



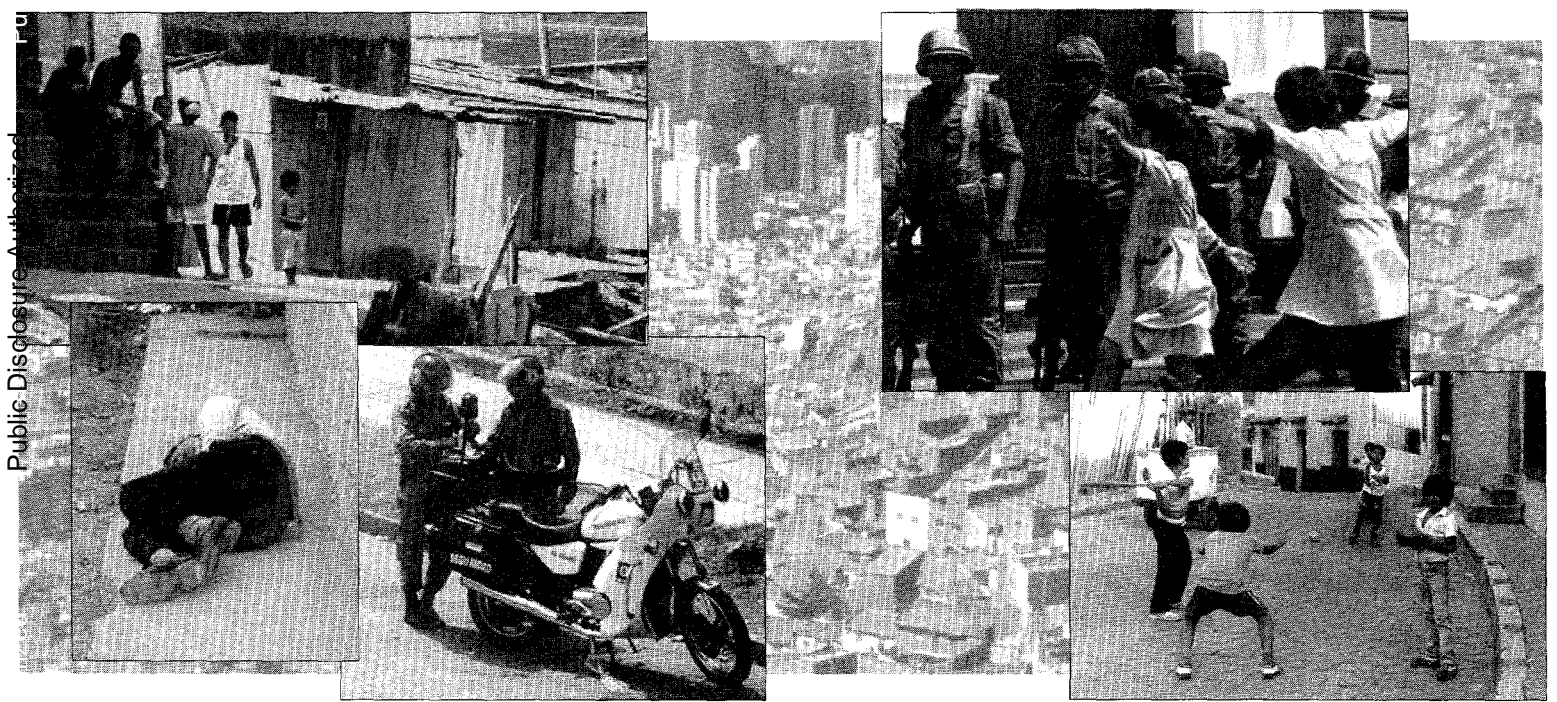
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Latin America and Caribbean Region  
Sustainable Development Working Paper No. 3

Urban Peace Program Series

# Youth Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean: Costs, Causes, and Interventions

August 1999



Caroline Moser  
Bernice van Bronkhorst

The World Bank  
Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office  
Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU



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The opinions expressed in this document are attributable to the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the position or official policies of the World Bank.

This working paper series is produced by the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit (John Redwood, Acting Director) of the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office.

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## Foreword

This document is part of a series of papers produced by the Urban Peace Program of the Latin America and Caribbean Region's Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit (LCSES). The Urban Peace Program is funded jointly by the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). The program focuses on the dynamics of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, its effects on poor communities, and the development of appropriate multisectoral strategies for violence reduction that would in turn help promote peace and development.

Violence has emerged as a significant economic, social welfare, health, and governance issue throughout the region. It is important not only in countries experiencing political unrest, such as Colombia and Peru, but also in war-to-peace transitional societies, such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, where levels of crime and violence remain high. Crime and violence erode physical, human, natural, and social capital, undermine the investment climate, and deplete the state's capacity to govern. Previously regarded as an issue of criminal pathology or human rights, violence is now recognized as a macroeconomic problem.

These papers synthesize information generated by one stage of activities of the Urban Peace Program. In turn, they are a contribution to the growing information infrastructure of the World Bank's Knowledge Management System in the area of Social Development.

