provide an organization for efforts to prevent youth violence--each distinct type of violence warrants a different type of intervention. For example, conflict-resolution programs would be useful for relationship violence but not for predatory violence.

***Situational violence.*** Studies have shown that specific situations can both lead to violence and increase the seriousness of the act. Police records, emergency room surveys, and other sources show increases in violence rates during *extreme heat, on weekends, and during times of social stress*, irregardless of individual factors. The availability of *handguns* and *alcohol and drug use* also represent powerful catalysts for youth violence. These situational factors lead to a substantial portion

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<sup>2</sup> Tolan, P. H., & Guerra, N. G. (1994). *What works in reducing adolescent violence: An empirical review of the field*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado. Available at: [www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv).



of violence. In this fashion, the occurrence of violence is not attributable simply to individual tendencies, instrumental goals, or relationship problems.

**Relationship Violence.** The second type of violence develops in the context of relationships. This type of violence encompasses a large portion of violence for all age groups, including youth, and particularly in Latin America. It arises from interpersonal disputes between persons with ongoing relationships, particularly friends and family members. In many cases, relationship violence seems to be a family habit, with the occurrence of violence between parents related to violence toward and among children. For youth, dating violence is another example of relationship violence. It may be useful to distinguish *domestic violence* (based on blood, marriage, or common-law) from non-domestic violence (labeled *social violence*)<sup>3</sup>

**Predatory Violence.** This type of violence refers to acts that are perpetrated intentionally to obtain some gain. *Muggings, robbery, and gang assaults* are common forms of this type of violence. Studies have shown that a relatively small percentage of adolescents are responsible for most of the serious predatory violence as part of a pattern of chronic antisocial behavior that often begins early in life. This pattern is the most studied and best understood type of adolescent violence. It seems to be predictable, develops slowly over time with onset in early adolescence, lasts long after adolescence, is dependent on multiple risk factors, and seems to require intensive and early prevention and treatment methods.

**Psychopathological Violence.** This is a rare type of violence but is often has the most deadly consequences. Of the four types, it represents the clearest example of individual pathology. Research suggests that such behavior is related to brain development and severe psychological trauma. For instance, *serial killers* typically evidence a history of psychopathology. Apparently, the violent behavior represents a by-product of the pathology rather than situational provocation or a developing criminal career.

### **Youth Violence in the Americas**

As cross-national and historical data indicate, violence has been a problem for a long time, and is committed by and towards individuals from all segments of society. However, youth are disproportionately involved in violence as both victims and perpetrators. The World Health Organization, *World report on violence and health* (WHO, 2003), estimates that 199,000 youth murders took place globally in 2000. Data also show that homicide rates are highest among males ages 15-24.

Although data on the violence problem worldwide is sometimes incomplete, existing evidence suggests that rates for serious violence such as homicide vary greatly across and within different regions of the world. For example, the worldwide average is approximately 11 homicides per 100,000 population. In contrast, the rate in Latin America and the Caribbean is almost three times the average rate, at 36.4/100,000 (WHO, 2003). Further, within this region, rates exceed the regional average in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, and Jamaica. Homicide rates also vary greatly across cities within

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<sup>3</sup> Buvinic, M., Morrison, A., & Shifter, M. (1999). *Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A framework for action*. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank.

countries. For example, the 1999 homicide rate in Medellin, Colombia (162/100,000) was approximately four times as high as in Bogota, Colombia (42/100,000).<sup>4</sup>

In many parts of the world, youth homicide rates increased dramatically between the mid-1980s and mid 1990s, a growth associated in many cases with increases in the availability of guns and drug markets. Although there is some evidence that this epidemic may have peaked in the mid 1990s, at least in the United States, rates are still higher than pre 1980s levels. In many urban settings, youth violence appears to be on the upswing since 2000. Indeed, the increase in youth violence and violence in general appears to be an urban phenomenon.

In many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, serious violence has increased steadily since the 1980s; regional homicide rates rose by an average of almost 50% during this period. In some cases, these increases were more dramatic. For instance, between 1980 and 2002, the homicide rate in Brazil more than doubled, from 11.4 per 100,000 population to 28.4. In São Paulo city, the rate more than tripled, from 17.5 in 1980 to 53.9 in 2002.<sup>5</sup> There is also evidence that this increase is most dramatic in recent years. For example, in Venezuela, a total of 9,617 homicides were recorded in 2002, a 30% increase from 2001.<sup>6</sup>

Not only is youth homicide a significant problem worldwide, but levels of aggression, bullying, abuse, and domestic violence are also of serious concern. In a recent survey of school-aged children in 27 countries (WHO, 2003), a majority of 13-year olds indicated that they engaged in bullying at least some of the time. Although worldwide data on child abuse are incomplete, the World Health Organization also estimates that approximately 40 million children 0-14 suffer from abuse. In every country where reliable studies have been conducted, results indicate that between 10% and 50% of women report they have been physically abused by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

### **Documenting Youth Violence Rates--Surveillance and Reporting Systems**

In many cases, documentation of youth violence is fragmented and partial, particularly at the local level. For this reason, an important first step in implementing successful prevention programs is to improve the quality of local data. These data can provide valuable information for policy or program development to prevent youth violence and for evaluating these efforts.

As we have discussed, homicide rates are frequently used as a general indicator of level of violence. The source of data for these rates may vary to reflect either victim statistics (number of individuals who are murdered) or perpetrator information (arrests for homicide). For information about youth violence perpetration, it is important to examine arrest data and to ensure that these data provide adequate information. For example, it is useful to collect information on age categories in order to capture adequately different risks of violence involvement at different ages, as well as information on different types of violence.

In many localities, youth violence is measured using arrest information. The accuracy and utility of this information varies greatly. In many settings, crimes are less likely to be reported to the authorities, resulting in an underestimation of violence, particularly when confidence in police and the judicial system is low. In other settings, certain groups of individuals may be disproportionately arrested for violent crimes. One strategy for increasing confidence in violence data is to gather this

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<sup>4</sup> Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses. Centro de Referencia Nacional sobre la Violencia (2000). Santa Fe de Bogota.

<sup>5</sup>Centers for Disease Control (March, 2004). Homicide trends and characteristics—Brazil 1980-2002. MMWR.

<sup>6</sup> *Drawing the line on guns* (March 22, 2004). Orange County Register.

information from different sources. For example, central archiving units can be created to process youth violence data from different agencies.

In addition to archival data, crime victimization surveys can provide useful information. Crime victimization surveys measure victimization in a representative sample of citizens. For example, in the United States, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) has been collecting data on personal and household victimization since 1973. The survey is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the Bureau of Justice Statistics. It is the primary source of information on the number and types of crimes not reported to law enforcement authorities. Data are obtained twice each year from a nationally representative sample of roughly 49,000 households comprising about 100,000 persons on the frequency, characteristics, and consequences of criminal victimization in the United States. Similar surveys have been administered in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The NCVS was designed with four primary objectives: (1) to develop detailed information about the victims and consequences of crime; (2) to estimate the number and types of crimes not reported to the police; (3) to provide uniform measures of selected types of crimes; and (4) to permit comparisons over time and types of areas. The data include type of crime, month, time, and location of the crime, relationship between victim and offender, characteristics of the offender, self-protective actions taken by the victim during the incident and results of those actions, consequences of the victimization, type of property lost, whether the crime was reported to the police and reasons for reporting or not reporting, and offender use of weapons, drugs, and alcohol. Basic demographic information, such as age, race, gender, and income, is also collected to enable analysis of crime by various subpopulations.

- A copy of the NCVS is available at <http://www.ojp.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ncvs1.pdf>.

**Activity 1: The Local Context**

(please estimate to the best of your knowledge)

- a. What are the most important youth violence problems in your city?
  
- b. What areas of your city are most affected by youth violence?
  
- c. What percentage of youth violence in your city is due to relationship violence? Is this most frequently between family members, neighbors, or acquaintances? Describe a typical incident.
  
- d. What percentage of youth violence in your city is due to predatory violence? How much of this is gang-related? Describe a typical incident.
  
- e. What have been the trends in youth violence perpetration and victimization in your city over the last two decades? How does this compare to country and regional trends?
  
- f. What data on youth violence are available at the local level? How is this information coordinated and communicated to policy makers? What additional data would be useful for documentation and program planning?

### III. FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING YOUTH VIOLENCE

#### Risk Factors for Youth Violence and Assets for Healthy Development

In order to effectively prevent problem behaviors such as violence, it is necessary to understand how such behavior develops and is sustained or escalates. A popular approach, based on a public health model, has been to identify a set of *risk factors* that increase the probability of aggressive and violent behaviors. On the other hand, *protective factors* or *assets* have been identified that potentially decrease the likelihood of engaging in violence. In settings or situations where violence is more likely, youth who manage to do well in spite of these odds have been labeled *resilient*. Drawing on this approach, interventions can be designed to increase risk factors, enhance protective factors, or build resilience.

- **Risk Factors** are scientifically established factors or determinants for which there is strong objective evidence of a relationship to youth violence
- **Protective Factors or Assets** are scientifically established factors that potentially decrease the likelihood of violence, thus "protecting" youth from risk or adversity.
- **Resiliency** emphasizes the ability to overcome obstacles, bounce back from frustration, and become a healthy and productive individual

In recent years, community responses have frequently been divided into those that emphasize:

- (a) identification of risk factors for both selection of participants and type of intervention, or
- (b) identification of important assets that can be promoted or enhanced.

Because risk factor research tends to emphasize what is "wrong" with youth and communities, a focus on assets has been embraced as building on what is "right" or what should be made right in communities. In truth, many protective factors reflect the opposite end of the risk spectrum. For instance, just as child abuse or neglect is a risk factor, parental warmth and caring is a protective factor or asset. For this reason, we now turn to a review of risk factors for youth violence, while still noting how these can be recast as protective factors or assets in order to guide interventions by encouraging positive development.

Risk factors for youth violence include *individual characteristics of children, risk associated with close interpersonal relationships (families and peers), and community and societal factors.*

#### ***Individual Characteristics of Children***

At the individual level, risk factors can be divided into biological factors, cognitive/academic problems, and behavior. In some cases, risk in one area (e.g., biological risk) can increase risk in another area (e.g., cognitive/academic risk). Similarly, risk at one level (e.g., child abuse in families) can increase risk in another level (e.g., brain development).

*Biological risk factors* typically are related to some type of neurological damage. This may occur as a result of a variety of events, including injuries or complications associated with birth and delivery, malnutrition, lead exposure, or severe trauma. For example, recent studies on early brain development

have identified a state called "hyper-arousal" that involves early exposure to chronic, traumatic stress such as domestic violence.<sup>7</sup>

Example: Hyper arousal

“Hyper-arousal is most common among adolescent boys. Similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, it occurs when the brain's "alarm" system becomes overly sensitized to threatening cues, often resulting in an aggressive or violent response. This typically occurs in response to chronic, traumatic stress such as child abuse early in development. The child's brain adapts to a dangerous and unpredictable world by being on alert for danger—it is hypervigilant to potential cues of threat or danger. The brain literally sensitizes the pathways for the fear response and creates memories so that the fear response becomes almost automatic. This can result in both an overreactivity to perceived threats as well as actual provocation of others in order to increase the predictability of threat.”

Several child characteristics related to *cognitive/academic functioning* have been identified as risk factors for aggression. For instance, there is strong research evidence that early aggression is linked to hyperactivity, poor self-control, IQ deficits, academic deficiencies, and low verbal skills. Further, many of these characteristics not only predict early aggression but also predict violence into early adulthood. There is some evidence that this constellation of risk factors is linked to deficiencies in the executive functions of the frontal lobes of the brain. These functions are implicated in sustaining attention, concentration, planning, goal formulation, effective self-monitoring, self-awareness of behavior, and inhibitions for inappropriate or impulsive behaviors. In addition to cognitive problems that influence learning, more aggressive children also develop distinct patterns of social cognition, such as difficulties solving interpersonal (social) problems.

Early aggression is the *behavioral* risk factor most closely associated with continued aggression during adolescence and beyond. Studies from around the world have consistently found that childhood aggression during the elementary school years is one of the best and most consistent predictors of youth violence. Serious adolescent violence is also a strong predictor of adult offending.

***Risk Associated with Close Interpersonal Relationships (Families and Peers)***

*Families.* Two primary dimensions of family functioning have been studied as risk factors for aggression and as possible targets for preventive interventions: (a) parent management methods and problem solving skills; and (b) characteristics of the emotional atmosphere of the family. Looking at assets or protective factors, families with effective parent management and problem solving skills and a positive emotional atmosphere are more likely to have children who are socially competent rather than aggressive.

*Parent management techniques and problem solving skills* have been studied extensively, and several techniques have been found to be more likely among parents of aggressive children. These include:

- inconsistent discipline that is sometimes harsh and sometimes lenient
- reliance on coercion and poor behavior management skills
- unduly harsh and/or abusive discipline
- low levels of parental monitoring and supervision, particularly with adolescents
- lack of information about child development and inefficient use of family resources

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<sup>7</sup> National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (2001). Understanding the effects of maltreatment on early brain development. Washington, DC: Dept. of Health and Human Services. Available at: [www.calib.com/nccanch](http://www.calib.com/nccanch).

- shared deviant values that support violent and criminal behavior

Example: Does Corporal Punishment Increase Risk for Aggression?

“There is considerable debate regarding the effects of spanking and corporal punishment on children's aggression. Some believe that any type of physical violence towards children, including spanking, will create a climate that sanctions aggression and increases the likelihood that children will behave aggressively. In a recent household survey of adults in the U.S., Latin America, and Spain, many parents thought that corporal punishment was necessary for their children. However, the survey also found that parents who themselves were spanked as children were more likely to hit their children, hit their children with an object, slap their partner, hit their partner with an object, and hit a non-family member. Although spanking children, absent other risk factors, is unlikely to cause aggression and violence, it does play a role in future aggression.<sup>8</sup>”

Characteristics of the *emotional atmosphere* of the family also have been found to be risk factors for aggression. Specifically, families of aggressive children have been found to have lower levels of emotional cohesion or closeness, a high frequency of negative and a low frequency of positive statements, and more dominance by one family member. There is also evidence to indicate that parent-infant attachment styles, characterized by a close relationship with a caregiver during infancy, differ between aggressive and non-aggressive children, with aggressive children showing more insecure attachments. Similarly, family relationships that are abusive significantly increase children's risk for aggressive and violent behavior.

*Peers.* Children's peer groups have an important influence on their development and behavior, particularly as children grow older and during adolescence. In most cases, these influences are positive, providing a setting for children to learn how to take turns, cooperate, and develop social skills. Peer groups are typically defined by similarities in both values and behaviors of children. This means that aggressive children tend to socialize with other aggressive children, and share similar norms regarding the appropriateness of aggression. It may be that "birds of a feather simply flock together," or it may be that aggressive and delinquent children have a more limited number of non-aggressive peers from whom to choose, since they are also more likely to be rejected by others.

It is well documented that by adolescence, youths who engage in violent and delinquent acts also tend to have delinquent friends. However, by adolescence this association is often more formalized, and serious violence and delinquency often occurs in connection with gangs. This is particularly evident in economically disadvantaged, urban communities where street gangs have a profound influence on the lives of children, adolescents, and adults.

Example: Gangs and Youth Violence

“Juvenile gangs are found throughout the world. They are typically comprised of adolescent and young adult males, although girls are now starting to form their own gangs. They tend to develop along racial and ethnic lines, stake out a specific territory, operate as an organization that may be part of a larger group, and display symbols of their organization in dress, tatoos, grafitti, hand signals, and language. Although gangs represent a relatively small proportion of the adolescent population, they commit a high proportion of serious youth violence.

In the United States, gang activity has been traced to the early 19th century when youth gangs emerged from some immigrant populations. However, since the 1980's studies have documented a more rapid proliferation of gang activity. For instance, the 1999 National Youth Gang Survey

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<sup>8</sup> Pan American Health Organization (2004). Activa Project: Cultural norms and attitudes towards violence in selected cities in Latin America and Spain. Available at: [www.paho.org/AD/DPC/NC/activa-sum.htm](http://www.paho.org/AD/DPC/NC/activa-sum.htm).

reported an estimated 26,000 gangs and 840,500 gang members in the U.S. The majority of these gang members reside in large cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles. Recent data from Latin America also indicate a growing gang problem. For example, the World Health Organization reports that there are an estimated 30,000-35,000 gang member in El Salvador and a similar number in Honduras. There is also a growing gang problem in northern and southwestern Mexican towns, where immigration from the United States is highest.

Research suggests that there may be multiple reasons why youth join gangs. These include lack of opportunities, social disorganization of the neighborhood, family disorganization, poor academic achievement and interrupted schooling, harsh physical punishment or victimization in the home, a local decline in law enforcement and order, and having peers, siblings, or family members who are already involved in a gang.”

### ***Community and Societal Factors***

The schools children attend, the neighborhoods they live in, and the broader societal context in which they grow and develop have an important influence on their development. In general, youth growing up in poor, urban neighborhoods with scarce resources, inadequate schools, and high levels of crime are more likely to be involved in violence than children growing up in more affluent neighborhoods. Still, there are particular factors in each context that impact violence. We now turn to a discussion of the impact of schools and the broader societal context. Following this, we focus entirely on specific risk in disadvantaged, urban communities and what factors seem to contribute to this risk.

*Schools.* In addition to the role of schools in promoting school achievement (an asset for healthy development), schools can influence aggression in a number of other ways. In particular, characteristics of both the school organization and specific teacher practices have been shown to increase risk for children's aggression or promote positive behavior. For instance, positive student behavior is more likely in schools that encourage student involvement in decision making, focus on excellence, have high quality leadership, and provide clear formal and informal behavior codes that are consistently enforced.

There is also evidence that teacher behavior and the social organization of the classroom can influence positive development as well as aggression. For example, studies of teacher-student interactions suggest that coercive interaction patterns can generate and maintain children's antisocial behavior in the classroom. Further, studies have consistently shown that teachers inadvertently reinforce aggression in the classroom by attending to students when they are disruptive rather than when they are well-behaved. Moreover, teacher expectations about students they regard as potentially violent has been shown to influence their behavior.