The papers are published through the LCR Sustainable Development Working Paper series produced by LCSES. The series seeks to share the results of analytical and operational work, present preliminary findings, and describe "best practices" with regard to major sustainable development issues confronting the region. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in these papers are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank, members of its Board of Executive Directors, or the countries they represent.

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The World Bank





## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report examines the causes of youth violence, its impacts, and interventions that have proved effective in addressing the needs of at-risk youth and reducing youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. It briefly outlines some of the approaches that have traditionally been taken to address the issues of at-risk youth and youth violence and uses an integrated framework to analyze the causes of youth violence and the associated interventions. This approach recognizes that violence—including youth violence—is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and that effective violence prevention programs involve multiple levels and sectors simultaneously.

Section 2 briefly describes the situation of youth in Latin America and the Caribbean, examines the assets of youth and the ways in which these are affected by violence, assesses the scale and the costs of youth violence, and looks at the critical importance of investing in youth for the prevention of future violence. Section 3 examines different policy approaches to at-risk youth and youth violence, showing how these have changed from a focus on individual problem behaviors and curative measures, to more integrated, community-based, preventive approaches. Section 4 uses an integrated framework to examine causes of youth violence and their associated interventions. Section 5 describes lessons learned from “youth-serving,” and violence prevention and reduction programs. It shows the need to develop and refine a community-based, holistic, and participatory strategy to address youth violence. At the same time it stresses the need for monitoring and evaluation of such programs. Throughout, this report considers the gendered nature of the different needs of and outcomes for youth and, where relevant to the Latin American and Caribbean context, experience from the United States is used to inform and illustrate the discussion.

## **2. BACKGROUND: YOUTH AND VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

While not a new phenomenon in most of Latin America and the Caribbean, violence has increased dramatically in recent decades and is now increasingly recognized as a serious economic and social problem. Rapid urbanization, persistent poverty and inequality, political violence, the more organized nature of crime, and the emergence of illegal drug use and drug trafficking are often cited as root causes of the increase in violence. Violence affects all level of society: the rich and poor, women and men, and young and old. Of particular concern are the high rates of violence perpetrated and experienced by youth (Box 1 presents some basic definitions relevant to youth and violence).

Adolescents ages 10–19 represent 21.9 percent of the population in the Latin America and Caribbean region, ranging from 17 percent in Uruguay to almost 26 percent in El Salvador. This compares with 13.7 percent for North America (Burt 1996). The socioeconomic and political situations facing youth in the region clearly are not uniform. Some countries are experiencing acute political unrest (such as Colombia and Peru), while others are war-to-peace transitional societies (such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua), and yet others have serious economic difficulties (such as Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico, and Venezuela). Despite these differences, however, there are environmental, social, and family conditions that are common to many young people in most countries in the region.

### **Box 1. Definitions Relevant to Youth and Violence**

**Violence and crime.** While violence and crime are frequently categorized as synonymous, there are important distinctions. Violence is the exercise or threat of physical force, while crime is an act punishable by law—the breach of legal prohibition. Violence types range from *homicide* at one end of a continuum through to *mental abuse* at the other, with varying context-specific types in between.

**Adolescence and youth.** Adolescence and its duration and defining characteristics are highly variable across time, cultures, and socioeconomic situations. This period is one of psychosocial change through which individuals initiate a process of development and maturation of their personality, sense of identity, and capacity for abstract thought. At this time adolescents form peer alliances, search for economic security and independence from parents, and develop values and attitudes. Critical decisions are taken that will ultimately influence earnings potential, well-being, marital patterns, and childbearing.

**At-risk youth.** An extremely broad category that generally refers to youth who face environmental, social, and family conditions that may hinder their personal development and successful integration into society as productive citizens. At the core of this notion of risk is the impact of poverty or economic stress on low-income families. Simply, “at-risk youth” are usually categorized as young people, between the ages of 11 and 19, who are at a social disadvantage.

*Source:* Moser 1996; Schneidman 1996; Barker and Fontes 1996.

In the 1980s and early 1990s Latin America and the Caribbean experienced rapid urbanization, persistent poverty, and, in many countries, increasing inequality. This has made youth increasingly vulnerable to poverty. It has also led to an increase in female-headed households, and an increase in the number of youth living in marginalized neighborhoods characterized by economic problems and high levels of generalized violence, crime, and social disintegration.

The economic difficulties in the region in the 1980s and 1990s have also led to a decline in government spending on social services, including education and health. Although primary school enrollment rates are generally high (around 90 percent), serious concern remains about the overall quality of primary education. Repeat and dropout rates are still high, as resources for teaching materials, teacher training, and salaries are limited. Secondary school participation rates are much lower, and many Latin American and Caribbean youth do not acquire the skills needed to successfully participate in the formal modern sector (Burt 1996).

Many youth need to work to supplement family income. An estimated 20 percent of children ages 10–14 are working (UNICEF 1992). For instance, in Peru 54 percent of urban youth and children ages 6–14 are working (Barker and Fontes 1996). Most of these youth work long hours in the informal sector, which interferes with their education and often exposes them to serious health and developmental risks. A frequently overlooked group is young female domestic servants. In Costa Rica 12 percent of girls aged 10–14 work as domestic laborers/household workers. There is also anecdotal evidence of a large number of young women who are sex workers. A 1992 survey in Bogota, Colombia, shows that 26 percent of women involved as sex workers were between 11 and 20 years old (Barker and Fontes 1996). Many youth—especially older adolescents who are not in school and who need to work—cannot find adequate work or lack the skills to work.