*Societal Factors.* Societal factors can create conditions that contribute to youth violence. In some cases, these conditions are directly linked to economic crises or a substantial decline in standard of living and basic infrastructure. This can result in a destabilization of informal and formal controls, greater income inequality, housing shortages and overcrowding, lack of opportunities, frustration, revolts, increase in illegal opportunity structures, increase in alcohol consumption, greater availability and use of guns, and a general increase in violence. However, these changes often result from complex political and historical influences and are difficult to modify in the short term, particularly at the national or regional level.

In addition to social conditions, cultural factors can increase or decrease the likelihood of violence in a society. Rates of violence across countries are not solely a function of economic development or opportunity structures, but also reflect different cultural norms about the acceptability of violence.



Societies and cultures that are more tolerant of violence and propagate these beliefs through rituals, customs, media exposure, rules, and laws tend to have higher rates of youth violence. In some settings, violence is seen as a normative and appropriate mechanism for both personal gain and conflict resolution. This is often complicated by the fact that disadvantaged social and economic conditions are both influenced by and influence these emerging norms. In some communities, violence becomes a normative currency for social interaction and engagement.

### **Specific Risk in Disadvantaged, Urban Communities**

We devote a special section to specific dimensions of risk in disadvantaged, urban communities. This is because interpersonal violence is one of the more pressing problems facing poor, urban residents around the world. Muggings, burglaries, carjackings, and drug-related crimes are now a common feature in many urban communities. Data on violence rates consistently find that youth who are poor, marginalized, and live in cities are at greater risk for violence perpetration and victimization than almost any other demographic group. This is particularly true in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the gap between the rich and the poor is often high, and urban pockets of extreme disadvantage are common.

Although it may be easy and convenient to implicate obvious factors such as poverty and lack of opportunities, understanding risk in this setting requires a deeper look at the dynamics in these communities and how they influence children's development. Poor, urban environments can influence both individual propensities for aggression as well as the circumstances under which aggression is learned over time. These communities provide a broad context of development that is situated within a larger, more distal historical, political, national, and global context. In many cases these settings reflect a non-shared context with mainstream society that defines unique pathways of development for poor, urban children.

In many communities, cities, and countries, the urban landscape has been greatly reshaped over the past few decades. Although changes vary by country and city, in many cases transformations have included an exodus of jobs, higher unemployment, prolonged joblessness, and detachment from conventional work and related values and skills within urban settings. Other transformations have included the movement of working-class families into the suburbs, retention of low-income families in the inner city due to declining housing values and rents, and increasing racial or economic segregation. In some cities, particularly in the poorer countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean, the situation in urban areas has simply gone from bad to worse, with a growing influence of illegal markets.

Still, if we are begin to address the manifestations of risk for violence in urban areas, we must try to capture the specific dimensions of risk in these settings. Although poverty is clearly a marker for disadvantage, it does not adequately capture the dimensions of disadvantage. The effects of poverty on youth violence are more evident when considering the mechanisms by which poverty and associated features can impact violence. Indeed, this recognition is one of the advances in violence research that has often associated disadvantage merely with poverty.

Three dimensions of disadvantage are particularly important in understanding the link with youth violence and can provide a focus for preventive efforts:

- resource scarcity
- concentrated disadvantage
- danger

### ***Resource Scarcity***

Resources refer to assets of a community that can be mobilized to promote human development. They can be physical or material resources, human resources, or social resources. Physical resources include such obvious assets as income and quality of the environment, and tangible opportunities (such as child care, schools, and businesses) that support families. Human resources include the prevalence of persons in the community with the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve or to help others achieve, either through their direct supportive involvement or indirectly by serving as role models. Social resources refer to the availability of social networks and social capital. Each type of resource is important for children's development and can be an effective violence prevention strategy. Indeed, studies of poor urban communities in Latin American and the Caribbean have often found a cyclical relation between social capital and violence—low levels of social capital promote violence, and violence, in turn, contributes to the further destruction of social capital.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Concentrated Disadvantage***

The degree of concentration of disadvantage in poor, urban settings is a key feature in understanding the development of adaptive strategies to disadvantage, particularly the rise of alternative means to surviving in an austere and potentially hostile environment. Thus, it is the combination of resource scarcity with intense concentration that must be considered in understanding patterns of violence. Concentration and poverty too often exacerbate the perception among residents that they are marginalized from the broader society. Density, residential segregation, and social exclusion accentuate the devaluation of these groups. Many residents simply feel that their voices are not heard and their needs are often ignored. Proximity creates a collective identity of the disenfranchised. When we look closely at the human costs of concentrated disadvantage, we often find a sense of separateness, lack of hope for the future, and a low level of personal self-efficacy to make things better.

### ***Danger***

Danger is often overlooked as an important dimension of disadvantage. This is a serious oversight because it plays a significant role in shaping the day-to-day cultural beliefs and practices within a community. Participation in dangerous life situations heightens the risk of violent posturing and violent behavior. Such settings also increase levels of fear and create a need for responses that help youth manage this fear. Some residents speak of an *ecology of danger* defined by the knowledge that violence can erupt at any moment, where individuals are generally regarded as having hostile motives. As a result, possessing a gun plays an important role in personal safety as both a pre-emptive and defensive strategy. In these communities, most young males can and do have guns, and that guns are available to just about anyone who has the means to buy, borrow, or steal them. Guns also raise the stakes in conflict—individuals who show guns must also be willing to use guns, limiting the number of choices for resolving conflicts. Further, gun carrying fosters a cognitive and behavioral readiness to aggress that can lead to offensive as well as defensive forms of violence.

### **The Ecology of Risk--Linking Individual and Contextual Influences**

Although we have reviewed a number of individual and contextual factors that increase or decrease risk for youth violence, it is still the case that no single factor, by itself, can explain much of the variance of aggression in the population, much less predict who will become seriously aggressive or

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<sup>9</sup> Moser, C., & Holland, J. (1997). Urban poverty and violence in Jamaica. In *World Bank Latin America and Caribbean studies: viewpoints*. Washington, DC. World Bank.

violent. Any one factor, considered separately, provides a competing theory of violence rather than an integrated perspective on how violence develops. Even if considered collectively, this listing of risk factors (as well as protective factors or assets) does not indicate how best to target prevention and intervention programs or direct policies.

Instead, it is important to address not only these separate risk factors, but the connections across these factors that considers the occurrence of violence as dependent on multiple-level influences that are part of a larger system that shapes these factors. In other words, a systems approach characterizes different levels of a child's life involvement and provides an appropriate focus for intervention efforts. This is considered an *ecological model*.

An ecological model allows us to consider direct effects within a level and simultaneously be aware of indirect effects from other "nested levels." We have emphasized three types of risk factors: individual factors; close interpersonal relations (family, peers); and community/societal factors. It is also important to understand that these types of risk are interconnected (or nested) so that what happens at one level impacts development at other levels. In other words, individual development is influenced by close interpersonal relations that are, in turn, influenced by community contexts and societal factors.

For example, a community policing program is likely to enhance neighborhood safety. In turn, this should provide a greater sense of security for families and reduce stress associated with children playing outside. Parents then are likely to be more supportive of children's playtime activities and individual children will have more opportunities for regular interaction with their peers. As this illustrates, intervention planning therefore must consider the multiple levels that impact a child and the effects on the developing child. It is important to provide interventions that focus directly on individuals while simultaneously influencing systems in which the individual develops. Interventions at the community or societal level typically are harder to bring about but can have broader benefits. Interventions at the individual level are more likely to result in immediate benefits, but for a smaller number of people.

One approach to community building for violence prevention is to provide interventions that are likely to have an impact at each of these three levels simultaneously. For example, at the *community level*, the focus could be on eliminating "broken windows," adding parks and playgrounds, providing community policing, and general physical enhancement. At the *relationship level*, this approach could provide mentors for young people to learn prosocial skills and engagement. At the *individual level*, programs in anger management and conflict resolution could be offered. Ideally, the impact of these interventions would be directed at groups of youth most at-risk. In the next section, we illustrate a range of approaches that can be effective at each level.

**Activity 2: Risk and Assets in Your City**

(please estimate to the best of your knowledge)

- a. What are the some of the primary individual risk factors for youth violence in your city?
  
- b. What are some of the most important family risk factors for youth violence in your city?
  
- c. What are some of the most important peer risk factors in your city?
  
- d. To what extent is gang violence a major factor in youth violence in your city? How has this changed over the last decade?
  
- e. What are some of the more pressing problems with the educational system in your city and how does this relate to youth violence problems?
  
- f. How have the economic and social circumstances affecting poor residents of your city changed over the last decade? What are current conditions with respect to resource scarcity, concentrated disadvantage, and danger?
  
- g. What are the some of the primary individual assets for youth in your city?

h. What are some of the most important family assets for youth in your city?

i. What are some of the most important peer assets in your city?

j. What are the primary positive youth groups in your city to encourage healthy youth development in your city?

k. What are some of the more positive features of the educational system in your city and how do these relate to youth achievement and competence?

l. What economic and social improvements have taken place in your city over the last decade? What are the current social resources available? How have residents and law enforcement worked to reduce danger?

#### IV. EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Just as there is no single cause of youth violence, there is no single solution. Given this complexity, prevention programs have been developed that focus on a broad range of risk factors across different contexts and for children of different ages. Some programs emphasize *primary or universal* interventions that are delivered to the whole population. In other cases, programs target *subgroups* of the population who are at high risk or who have been identified as having detectable violence-related problems. Even strategies typically linked with violence control, such as residential detention programs for offenders, are also trying to prevent future violence.

A clear challenge for policy makers and service providers is deciding which types of programs for which group of individuals will have the greatest impact in the local setting. As mentioned in the previous section, community programs that *target multiple levels of risk* or influence are likely to have the strongest effects on changes in individual behavior and overall rates of violence. It is also likely that programs that target *young children and involve families* will be most successful, because patterns of violence develop at an early age and families are the one context that is relatively stable throughout a child's development.

Of course, decisions on types of programs included in a community strategy are often linked to factors such as specific youth violence problems, service availability and service gaps, economic constraints, political considerations, and public opinion. For example, if a city is responding to a growing and violent youth gang problem, resources must be allocated to this problem before being extended to early development programs such as preschool enrichment or home visitation with new mothers, where effects will take over a decade to be realized.

We now turn to a discussion of specific types of programs that address individual and contextual risk factors that have been shown to be effective in preventing violence. Whatever combination or sequencing of programs is selected, it is critical that these programs reflect what is known about "best practices." After reviewing specific types of programs, we then suggest effective strategies at each level of intervention.

##### **General Recommendations for Youth Violence Prevention Programs**

- Provide programs across multiple levels of risk
- Begin early--the path to violence begins even before birth
- Involve families—they are the most constant influence in children's lives and are particularly important during the early years when patterns are developing
- Provide for identification of youth most at-risk for violence and offer specialized and tailored services for these youth
- Build assets and encourage healthy development—this is the best antidote to violence and problem behavior

## **Child-Centered Interventions**

The most common child-centered preventive interventions against youth violence focus on building individual skills, assets, and other positive factors that will reduce risk. As mentioned previously, key individual risk factors for violence are:

- **Neurological damage**
- **Hyper-arousal**
- **Hyperactivity**
- **Poor self control and high impulsivity**
- **IQ and Academic deficiencies**
- **Low verbal skills**
- **Lack of social and interpersonal problem solving skills**
- **Early aggressive behavior**

Given these risk factors, most child-centered programs cluster around four areas of risk: physical development and health; cognitive functioning and academic performance; social/cognitive processes; and social/behavioral skills. Some interventions are quite specific to one area, such as academic enrichment, whereas other programs represent more broad-based approaches. Some programs are offered by professionals while other programs train specific caregivers, such as teachers. Prevention efforts are often distinguished by the age period served-- birth to five years, childhood, and adolescence.

### ***Interventions for Children from Birth through Five Years of Age***

Over the past decade, there has been a surge of research into early brain development and its relation to learning and behavior. Although it had been previously thought that babies were born with their brain structure already genetically determined, new studies are pointing to the importance of the early environment as well. More and more, we are realizing that activities to stimulate early learning are critically important. In recognition of this need, a common strategy for preventive interventions with this age group emphasizes *preschool education and enrichment*. Several studies have found that these programs are effective in promoting healthy development and in reducing children's aggressive and violent behavior.

This early stimulation and learning is particularly critical for children growing up in resource poor communities with few opportunities. In the United States, a popular intervention that has been implemented for several decades is the *Head Start* program. This program was designed as an early academic enrichment program for economically disadvantaged children. It was originally implemented as a brief summer preschool experience prior to entry into kindergarten. As it evolved, the program became more comprehensive, began earlier, and lasted longer. It also gave rise to a number of other preschool enrichment programs, such as the Houston Parent-Child Development Center and the Perry Preschool Project. Most of these programs show short-term academic gains and some behavioral gains. However, for the effects to endure they must also stress social and behavioral competence and provide continued support as children get older.

### ***Interventions during Childhood***

There are many types of violence prevention programs for children. Most programs for children of this age group are conducted in the school setting. These programs typically are aimed at improving

children's social competence and overall behavioral adjustment. They are called *social development programs*. Some of these programs are offered to all children in a classroom (primary or universal prevention) and other programs provide services to children who are already aggressive or at-risk (secondary or selected programs).

Many of these programs use a specific curriculum over the course of the school year that is delivered by teachers. These programs typically provide training in social skills such as identification of emotions, anger management, conflict resolution, moral reasoning, social perspective taking, resisting peer pressure, and social problem solving. In some cases, these programs are part of a larger school-wide effort to decrease aggressive behavior. For example, a well-known *anti-bullying* intervention that was originally developed in Norway has been shown to reduce levels of bullying and aggression in schools and communities. In addition to specific lessons to prevent bullying, an effort is made to set broader normative standards that sanction bullying and related aggressive behaviors.<sup>10</sup>

However, although a number of published studies have shown that these types of programs can reduce levels of aggression, they are less effective in resource-poor, economically disadvantaged urban settings. It may be that a certain degree of *readiness* in a setting for this type of intervention is necessary. That is, schools or communities that are struggling with subsistence-level resource issues are probably ill-equipped to provide additional social development training. In fact, this type of program may further tax limited resources.

#### Example: The Metropolitan Area Child Study

“A 2-year preventive intervention was implemented in 19 elementary schools in Chicago, Illinois. Half of the schools were in resource poor, inner-city communities, and half of the schools were in moderate resource urban neighborhoods. The intervention provided a classroom-based social development curriculum and teacher training program, small group training with groups of high-risk peers, and a parent training/family support program. The training began when children were either 7-8 years old or 11-12 years old. The program resulted in decreases in aggression but only for younger children living in moderate resource communities. In contrast, no changes in aggression, and even slight increases, were found for older children and children living in the inner city communities.<sup>11</sup>”

#### *Programs for Adolescents*

Although there is an abundance of programs for young children, there are fewer individually-focused programs specifically designed to build skills and prevent aggression in adolescents. Indeed, most of these programs have been carried out as treatment programs for at-risk or delinquent youth. When prevention programs are offered, they are often conducted in high school health classes. Many of these programs focus on the same type of social development skills covered with younger children. In some cases, they also include citizenship education.

For example, in the *Student Training Through Urban Strategies* program, high-risk youth were enrolled in a special social studies class to increase their legal and social awareness and to build enthusiasm for learning. Over the course of the school year, the curriculum focused on providing information about human relations, legal issues, society and the family, job markets, and life skills.

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<sup>10</sup> Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. (1998). *Bullying prevention program: Blueprints*. Available from Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado: [www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv).

<sup>11</sup> Metropolitan Area Child Study (2002). A cognitive-ecological approach to preventing aggression in urban settings: Initial outcomes for high-risk children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *70*, 179-194.



Self reports and official contacts indicated that the program led to improved grades, greater involvement in school, and decreased delinquent behavior.<sup>12</sup>

### **Building Relationships: Families, Peers, and Mentors**

The programs described above focus directly on reducing individual risk. However, as also mentioned previously, an ecological approach emphasizes the importance of different systems that impact children as they grow up. Another set of programs attempts to prevent youth violence by influencing the relations children have with other important "agents" of socialization. These programs emphasize families, peers, and mentors. Family programs have been implemented for children of all ages; peer and mentor programs tend to be used with older children, when the influence of peers and adults outside of the family is greater.

#### ***Programs for Families***

Programs for families try to help families by providing information about children's health and development, supporting the development of a strong early positive relationship with a primary caregiver, and training parents in effective use of resources, coping, discipline, and parenting skills. Many of these programs are aimed at parents of very young children. Although a general goal is to promote children's health, well-being, and prevent problem behaviors, these programs are also important as child abuse prevention strategies.

One of the most well-known and successful interventions for parents of infants (ages 0-3) that has been used in many parts of the world is **home visitation**. This program uses nurses or other health care professionals to conduct regular home visits with low-income families where they cover a range of topics including parenting behaviors, home safety, and personal health habits. Home visitation is effective in reducing child maltreatment and promoting healthy cognitive and social development. These programs also appear to have significant long-term benefits in reducing violence and delinquency.<sup>13</sup>

A variation of the home visitation approach, **Parents as Teachers (PAT)**, uses parent educators to conduct home visits during pregnancy and through the child's second birthday. The parent educators conducted child health screenings and check developmental milestones as well as discussing basic parenting skills. Case managers also provided referrals for physical and psychological adjustment. Two randomized controlled trials in the U.S. failed to demonstrate significant gains in child outcomes. However, children in a Latino subgroup did show significant gains, particularly in the group that received both parent education and case management. In addition to the PAT program, a variety of interventions have been developed that match paraprofessionals and professionals and provide some type of home visitation. These include Healthy Families America, the Family, Infant, and Preschool Program (FIPP), and the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY). These programs have demonstrated improvements in parent-child interactions and children's cognitive abilities.

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<sup>12</sup> Gottfredson, D. C. (1987). An evaluation of an organizational development approach to reducing school disorder. *Evaluation Review*, 11, 739-763.