Youth, particularly those living in marginalized neighborhoods, face trauma and stress related to living in violent situations, both from local violence and gangs and from household violence (child abuse and domestic violence). Some of the consequences include low educational attainment, lack of employment alternatives, and involvement in gang activities, criminal activities, and delinquency. In Colombia 25 percent of people arrested in 1992 were between the ages of 16 and 24 (Barker and Fontes 1996). In the Caribbean an estimated 80 percent of violent crimes are committed by men, the majority of whom are under 35—with an increasing number under 14 (Gabriel and Bishop 1995). In 1995 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 91 percent of the city's homicide victims were men—57 percent between the ages of 15 and 29. (Veja 1997b).

### **The Gendered Nature of Violence: The Invisibility of Girls**

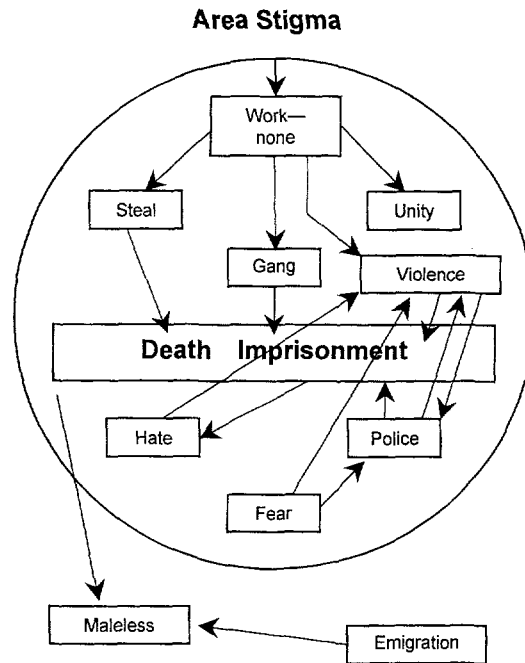
While most of the focus by the media, researchers, and policymakers has been on young men as the main perpetrators of violence and victims of homicide, young women also face very high levels of violence, especially as victims rather than as perpetrators. Although women are less likely to be the victims of homicide, their lives and livelihoods are severely restricted by violence in their communities that increases their vulnerability and insecurity. Young women are especially affected by perceptions of violence and fear of violence in public spaces, which can prevent them from participating effectively in educational, economic, community, and political activities. For example, in many violent communities the threat of violence makes it problematic for women to go out unaccompanied after dark—whether to work, visit a friend, or attend evening classes or a community meeting.

Sexual violence mostly affects women—young women and girls in particular—but remains mostly unreported and unpunished. Similarly, family violence affects women disproportionately, but is still widely accepted and remains largely invisible (GómezGómez, 1993). The physical nonsexual abuse of children (boys or girls) is a widespread practice throughout the region, and it is commonplace for women to physically punish their children.

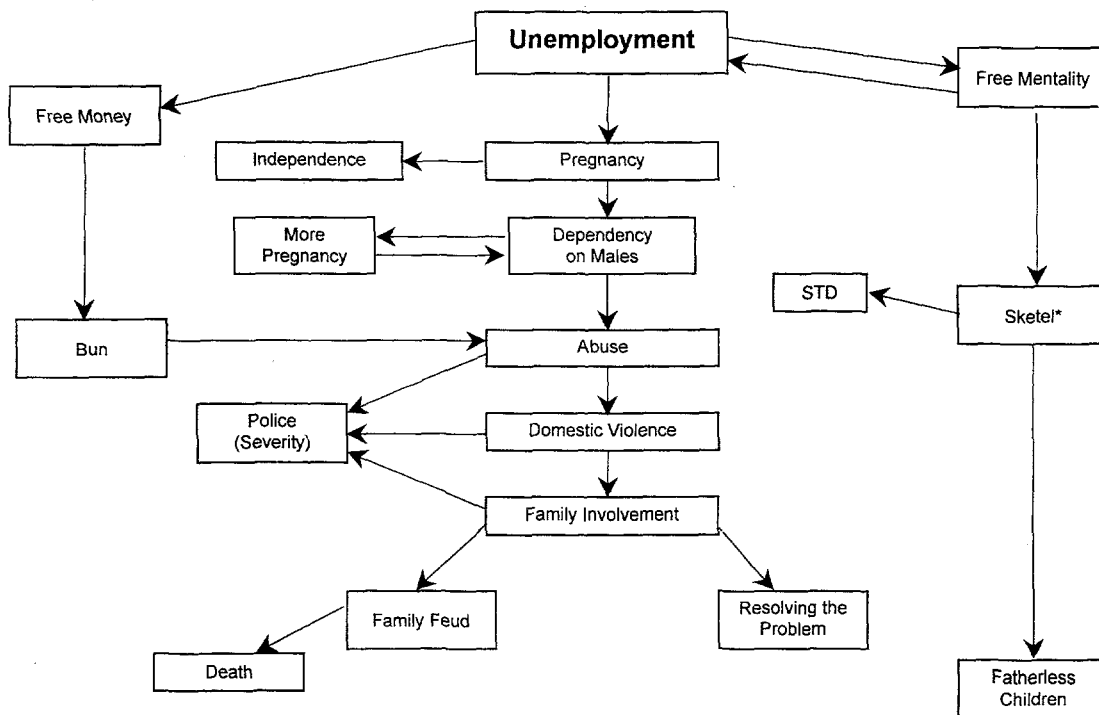
Conditions such as high levels of poverty, unemployment, a poor education system, and high levels of community and family violence can lead to delinquency and the ready acceptance and use of violence within and outside the family by young men (Figure 1). Consequently, young men constitute the highly visible majority of both the victims and the perpetrators of street violence. But despite the strong focus on young men and the problems that they cause, many of the environmental, social, and family conditions that face youth in Latin America and the Caribbean affect young women equally, if not more than young men although often with different outcomes. For young women these same conditions tend to contribute to teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution, dependency on men, and the intergenerational reproduction of poverty and family violence. These outcomes are equally serious, but certainly less visible (Figure 2).

The links between unemployment, pregnancy, domestic violence, interpersonal, and gang violence are especially strong, as is evident from the results of a participatory urban appraisal of violence in Jamaica. Separate groups of young men and women analyzed the problem of unemployment and its impacts (figures 1 and 2). Men said that high unemployment led to frustration and idleness, which in turn led to an increase in gang violence, interpersonal conflict, and domestic violence. Women on the other hand said that high unemployment led to greater economic dependency on men, which in turn led to an increase in domestic violence.

**Figure 1. The Problem of Unemployment and Its Impact on Men**  
 (Diagram prepared by a group of young men from Park Town in Kingston, Jamaica)



**Figure 2. The Problem of Unemployment and Its Impact on Women**  
 (Diagram prepared by a group of young women from Park Town in Kingston, Jamaica)



\*Sketel = loose woman

Source: Moser and Holland 1997.

## Costs of Violence: The Critical Importance of Investing in Youth

The economic costs to individuals, governments, and society of violence in general, and of youth violence in particular, are extremely high. Although data on the costs of violence committed by youth are scarce, the fact that the large share of the violence is perpetrated by youth implies that youth are also responsible for a large share of the costs of violence. The economic costs include direct costs (destruction of physical assets and human lives, use of scarce resources on criminal justice and incarceration, health sector costs) as well as indirect costs (lost investment opportunities, forgone earnings of criminals). The total economic cost of violence to the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1993 was estimated at US\$1 billion (Lewis and Carter 1997). In Colombia public spending on security and criminal justice was 5 percent of the country's GDP in 1996; private expenditures on security amounted to another 1.4 percent of GDP (Buvinic, Morrison, and Shifter 1999) and has led to a 2 percent reduction in average annual growth over the past decade (Schneidman 1998).

Capturing the costs of violence at the micro-level and in a conceptually different way, violence also erodes the assets of the poor—and of youth from poor households—such as labor, human capital, social capital, household relations, and productive assets. (Box 2). The more assets that individuals, households, and communities can acquire and the better they manage them, the less vulnerable they are (Moser 1998). Childhood and adolescence are critical stages for the accumulation of these assets and these groups are particularly vulnerable when violence erodes these assets. For example, when households can no longer function as a unit due to family violence, the children are at a much higher risk of being abused, dropping out of school, and living on the streets, while not yet prepared yet to fend for themselves.

The accumulation of youth's human capital assets is restricted when violence limits their access to education and health care. This can be due to threats to teachers or health workers, or the presence of gangs and violence in schools or on the way to school. A failure to gain basic literacy and numeracy skills as well as poor health and nutrition during childhood and adolescence can be very difficult to rectify later in life.

Similarly, youth's labor assets are severely affected when violence limits their access to jobs because of the risk of violence in the street, or because there are no jobs in the community due to its bad reputation. Youth unemployment rates are consistently higher than those of the rest of the population, and many youth never enter the labor market. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, the overall unemployment was 17.2 percent in 1995, while the rate for those ages 15–19 stood at 37.4 percent. For males ages 14–15 it was 28.3 percent, for females in the same age group it was 35.2 percent (MacArthur 1999). Perversely,

### Box 2. The Asset Vulnerability Framework and Violence

Violence erodes:

*Labor* as an asset when it limits access to jobs.

*Human capital* as an asset when it limits access to education and health facilities by both users and providers.

*Social capital* as an asset when it reduces trust and cooperation between community-level social organizations.

*Household relations* as an asset when it limits the capacity of households to function effectively as a unit.

*Productive assets* when it destroys housing—the urban poor's most important productive asset.

Source: Moser 1996b, 1998

the fewer assets youth have, the more likely they are to turn to alternative means of survival (which often include violence) thereby perpetuating violence and the erosion of assets in households and communities.