<sup>13</sup> Olds, D. L. (1998). Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and antisocial behavior: A 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280, 1238-1244.

### Example: Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol and Youth Violence

“The saying that it is "never too early" for prevention can be seen in the effects of maternal behavior during the prenatal period. For example, over the past several years, studies have found that mothers' exposure to alcohol and other drugs, especially early in the pregnancy, can disrupt and significantly impair the way the baby's brain is formed. These effects can alter the development of the cortex, reduce the number of neurons that are created, and affect the way in which chemical messengers are used. Not all children exposed develop these neurobiological problems, but many do. These problems, in turn, create attention difficulties, problems with memory, and problems with abstract thinking, all of which have been shown to be risk factors for early aggression. Many children are born with a distinct type of retardation, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, as a result of maternal alcohol use. For this reason, educational programs for pregnant mothers are also extremely important and valuable violence prevention tools.”

A slightly different approach to working with families of young children involves more didactic training in specific parenting skills via manualized interventions. Perhaps the most well-known and evaluated program of this type for young children is the *Incredible Years Parent Training Series*.<sup>14</sup> This program is designed for children aged two to eight who are at risk for or presenting with conduct problems. One component emphasizes weekly trainings for parents in parenting skills (BASIC), a second component provides additional training for parents in communication and problem solving (ADVANCE), and a third component emphasizes helping children with their schoolwork (SCHOOL). There are also separate curricula for teachers and children. Several randomized controlled trials in the U.S. have found increases in positive parenting and reductions in children's conduct problems for this early intervention program.

A number of other parent training and skill building programs have been implemented and evaluated with parents of children and adolescents. Most of these programs are based on learning theories of behavior, and attempt to teach parents skills such as effective discipline, reinforcing prosocial behavior, and monitoring children's behavior. Overall, there is evidence to suggest that parent training is effective in the prevention and treatment of aggression with children and adolescents. This is particularly true when training is comprehensive and supported by additional resources to families.

However, low-income families living under conditions of chronic and persistent stress appear to be least likely to benefit from traditional parent training programs. The limited success of these programs may be due to several factors. For example, many parent training programs have been developed for middle-class families and in cultures that emphasize children's participation through an "authoritative" structure. Yet, in some cultural environments, respect for authority is paramount and children are not permitted, let alone encouraged, to discuss or participate in rule setting.

In addition, parents experiencing multiple stressors may simply be overwhelmed by day-to-day pressures. Even if interventions are able to bring about short-term changes in parenting practices, the behavior of children and their parents may ultimately respond to a myriad of powerful contextual factors that a parent training program alone cannot change. At the very least, parent training programs should be developed that are sensitive to the contextual demands of the setting.

Parent training programs such as those described above often provide a set of specific lessons. In contrast, some interventions emphasize building parent support networks. An emphasis on parent engagement and support is more evident in the *Families and Schools Together program (FAST)*,

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<sup>14</sup> Webster-Stratton, C. (2001). *Incredible Years Parent Training: Blueprints*. Available from Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado: [www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv).

that has also been evaluated extensively with positive results for elementary and middle school students.<sup>15</sup> FAST emphasizes the quality of family relationships, but it also builds partnerships between families, schools, and community agencies. FAST invites the whole family to attend and works with families as systems embedded in social contexts. It was also designed to address disparities in cultural and social class utilization of mental health and support services by providing these services in a "non-traditional" fashion. FAST has been found to be effective with low-income families in diverse communities.

Another type of family intervention emphasizes a therapeutic approach designed to improve communication, strengthen positive interactions, and improve family functioning. Some programs also help families make better use of community resources and manage their daily lives. Because family therapy involves the child and the child's family in a treatment program, it is limited to settings where children have been identified for services. As such, it has not been used as extensively as parent training in prevention programs.

A therapeutic program that has been widely used in the United States and worldwide is *Multisystemic Family Therapy (MST)*.<sup>16</sup> In addition to focusing on intrafamilial problems such as parent practices and family cohesion and organization, interventions following this approach aid the family in developing skills to address external demands in day-to-day life. This approach has been found to be particularly useful for more seriously aggressive and violent adolescents. For example, in one evaluation study, delinquent youth were randomly assigned to either MST or usual probation services. The MST group had fewer subsequent arrests, fewer weeks of subsequent incarceration, and reported less delinquent behavior than the probation group. A number of studies over the past decade have confirmed the effectiveness of this intervention, particularly for low-income families.

MST acknowledges the importance of contextual demands and families' abilities to cope successfully. Another program that emphasizes refocusing resources to deal more comprehensively with the context in which families live is *Homebuilders*.<sup>17</sup> This program emphasizes strengthening families by providing the type of social support and guidance traditionally available in intergenerational family networks or close neighborhoods but that is often missing in low-income urban communities. This approach combines traditional caseworker treatment and foster placement with an extended type of community-based primary prevention, providing intensive, home-based, 24-hour support. Efforts are made to tailor services for each family while emphasizing strengthening parent skills. Success is determined primarily by reducing number of out-of-home placements due to abuse or neglect. Although few studies have examined long-term impact on children's aggression, this approach represents an important effort to keep children with their families and prevent abuse and neglect.

### ***Peer Group Interventions***

Peer group interventions emphasize preventing or modifying aggressive and violent behavior by changing the nature of the peer group, particularly in terms of shifting peer group norms, promoting

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<sup>15</sup>McDonald, L. & Frey, H. (1999, November) Families and Schools Together: Building relationships. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (pp. 1-19). Washington, DC: US Department of Justice. Information on the FAST program is also available at: [www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/fast).

<sup>16</sup> Henggeler, S. W., & Borduin, C. M. (1990). *Family therapy and beyond: A multisystemic approach to treating the behavior problems of children and adolescents*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole. Also available in the *Blueprints* series. University of Colorado: [www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv).

<sup>17</sup> Kinney, J. M. et al. (1990). The Homebuilders model. In J. K. Whittaker, J. Kinney, E. M. Tracey, & C. Booth (Eds.). *Reaching high-risk families: Intensive family preservation in human services* (pp. 31-64). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

youth involvement with prosocial peers, and redirecting the activities of antisocial peer groups and juvenile gangs. Unfortunately, there is very limited evidence for the effectiveness of these programs, and some programs have demonstrated negative effects.

For example, efforts to develop a positive, *anti-violence "peer culture"* have generally failed in schools, institutions, and community settings. In some cases, antisocial behavior even increased. This is particularly evident when groups are comprised entirely of violent or delinquent youth. However, group efforts appear to have some success in changing peer norms when aggressive youth participate in groups that also have prosocial youth to model prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Unfortunately, most anti-violence interventions group aggressive youth together, often becoming "training schools" for violence.

There has also been a surge in popularity of peer-mediation programs, where peers are enlisted to help other peers resolve disputes. Although these programs have gained popularity worldwide, there is relatively little evidence that they are effective in violence prevention.

Perhaps the most urgent need in combating peer influences is seen in the area of gang prevention. Although the gang problem has been evident for some time and continues to increase worldwide, there have been relatively few effective prevention programs. Due to the complex interplay of factors that lead to gang membership, there are various types of intervention programs focused on *prevention, intervention, and suppression*.

Prevention strategies aim to prevent youth from joining gangs through education programs.

A well known prevention program in the United States is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms' *Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T.)*. In this program, law enforcement officers teach a 9-week curriculum to primary school students on resisting gang involvement and avoiding the use of violence. This program has been successful in increasing prosocial attitudes and reducing some types of delinquency, although its impact on gang involvement is less clear.

In addition to prevention programs, intervention programs aim to divert youth from gang activity by providing alternative opportunities such as after-school programs, counseling, and job training. Suppression strategies use enforcement tactics that identify, isolate, and punish criminal offenders. Overall, the model that seems to be most effective contains multiple components, incorporating prevention, social intervention, treatment, suppression, and community mobilization.

For example, the *Little Village* program implemented in Chicago, Illinois, U.S. utilized two coordinated strategies: increased probation department and police supervision and suppression to control violent youth, and encouraging at-risk youth to become involved in conventional activities through education, jobs, job training, family support, and counseling. Preliminary evaluation results in Chicago and at other sites are positive, suggesting that a comprehensive program such as this that targets many risk factors at once may be needed to prevent gang-related violence and delinquency.<sup>18</sup>

However, it is also important to mention that other gang prevention and intervention evaluations have underscored the need to structure these interventions so that gang members spend less, rather than more, time together in these new activities. For example, one program provided academic tutoring, athletic, and social events to 800 members of four gangs. However, following this intervention, an increase in criminal behavior was noted, most probably due to an increase in time spent with other

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<sup>18</sup> Howell, J. C. (1998). *Youth gangs: An overview*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, www.Ojjdp.ncjrs.org. Information is also available at the National Youth Gang Center, www.iir.com/nygc.

gang members.<sup>19</sup> Further, efforts that place too much emphasis on suppression generally are less successful, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, where opportunities for positive engagement may be less widely available to complement suppression efforts.

### ***Mentors and Prevention***

When relationships with adults or prosocial peers are compromised, a relationship with another warm and supportive person can be a protective factor for youth violence. In many communities, natural mentors exist (such as aunts, uncles, neighbors) and develop these relationships with young people without planned interventions. However, for youth who do not have these natural mentors, a number of structured programs have been developed.