The combined economic and social costs are almost always higher than those of effective preventive and rehabilitative programs that set out to meet the needs of youth within the context of their families and communities and that help them to become productive members of society. Schneidman (1996), in a recent review of approaches to at-risk youth, suggests a threefold rationale for investing in youth.

- We invest in the alleviation of poverty and the strengthening of social capital.
- We help prevent negative externalities.
- We ensure social justice and human rights (Schneidman 1996).

Investing in youth brings significant benefits for individuals, their families, and their communities, and is also vital for a well-educated, healthy, and productive work force that is necessary for the future economic development of the region.

### **3. CHANGING APPROACHES TO YOUTH VIOLENCE AND AT-RISK YOUTH**

#### **From an Individual Problem to a More Holistic Framework, from a Curative to a Preventative Approach**

Historically, research and public policy dealing with youth issues and development have been almost exclusively concerned with “negative outcomes.” The focus was on individual, deviant behavior such as youth delinquency, school dropout, or teenage pregnancy. The types of attention that adolescents often still receive are curative or tertiary programs, designed to prevent repeat offenses of, for example, drug abuse, homelessness, and early childbearing. Such programs are usually residential and are expensive in terms of treatment per person. Youth violence is typically dealt with through the criminal justice system by incarcerating the juvenile offender, offering remedial programs in prison, and instituting ever tougher sentencing laws.

However, there has been an increasing recognition that the programs that focus on single issues treat only the symptoms and not the underlying problems, and they have not been very successful in changing the lives of adolescents or in reducing overall levels of delinquency (Spergel 1995). Much research on factors contributing to the development of problems such as substance abuse, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, school dropout, and violence have identified similar underlying conditions for all of these. Combined with this is the recognition that these behaviors do not just suddenly appear, they develop from early childhood and, therefore, could have been prevented. A more holistic approach to the problem is based on the premise that youth behavior is learned and “does not occur in a vacuum but in the context of the youth’s family and family dynamics, peer group, neighborhood and social opportunities. The more desperate the context, the more supports the youth will need to survive and prosper” (Burt 1996, p. 1). It is here that the concept of at-risk youth becomes useful—youth who face environmental, social, and family situations that hinder their personal development and successful integration into society as productive citizens (see Box 1). Two different frameworks are presented in tables 1 and 2, both of which are examples of a more holistic approach to youth development that incorporates multiple causation and the interaction between the individual and the environment. They clearly demonstrate the common antecedents of different problem behaviors and focus on prevention.

Table 1 presents a more holistic approach, which stems from the dominant public health discourse in the field, and which sees violent youth at the extreme end of a continuum of at-risk youth. It identifies three “stages” prior to “negative outcomes,” that help in identifying high-risk youth—risk antecedents, risk markers, and high-risk behaviors. To prevent and reduce youth violence successfully, one needs to address youth in general, rather than just offenders and those with severe problems.

Table 2 presents another example of a more holistic approach, the three-tiered model for defining the needs of at-risk youth development, developed by Barker and Fontes (1996). Violent youth have moved from the at-risk category to the category of tertiary risk—no longer at-risk of becoming violent but actively engaged in violent behavior or suffering its consequences. The model shows the continuum between the different risk categories and highlights the possibility of preventing certain negative outcomes at different stages.

Both frameworks highlight the need to address environmental issues such as poverty, neighborhood, and family situations, and they show the potential for early intervention and prevention. While the Schneidman framework focuses mostly on behaviors and conditions, the Barker and Fontes framework also incorporates the level of attachment that youths have to their families, communities, and social institutions, and links a decrease in these attachments to an increase in risk.

**Table 1. A Holistic Framework for Youth Development**

<i>Risk antecedents</i>	<i>Risk markers</i>	<i>High-risk behaviors</i>	<i>Negative outcomes</i>
Environmental conditions such as poverty, neighborhood environment, and family dysfunction, which predict subsequent negative outcomes.	Behaviors or conditions associated with more serious outcomes. Poor school performance and involvement with child protective services are critical markers for which data are usually available.	Activities that have the potential to hurt youth and the community. These behaviors are most likely to occur in youth who have displayed risk markers in the past or who were living under risk antecedent conditions.	Conditions that have negative consequences for a youth’s future development. Many of the negative outcomes are of concern to society because of their high socioeconomic costs—because children born in households where violence, abuse, and early childbearing occur tend to contribute to the intergenerational reproduction of poverty.
Poverty	Poor school performance and high repetition rate	Absence from school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School dropout</li> <li>• Premature entry in the labor market and poor credentials for economic self-sufficiency</li> </ul>
Unstable family environment	Involvement in child protective services	Association with delinquent peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delinquency and criminal behavior</li> <li>• Death</li> </ul>
Unfavorable neighborhood environment		Running away from home  Early use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol  Unprotected sexual intercourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Addiction to drugs and alcohol, with associated health problems</li> <li>• Teenage pregnancy</li> <li>• Poor pregnancy outcomes and unsafe abortions</li> <li>• Sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS</li> <li>• Prostitution</li> <li>• Physical and sexual abuse</li> </ul>

Source: Schneidman 1996

**Table 2. A Three-Tiered Framework for Defining the Needs of At-Risk Youth**

←----- Continuum ----->		
<i>Youth in primary risk</i>	<i>Youth in secondary risk</i>	<i>Youth in tertiary risk</i>
<p>Youth who live in situations of urban poverty and are at risk of dropping out of school or otherwise compromising their healthy development because of environmental, familial, and social factors. They are still fundamentally attached to their families, communities, and social institutions, but are at risk of losing these connections and suffering from situations that could compromise their integration into society. The "risk" is general and related to poverty.</p>	<p>Youth who have moved from a general to a specific risk, for example, by dropping out of school, working at an early age, involved in a youth gang or at risk of violence or abuse in the home. They face specific stress factors that put them at direct risk for an identifiable and harmful situation. They continue to live at home and have some connections with their community and social institutions, but are weakening—a youth who has dropped out of school but continues to live at home, a working youth, and a youth at risk of child abuse would be in secondary risk.</p>	<p>Youth who have actually moved from being "at-risk" of a situation to suffering the impact of a particular situation, such as physical or sexual abuse, living in the streets, incarceration due to delinquency, and the like. Youth whose connections with their families, communities, and social institutions have been severely weakened or severed—youth living in the streets, involved in drug trafficking or youth gangs, or an adolescent mother. Assistance would require intensive social services and interventions, which often involve out-of-home care or alternative living situations.</p>
<i>Primary prevention</i>	<i>Secondary prevention</i>	<i>Tertiary attention</i>
<p>Programs that work with youth (generally in-school youth) who live with their families, but who are at risk because of urban-based poverty and other social conditions.</p>	<p>Programs that work with youth who are in one or more situations of identified specific risk (by being out of school, living in communities with high levels of violence, living in families where they are at high risk of abuse or abandonment, or living in the streets.</p>	<p>Programs that offer protective or intensive services for youth who have been abandoned, who live in the streets, who have been abused or sexually exploited, who have already had children, or who are involved in delinquency or have somehow been separated from their family and community.</p>

Source: Barker and Fontes 1996

### **From Targeting the Individual Alone to Targeting the Individual within the Community**

A second, related shift in thinking about youth development and the prevention of negative outcomes has been a move away from the traditional strategy, which dealt with the delinquent individual in isolation from the community. Programs increasingly focus on the individual within the community in resolving the problems of delinquent behavior.

It is increasingly recognized that removing delinquent youth from the community is not a long-term solution as they will eventually be released into those same communities. Furthermore, often they will have received a thorough "education" in criminal and violent behavior while in detention, thereby bringing even greater problems upon their return to the community. In the United States, the Family Support Movement and the Youth Development Movement have changed the general approach to youth development and youth at-risk from tertiary to preventive attention. The preventive attention approach is built around the concepts of community building and social capital (Kubish 1998). An example of a neighborhood strategy for reducing crime and violence within the context of supporting and building social capital involves a combination of development work with at-risk youth, community policing, creation of safe places to play, hang out, and go to school, and community-based crime prevention programs such as neighborhood-watch schemes. A recent study in Chicago found that "collective efficacy," defined as social cohesion among neighbors combined with a willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good, is linked to a reduction in violence. Associations of concentrated disadvantage and residential instability with violence were found to be largely mediated by collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).



Teenage pregnancy provides another example of how the discourse and practice has changed. Until recently, in the United States a pregnant adolescent was often stigmatized, forced to leave school, and made to give birth in special institutions for single mothers. This had adverse effects on the mother's educational attainment and employment prospects and contributed to the intergenerational reproduction of the teenage pregnancy, violence, and poverty cycles. The United States now uses community-based programs that try to keep pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers with small children in school and help them and their children cope with the challenges of staying in school, parenting, and finding and keeping employment

Furthermore, teenage pregnancy is no longer exclusively regarded as a "girls" problem; adolescent men are increasingly targeted with programs on safe sex, family planning, and responsible parenthood. (The Urban Institute 1998).<sup>1</sup> More emphasis is now being placed on understanding the role of men in reproductive health. This has led to a focus on men as needed to protect women's health, a focus on men's own health needs, and on how we can practically engage men in reproductive health decisions and behaviors.

#### **4. AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR VIOLENCE CAUSALITY AND ITS APPLICATION TO YOUTH VIOLENCE**

Although the field of *youth development* has adopted a more holistic approach, work on *youth violence* and its *prevention* and *reduction* is still characterized by compartmentalization and the lack of an integrated framework. Different disciplines such as public health, criminology, sociology, and psychology have studied and applied different concepts, often focusing exclusively on various sectors such as health, criminal justice, community development, and education. Furthermore, the field is compartmentalized in different subgroups of violence: political violence, community violence, domestic violence, youth violence. Many projects are designed to deal with any one of these manifestations of violence, but there is very little integration of efforts and understanding of how they interrelate and can reinforce each other.

A recent new framework for understanding both the causes of violence and its associated interventions is the so-called integrated framework, that is heavily based on the ecological model.<sup>2</sup> This framework provides a useful way of understanding the different causal levels of youth violence. It also addresses some of the concerns raised in the previous section.