Mentoring programs typically try to match children and youth who do not have good family or community support systems (such as children from single parent families, children living in poverty) with a caring adult mentor from outside the family. Mentors are volunteers recruited from businesses, schools, and other community settings. The primary objective of the mentoring relationship is both to help the young person develop personal and social skills and to provide a sustained relationship with a caring adult. In some cases, older children primarily focused on academic tutoring.

Overall, high quality mentoring programs can lead to positive gains for youth. Recent evaluations of mentoring programs in the United States, such as the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program, have found it to predict both academic success and reduced rates of violence and delinquency in participants.<sup>20</sup>

### **Improving Schools and Communities**

Interventions aimed at improving schools involve extending access to schooling, increasing the quality of schooling available, and improving directly either the classroom environment or characteristics of the school organization. Although many of these interventions have focused primarily on gains in academic achievement, some studies have looked at the effects on student behavior including aggression.

Interventions at the community level represent even broader attempts to modify environments in which children grow up. These interventions can focus on a specific neighborhood or community, or on specific systems that impact children in a community.

For example, community-based efforts would include neighborhood revitalization programs, economic development projects, housing programs, increased opportunities for recreation and positive engagement for youth, community policing, development of anti-violence coalitions, reducing availability of alcohol, and changes in policies of youth serving agencies. Some efforts have incorporated a range of community programs.

Indeed, in terms of sheer numbers of programs offered, community-based programs are certainly among the most popular. However, this popularity has not been accompanied by careful evaluations of the effects on violence, and data on effectiveness is limited.

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<sup>19</sup> Klein, M. (1971). *Street gangs and street workers*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>20</sup> Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (1998). *Mentoring Program: Blueprints*. Available from Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado: [www.colorado.edu/cspv](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv)

### ***Programs in Schools***

In many cities and countries around the world, the public school system faces serious challenges. Equal access to quality instruction is limited, particularly during the preschool and adolescent years. Yet, studies in developing countries have found that greater access quality education can significantly reduce crime, although the impact is often delayed until the children reach adolescence. ***Institutional reforms*** such as allocating more resources to quality primary education, universalizing secondary school, increasing the quality of teachers, and giving local schools greater autonomy can improve the educational system.

In addition, specific classroom practices can also improve children's academic achievement and social behavior. These interventions commonly target two areas of teacher skills: teacher practices and classroom management. Most interventions with teachers have focused on modifying teacher practices that increase children's risk for aggression. For example, the ***Direct Instruction Model*** provides a sequenced curriculum that emphasizes training in basic skills, systematic reinforcement for correct responses, and effective use of teaching time. In a nationwide evaluation of this method in the U.S. comparing this model with 12 other teaching strategies used with economically disadvantaged primary students, this model produced the greatest gains in academic and social skills.<sup>21</sup>

Another strategy for more effective classroom management is ***cooperative learning***. Teaching children in smaller groups with a cooperative, team orientation, has resulted in more successful mastery of tasks and higher self-esteem than individualistic classroom activities. The premise is that when the success of any individual student depends on the success of other students in the group, students must learn to cooperate and compromise.

This approach can also be effective in facilitating classroom management. Other classroom management strategies that have been shown to prevent student misbehavior include establishing clear rules for behavior, giving clear directions and maintaining consistent expectations, praising students for on-task behavior and good performance, and handling student misconduct in the least disruptive manner.

In addition to classroom environment, the organization of a school can also have a significant impact on student achievement and behavior. Perhaps the most well known and successful school reorganization program for low-income, urban schools is the ***Comer School Development Project***. This effort was implemented in several inner city schools in the United States over several years. The major thrust of the program involves the creation of three teams: the school planning team is the governance and management body; the mental health team is charged with preventing problem behaviors in the school; and the parent program uses existing parent organizations as the basis to increase participation. The program is also tailored to poor and disenfranchised students, with significant attention focused on organizing school and classroom activities to promote individual and cultural pride and success.

### ***Programs in Communities***

According to the ecological model presented previously, communities provide an important context for development that, in turn, influences families, peers, and individuals. Changing practices and opportunities in a community should have a greater and more far reaching impact on youth violence

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<sup>21</sup> Becker, W. C., & Carnine, D. W. (1980). Direct instruction: An effective approach to educational intervention with disadvantaged and low performers. In B. B. Lahey & A. E. Kazdin (Eds.), *Advances in clinical child psychology* (Vol. 3, pp. 220-240). New York: Plenum Press.

prevention than changing any one system or group of individuals. In this section, we provide an overview of some of these efforts. Because of their importance, we also provide two case studies on community-wide efforts in the next section.

A number of different community-centered programs have been developed. Some programs attempt to enhance the role of a specific agency or system that impacts residents. For example, **community policing** has gained acceptance worldwide as a part of a broader violence prevention strategy at the local level. This type of response can take many forms, but typically involves building community partnerships and solving community problems through a more regular presence in the community (particularly high crime areas) and more regular interactions with citizens. In some cases, police collaborate with other agencies to identify and refer youth in need of services. In other cases, police work with local programs to enhance opportunities for youth, such as organizing neighborhood car washes.

Community policing efforts have been linked to reductions in crime and increases in resident perceptions of safety in both the United States and Latin America. Still, results have been promising at best. For example, an evaluation of a community policing program in Hatillo, Costa Rica found that it was associated with improved attitudes towards police and increased perceptions of safety, although rates of victimization did not change much.<sup>22</sup>

#### Example: Perceptions of Police in Latin America

"An important component of community policing is to improve police-community relations. However, in Latin America, attitudes towards police are cause for some concern, and suggest that community policing must be accompanied by additional efforts to increase public confidence in law enforcement."<sup>23</sup>

- In a recent 1999 survey from Buenos Aires, Argentina, 37% of adolescents were more afraid of police than delinquents; 15% said they had been the victim of police abuse in the last year
- In a 1995 survey from El Salvador, 22% of respondents said that the police do not respect citizen rights; 33% said that they respect citizen rights at times

In a 1998 survey of families of homicide victims in Caracas, Venezuela, 75% of respondents expressed an enormous lack of confidence in the police

In addition to changing police practices, other strategies have been implemented to reinforce community assets and reduce risks. For example, the "**broken windows**" model suggests that physical disarray can have an effect on behaviors such as crime. In other words, factors like broken windows, garbage in the streets, abandoned houses, and lack of street lighting create an environment that promotes crime and delinquency. **Availability of weapons** on the street is also an important target for community violence efforts, particularly in Central America and countries emerging from internal conflicts. Although gun buy-back programs generally have not been successful, there is some evidence that gun policies restricting firearm possession during "high-risk" times can be effective.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Buvinic, M., & Morrison, A. (2000). *Control of violence: Technical note 6*. Washington, DC: Interamerican Development Bank.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Guerrero, R. (1997). *Epidemiologia de la violencia: El caso de Cali, Columbia*. Washington, DC: Interamerican Development Bank.

Another community factor directly linked to aggression and violence is the *availability of alcohol*. In many neighborhoods, economic decline is linked to an exodus of all businesses except alcohol outlets, which seem to increase. Given the known role of alcohol as a risk factor for violence, decreasing availability and ease of access should contribute to reductions in violence. Although large scale studies are scant, there is evidence that reducing alcohol availability is related to a drop in violence rates.

Several studies have shown that programs designed to change the roles of at-risk youth in the community and increase their motivation toward prosocial behavior can also be at least moderately effective in reducing violence. An important aspect of the effectiveness of such interventions seems to be that they are provided as part of a larger-scale focus that promotes community development.

An example is a program that provided *prosocial skill development and opportunities* for all children (ages 5 to 15) living in an urban public housing complex. In addition to direct skills training, the children were involved in organized recreational and community activities. The program developers also worked with the community to increase support for the program. Results indicated that participants showed increased skills and involvement and lowered crime and security violations when compared with children from a matched control housing project. The rate of police charges against participants was one-fifth the rate in the control group.<sup>25</sup> Similar programs that are comprehensive and of long duration have been shown to promote constructive behavior and reduce violence in youth around the world.<sup>26</sup>

For example, at the city level, an ambitious program designed to *enhance civic participation and reduce crime* was launched in Bogota, Colombia in 1995. Over the course of three years, 130 million dollars U.S. was invested in a range of programs including prevention and control of alcohol consumption, increased community participation, augmentation of the police force, church involvement in reduction of firearms, and enhanced data collection and reporting of information regarding violence and delinquency. During this time period, homicide rates were reduced significantly, particularly those involving alcohol. In addition, thousands of firearms were collected and melted into baby spoons.

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<sup>25</sup> Jones, M.B., & Offord, D. R. (1989). Reduction of antisocial behavior in poor children by nonschool skill development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30, 181-189.

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization (2003). *World Report on Violence and Health*.



## **Costs and Benefits of Prevention**

The costs and benefits of prevention can be understood in terms of the socioeconomic costs of violence, the actual costs of prevention efforts, and the cost savings from preventing violence.