##### **Integrated Framework**

The integrated framework is a multilevel framework that incorporates psychological and social factors at the individual level, as well as those external factors that act upon the individual, and focus on the linkages between them (see figures 3 and 4). The framework is based on the following principles:

- Violence is a complex, multifaceted social phenomenon whose interrelated causes and consequences imply a multisectoral, integrated approach for interventions
- Violence has four interrelated levels of causality, impact, and intervention—structural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual (figures 3 and 4).<sup>3</sup>

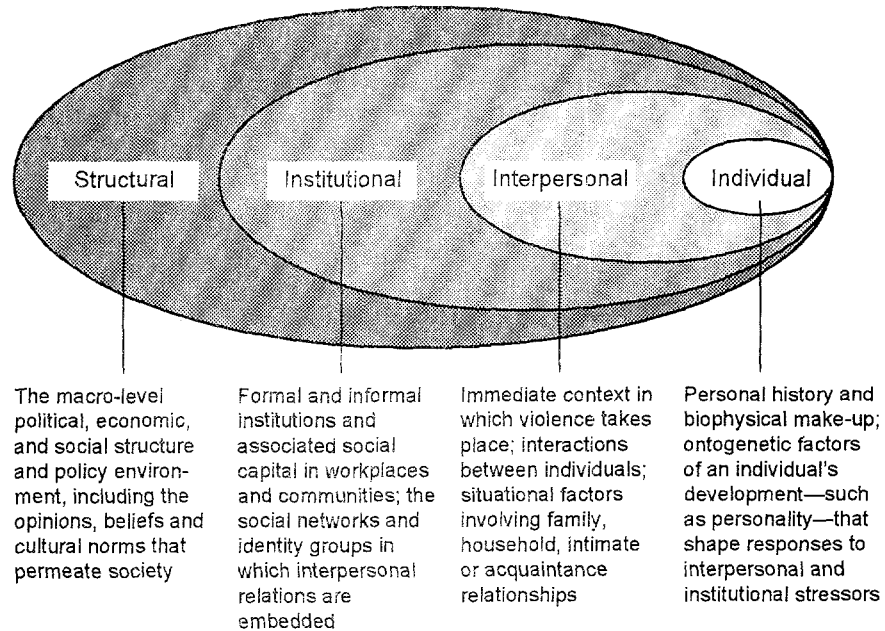
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1. See, for example, the work done by the Young Men's Clinic in New York City, as part of the Population and Family Health Program of the Columbia University School of Public Health.

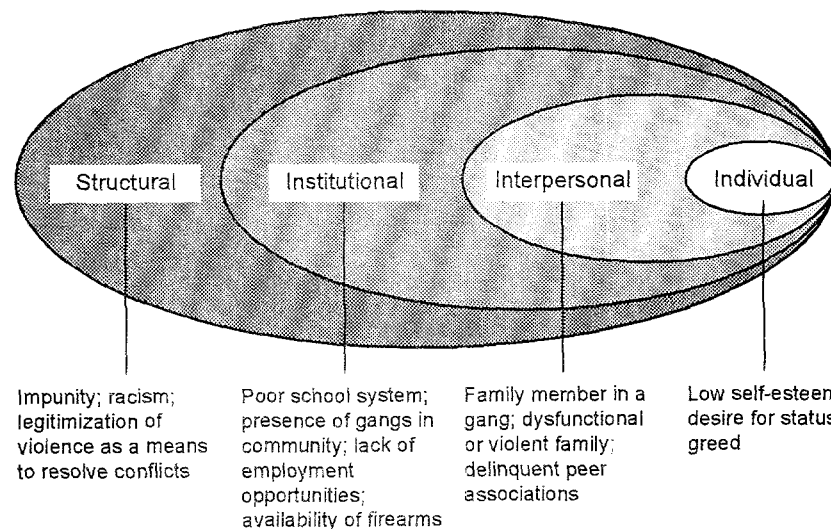
2. The ecological model has been applied variously to explain different manifestations of violence. See, for example, Heise 1998.

3. This section relies heavily on the ecological framework for understanding violence developed for the Urban Peace Program, Latin American and Caribbean Region, Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit, World Bank. See Moser and Shrader 1999.

**Figure 3. An Integrated Model for Violence Causality**



**Figure 4. The Integrated Model for Violence Causality Applied to Gang Violence**



No single causal variable wholly determines or explains violence, but when one or more additional causal variables are combined, they may yield a situation in which someone commits, or is victimized by, violent acts. Similarly, violence prevention requires interventions at the four different levels:

- Individual (behavior modification for reduction of risk factors or promotion of protective factors).
- Interpersonal (education and training in nonviolent relationships, strategies for conflict resolution).
- Institutional (building community assets, strengthening social capital in poor communities, implementing multi-sectoral training initiatives to improve the quality of services, developing and enforcing responsive policies and procedures).
- Structural (policy-level innovations, legislative reform, and media campaigns).

Focusing interventions at some levels may challenge the structural causes of violence, while focusing on other levels may achieve more immediate, short-term, ameliorative responses.