Although relatively little information is available on the actual costs associated with violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, we can consider different types of costs associated with violence. These include direct costs, nonmonetary costs, economic multiplier effects, and social multiplier effects. Several examples can be discussed.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Direct costs of violence—value of goods and services used in treatment***

- Medical treatment (hospitalization, emergency room services, care at clinics)
- Social services (psychological counseling, shelters, job training, domestic violence)
- Police and criminal justice system (patrols, prosecution, prison and detention costs)

### ***Non-monetary costs—pain and suffering caused by violence***

- Increased morbidity
- Increased mortality through both homicide and suicide
- Increased fear, stress, anxiety, depression, and violence-related disorders
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs

### ***Economic multiplier effects—macroeconomic, labor market, productivity impacts***

- Decreased labor market participation
- Reduced productivity on the job and increased absenteeism
- Lower earnings
- Decreased investment, savings, and capital flight
- Intergenerational productivity impacts through lower educational attainment of children

### ***Social multiplier effects—impact on interpersonal relations and quality of life***

- Intergenerational transmission of violence
- Reduced quality of life
- Widespread fear and absence of norms of cooperation
- Erosion of social capital
- Reduced citizen participation in the democratic process
- Reduced confidence in the rule of law

The actual costs of prevention programs, when calculated, are significantly less than the corresponding costs for intervention and treatment. For example, the costs of Multisystemic Family Therapy (MST) described previously have been calculated to be about \$4,000 U.S. versus over \$20,000 for one year of incarceration.

In one study on the cost-effectiveness of prevention and early intervention in California, United States, it was estimated that successful parent interventions prevented 157 serious crimes for every

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<sup>27</sup> Buvinic, M., Morrison, A., & Shifter, M. (1999). Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: A framework for action. Washington, DC: Interamerican Development Bank.

million U.S. dollars spent. Comparing this cost to the cost of incarceration, parent interventions were found to be about three times as cost effective as the policy of using harsh sentences for serious and repeat offenders.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Greenwood, P. W. et al.(1996). *Diverting children from a life of crime: measuring costs and benefits*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

#### ***IV. EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS***

Different violence prevention programs have been shown to be effective for different groups, in different types of communities, and in different countries. Still, based on reports, evaluations, and research studies, certain types of efforts seem warranted.

##### ***Individual Level Programs***

- Universal, high-quality child care and preschool education for young children
- Social skills and problem solving interventions for primary and secondary school children
- Life skills training and civic education for adolescents

##### ***Building Relationships: Programs for Families, Peers, and Mentors***

- Home visitation programs for parents of infants and young children
- Parent school partnerships that encourage parental involvement in children's education and learning
- Programs and policies to prevent child abuse and maltreatment
- Parent training programs, particularly those that help families utilize resources
- Gang prevention programs that combine prevention, intervention, and suppression
- Mentoring programs that provide role models for at-risk youth

##### ***School and Community Programs***

- Improving the quality of education, including universalizing secondary school
- Emphasizing cooperative learning and student/family engagement
- Developing community policing programs that are sensitive to local conditions
- Building infrastructure within communities to provide opportunities for youth and families to engagement in positive activities (recreation, learning, employment)
- Building physical and social capital in communities through collaborative efforts

**Activity 3 : Youth Violence Prevention Programs in Your City  
(please estimate to the best of your knowledge)**

- a. What programs are available in your city for violence prevention at the individual level? For what ages? Which sector is primarily responsible? What programs are needed?
  
- b. What programs are available in your city for violence prevention for families? For what age children? Which sector is primarily responsible? What programs are needed?
  
- c. What programs are available in your city for violence prevention through mentoring? For what age children? Which sector is primarily responsible? What programs are needed?
  
- d. What violence prevention activities are conducted in the schools? How does the educational system overall contribute to or prevent youth violence in your city? What programs are needed?
  
- e. Is community policing used in your city? If so, what are some of the successes and challenges? If not, is there support for this type of approach?
  
- f. What is the role of the health sector in youth violence prevention in your city? What else should they be doing?
  
- g. What is the role of the justice system in youth violence prevention in your city? What else should they be doing?

h. What is the role of social services in youth violence prevention in your city? What else should they be doing?

i. What is the role of housing and urban development programs in youth violence prevention in your city? What else should they be doing?

j. What is the role of civil society in youth violence prevention in your city? What else should they be doing?

k. How are programs and services for youth violence prevention coordinated across sectors in your city?

Activity 4: Costs of youth violence and prevention in your city  
(please estimate to the best of your knowledge)

a. What are the direct costs of youth violence in your city? If unknown, how can these best be estimated?

b. What are the major nonmonetary costs of youth violence in your city?

c. What are the major economic multiplier effects of youth violence in your city?

d. What are the major social multiplier effects of youth violence in your city?

## V. CASE STUDIES IN COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Up to this point, we have reviewed a number of distinct types of anti-violence prevention and intervention programs. As we have discussed, a particularly important challenge for communities and cities is how to structure a set of programs and activities to address youth violence prevention at multiple levels across settings and sectors. Because violence emerges from complex personal, social, and economic causes, multi-faceted approaches are needed. At the community level, this should include:

- ***Building local coalitions*** (including a range of service providers such as those focusing on domestic violence, child abuse, youth violence, alcohol or substance abuse, educational improvement, employment, etc.)
- ***Providing a broad range of prevention services*** (building individual skills, providing opportunities for engagement, strengthening families, influencing policies, etc.)
- ***Creating partnerships for institutional change***(a systems approach to combine coalition building with multiple prevention efforts with changes in institutional policies)
- ***Incorporating evaluation into prevention efforts*** (targeting and design of programs, monitoring of services, and estimation of effects on violence and risk factors/assets)

In this section, we provide two examples of collaborative planning and service delivery that address this challenge in Latin America and the United States.

### **Strengthening Social Capital to Reduce Youth Violence in Cali, Colombia**

Although high rates of poverty are associated with higher rates of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is also clear that accelerated economic growth does not automatically correct social inequalities and social problems. In other words, violence is not simply the outcome of weak economic growth; similarly, increasing the GDP of a country does not necessarily translate into violence reductions.

Rather, studies in Latin America have shown associations between a community's capacity to generate shared values and mutual trust with social gains and reductions in social problems such as violence. This association has given rise to innovative ideas about institutional reform across multiple sectors aimed at promoting the development of social capital as a prevention and development strategy.

In this context, ***social capital*** refers to the features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that encourage cooperation and coordination for the common good. It includes networks, coalitions, and linkages within a community as well as social trust, solidarity, and shared norms, values, and beliefs.

A number of initiatives in Latin America have focused on building social capital by strengthening connections between families and providing non-governmental venues for conflict resolution and development.

One example of this approach is a comprehensive community initiative that was developed in Cali, Colombia beginning in 2001. This intervention was developed using local baseline data on youth

violence and social capital to identify specific neighborhoods for implementation. Community participation in the design of the intervention was also encouraged. Finally, with funding from the U.S. National Institutes of Health, FUNDAPS (Consulting Foundation in Health Programs), and South Bank University in the U.K., a comprehensive pre- and post-test evaluation was conducted.

### ***The Local Violence Problem and Need to Build Social Capital***

In 1999, the murder rate for youth ages 15-24 in Cali, Colombia was 267 per 100,000 (compared to the average rate for Latin America and the Caribbean of 36.4/100,000). In 90% of cases, victims were male and the murder was committed with a firearm. These rates varied across different administrative areas (called communes). In order to target areas most in need, the intervention was conducted in selected neighborhoods of two communes in Aguablanca, a marginalized area of Cali with nearly 400,000 people. Violence rates in this area were among the highest in the city, and the population was characterized by poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to basic services such as health and education.

An initial household survey was conducted with 1168 youths. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were also conducted with youth, members of youth organizations, staff of health centers and hospitals, and municipal staff. In terms of violence, underreporting to police was seen as an important problem. Self-report data indicated that approximately 25% of respondents had been victims of family or neighborhood violence, although approximately 75% had seen someone in the neighborhood being hit or attacked. Norms about violence were also measured. Overall, approximately 20-30% of respondents thought it was acceptable to kill an unfaithful partner and to kill people who threaten the family or community. Alcohol was also implicated in many incidents of interpersonal violence.

In terms of social capital, fairly low levels of group participation were found. Less than 20% of youth participated in cultural, sports, or religious groups and only 10-20% had participated in activities for the benefit of the neighborhood. Highest rates of youth participation (although still around 20%) were noted for "parches," a type of informal "crew" that may or may not be violent. Trust in the church was high, but trust in the police was low, under 35%. There were high levels of solidarity for social support in the neighborhood, but less trust for confiding personal matters to others.

When violence measures and social capital measures were looked at together, social capital was found to have a significant independent association with violence which, in turn, had a significant independent association with mental health problems. Based on these findings, it was concluded that an intervention to strengthen social capital could both reduce violence and indirectly improve mental health.

### ***The Intervention***

The specific intervention was designed to incorporate multiple activities and programs. It was funded by a variety of sources including CORDAID (a Dutch funding agency), the Kellogg Foundation, USAID, the U.S. National Institute of Health, and the municipal government of Cali. It was managed by FUNDAPS (Consulting Foundation in Health Programs), an NGO that had been working with youth groups for many years. The primary focus of FUNDAPS was to develop public health services in Cali through a close working relationship with the local health department.

In the social capital intervention, FUNDAPS worked with three youth organizations. The intervention involved strengthening the organizational capacity of these youth groups, extending the focus from reproductive and sexual health to violence, and engaging youth in dialogue with local authorities to

enhance services and relationships. The intervention also focused on promoting intersectoral work in the community between six departments of local government: education, health, governance, social welfare, community welfare, and justice.

Consistent with the multi-level approach recommended in this training module, the intervention was designed to impact youth at multiple levels. Individual skill development and conflict resolution was encouraged through active social participation and training in the youth organizations. Relationship development was encouraged through an increase in associational life involving non-violent relationships linking youth with other youth organizations, community members, health institutions, and municipal sectors.

At the community level, violence prevention was linked to community-wide health promotion and violence prevention efforts, increasing the capacity of health institutions to interact with youth, strengthening youth organizations, and implementing multi-sectoral training and policies that incorporate needs of youth and provide for improved services.

An outcome study of intervention impact is currently underway. This study will measure whether changes in social capital occurred, and whether these changes were related to changes in types and levels of youth violence in the community. A further goal of this project is to develop a replicable model of how to strengthen social capital to reduce youth violence in low-income urban populations.

### **The "Red Team" Approach to Community Violence Prevention Planning in Riverside, California, U.S.**

Many cities across the United States face unacceptably high rates of youth violence. As mentioned previously, these rates have escalated since the 1980s, and even with some recent declines, are still quite high. Although absolute poverty rates in the U.S. are not as high as in many parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, there are still many urban areas with high relative rates of disadvantage, social problems, lack of resources and opportunities for youth, and elevated violence. In particular, ethnic minority and immigrant youth are more likely to experience high rates of disadvantage and violence in the U.S.

To address this concern, federal, state, and local initiatives have supported a range of community mobilization and planning efforts to improve opportunities for youth and prevent violence. Although communities often have ideas on how to approach youth violence problems, they frequently do not know how to pull these ideas together in a strategic plan that can guide efforts in a systematic manner.

One example of a community mobilization approach is illustrated in the work of the Red Team in Riverside, California, U.S. In 2000, the city of Riverside held a Youth Summit. This conference brought together leaders in education, law enforcement, social services, and community and faith-based organizations to explore strategic options for dealing with youth violence in Riverside. As a result of this summit, the Mayor called together a selected group of individuals to form a multi-agency planning team to develop a quick and comprehensive response to youth violence prevention in the city. This team was called the Red Team.

#### ***What is a Red Team?***

The Red Team approach is a means of problem solving and strategy development. The idea of Red Teaming was originally used by military strategists to develop combat strategies in a quick and



efficient manner. In addition, Red Teaming has been used in a variety of contexts including government, aerospace, information technology, and business.

Regardless of context, several principles guide the formation of a Red Team. It is always an independent and interdisciplinary group that is organized with a specific focus. It is typically mandated to complete its tasks within a very short amount of time. It is also very action oriented. The Riverside Red Team was an interdisciplinary group of organizations and people, public and private, brought together to concentrate their knowledge, expertise, and resources for the sole purpose of developing a strategic plan for youth violence prevention for the city of Riverside. It was given 90 days to complete this process.

Red Team members represented city departments including the Mayor's office, the City Manager's office, and the Police. They also represented county departments of Education, Mental Health, Public Health, Probation, and Social Services, two school districts, the local University and community and faith-based organizations.

#### **Advantages of the Red Team Approach**

- Members offer individual knowledge, expertise, and experience from a range of backgrounds
- Key agencies and people are brought together for a common purpose
- The diversity of the group leads to quickly determining the assets and needs of the community
- The group, although diverse, has one distinct focus
- A strategic plan is developed within a short time frame

#### ***The Planning Process***

As soon as the group was assembled, the planning process began. The first step was to decide on a target area and population. The group gathered data on crime and violence rates in the city, and examined research on risk factors for youth violence.

Based on this information, the Red Team quickly decided to focus prevention efforts on young children and families (ages 0-10) both citywide and in one neighborhood of the city, the Arlanza neighborhood, which had the highest poverty and violence rates.

Next, the Red Team developed a set of reasonable goals for youth violence prevention. Based on needs and resource assessments, the team selected ***six overarching goals***:

- **Goal 1:** Make youth violence prevention a public issue and engage the community in youth violence prevention efforts
- **Goal 2:** Build partnerships and collaborations among public, community, and private service providers, as well as schools, churches, and businesses
- **Goal 3:** Increase developmental assets for children, particularly children from 0 to 5 years of age, including physical well-being, cognitive skills, capacity for learning, and social skills needed for healthy relationships

- **Goal 4:** Increase and enhance school and community programs for children ages 5 to 10 that motivate academic performance and prepare children to become active members of the community
- **Goal 5:** Address specific situational factors that are linked to youth violence in the city (prevalence of gangs, possession of guns, alcohol use)
- **Goal 6:** Insure implementation and evaluation of the city's strategic plan for youth violence prevention

### ***Recommendations and Action Strategies***

The Red Team was further divided into subcommittees to develop realistic action strategies or steps that should be taken in order to meet each goal. This involved an assessment of existing resources and programs, and determination of how additional resources could be leveraged. As action strategies were developed, collaborative partners were also suggested. Drawing on these action strategies, a set of 17 specific youth violence prevention recommendations were made to the Mayor and City Council. These recommendations included:

- Establish a citywide Youth Crime Prevention Board
- Create a joint city/county/community Youth Crime Prevention Team
- Expand the mission of the City of Riverside Office of Neighborhoods
- Create Family and Neighborhood Resource Centers to serve as a single point of access to services for youth 0-10 and their families
- Identify existing staff (or hire new staff) to operate these resource centers
- Coordinate services for at risk youth 0-10 by establishing case management teams
- Significantly increase the availability of quality child care and Head Start Programs
- Expand the nurse-home visitation program to include all newborns and their families
- Expand mental health service availability to children with mental health problems
- Enhance school readiness, which includes the social, physical, and emotional well-being in addition to early literacy
- Provide seed funding to permit school districts to develop a home instruction program for preschool children
- Expand the Early Steps to Reading Success program
- Expand family literacy projects by teaching reading and strengthening relationships between family members, children, and educators
- Develop an annual evaluation process to measure programs against goals and evaluate the effectiveness of programs
- Approve goals and action strategies for a model program and city-wide blueprint
- Identify and seek funding to support recommended programs
- Identify a single individuals as project manager

### ***Outcomes***

The Red Team strategic plan was presented and accepted by the local City Council and County Board of Supervisors. In addition, through efforts of various members, funding was secured to begin

construction and development of a Family and Neighborhood Resource Center in the Arlanza neighborhood, a community with high rates of poverty and violence. Agencies continue to work together on the additional recommendations, and the report of the Red Team now provides a blueprint for citywide violence prevention efforts for the years to come.<sup>29</sup>

### **Guidelines for Local Planning Efforts to Reduce Youth Violence**

Although a number of different approaches to community planning and collaboration for youth violence prevention can be utilized, several considerations are important:

- What information is available regarding the local youth violence problem?
- What additional information can be gathered and how (surveys, focus groups, structured interviews, agency data)?
- What information is available about existing programs for youth and families, needs, and service gaps?
- What additional information can be gathered and how (surveys, focus groups, interviews with agency representatives)?
- Is there local support for collaborative efforts to prevent youth violence? If not, how can this support be generated?
- Who should be represented on the planning group (agency representatives, sector representatives, private citizens, families, youth)?
- Who will be responsible for providing leadership for the planning group?
- Should the emphasis of the planning effort be on selected areas within the city or citywide?
- What are the major tasks for the planning group?
- How long will they be given to complete these tasks?
- What should be the form of the final report or action plan?
- How will action strategies be implemented and who will oversee this?
- Are additional funds available to support any proposed activities?
- What are some possible sources of additional funding?
- How will the work of the planning group be monitored and evaluated?
- What provisions for evaluation of new programs will be made and who will conduct these evaluations?

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<sup>29</sup> A full copy of the Red Team report, including the Youth Violence Prevention Blueprint: Goals and Action Strategies is available at: [www.stopyouthviolence.ucr.edu](http://www.stopyouthviolence.ucr.edu).

### **Activity 5: Collaborative Youth Violence Prevention: Next Steps**

- a. What activities have occurred in your city over the last 5 years involving collaborative efforts to prevent youth violence?
  
- b. What steps can be taken to increase community and city-level "readiness" to develop a comprehensive strategy for youth violence prevention?
  
- c. What sectors of the city are most likely to participate and provide support for a collaborative youth violence program? Which sectors are least likely? Why?
  
- d. Based on public perceptions and available data, what aspects of the youth violence problem are of most concern to residents (for example, gang activity, illegal markets, street crime)?
  
- e. Based on what you have learned, what types of programs would be valuable?
  
- f. What are the next steps for collaborative violence prevention planning and action in your city?
  
- g. Which sectors/agencies/individuals will be responsible for carrying out these steps?
  
- h. What major challenges do you anticipate and how can these be overcome?

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