### **Integrated Framework as Applied to Youth Violence, Its Causes, and Interventions**

This section is based on a literature review of different approaches to youth violence. It uses the integrated framework to examine the causal relationships between the different levels and their associated interventions. Although a challenging task, an attempt is made to address all four levels at the same time, since it is important to move towards this approach (Table 3).

**Table 3. Integrated Framework as Applied to the Causes of Youth Violence**

<i>Causality</i>	<i>Interventions</i>
<b>Individual level</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Internal locus of control</li> <li>• Temperament—children who show a fearless, impulsive temperament very early in life may have a predisposition for aggressive or violent behavior</li> <li>• Lack of lifeskills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs directed at reducing the early signs of anti-social behavior, for example information-processing skills, conflict resolution skills, problem solving skills</li> <li>• Programs to build self-esteem and self-efficacy (as part of a lifeskills program)</li> </ul>
<b>Interpersonal level</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family demographics—socioeconomic status and poverty</li> <li>• Unstable family environment—breakdown of the family, domestic violence</li> <li>• Parent and sibling characteristics—antisocial personality, marital violence, parent or sibling involved in violent acts/crime/the criminal justice system</li> <li>• Parenting techniques—lack of monitoring, inconsistent discipline, harsh and continuing physical punishment, abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with families</li> <li>• Provide opportunity to develop stable and successful relationships with competent and caring adults</li> <li>• Parenting/life skills programs</li> <li>• Programs that address the socioeconomic needs of the family, for example employment opportunities, housing needs, drug abuse prevention</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional level</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School—access, poor quality; lack of relevant skills; particular features of the school context may help to create a milieu conducive to aggression</li> <li>• Neighborhood—high levels of crime and violence, presence of gangs, ready access to alcohol and drugs</li> <li>• Neighborhood-specific poverty and lack of employment opportunities</li> <li>• Criminal justice issues—racism, poor policing, perceived lack of justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create violence-free school environment</li> <li>• School-based programs—dropout prevention, drug counseling, sex education, life skills, work placements</li> <li>• Sports and recreation opportunities—the soccer field</li> <li>• Work with the neighborhood on establishing community laws and norms to address drug use, crime, and the availability of firearms</li> <li>• Community policing</li> </ul>
<b>Structural level</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media—high levels of violence in the media and the glorification of violence by the media</li> <li>• Culture at large—legitimization of violence to resolve conflict</li> <li>• Presence of political and other types of violence</li> <li>• Racism and social exclusion</li> <li>• Poor socioeconomic policies and conditions—employment levels, countrywide poverty, and inequality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage the media in violence-reduction programs</li> <li>• Awareness-raising programs to delegitimize the use of violence including impunity, and anti-corruption</li> <li>• Address all types of violence, and integrate social, political, and economic programs</li> <li>• Address socioeconomic needs</li> </ul>

### *Individual level*

Psychological and developmental research has shown that children who exhibit a fearless, impulsive temperament early in life may have a predisposition for aggressive and violent behavior (Pepler and Slaby 1994). Therefore, programs directed at reducing the early signs of antisocial behavior—for example, by teaching information-processing skills, conflict resolution skills, social-problem solving skills—can be effective interventions by changing children and youth's involvement with and response to social experiences and preventing the use of violence at a later stage in life.

Studies that focus on youths who seem to do well despite living in difficult circumstances have identified certain protective or resiliency factors at the individual level. These include high self-esteem and a strong internal locus of control—feeling confident that your own efforts will produce desired effects (Grossman and others 1992, as cited in Burt 1996). Conversely, youths who lack self-esteem and an internal locus of control are found to be at a much higher risk of engaging in risky or violent behavior. Therefore, many programs working with at-risk youth—including those designed to prevent youth violence—try to strengthen youth's self esteem and self-efficacy.

Another example of the importance of strengthening self-esteem and self-efficacy arises when working with girls and young women; research has shown that girls who have low self-esteem or who feel little or no control over their bodies (often as a result of sexual abuse) are much more likely to feel powerless to control their own reproductive and sexual choices later in life (Schneidman 1996).

Intimately linked to low self-esteem and locus of control is the idea of youth being conditioned to failure by their environment, equipped with few or no skills to become successful and productive adults. Life skills programs are designed to overcome this culture of failure and usually include elements of self-awareness and self-knowledge, anger management, conflict resolution, family planning, and parenting skills. The SERVOL program in Trinidad and Tobago is a well-known youth development program that incorporates a strong life skills component (Box 3).

#### **Box 3. The SERVOL Program in Trinidad and Tobago**

SERVOL is a nongovernmental organization that works in poor urban neighborhoods, particularly with children who are not reached by the school system—those age 0–5 and 16–19. They run an early childhood intervention program, a parent outreach program, and an adolescent development program—all are community-based programs. Father Pantin, the director, describes a culture of very high levels of psychological battering and physical abuse in families (including sexual abuse) that result in youth with low self-esteem who are “conditioned to failure.” The adolescent development program is an intense, full-time, three-and-a-half month program that teaches “life skills” designed to overcome low self-esteem. The program consists of courses in self-awareness and self-knowledge, anger management, nutrition, personal hygiene, parenting skills, family planning, and public speaking, among others. After successful completion the students continue on a one-year to two-year skills training and apprenticeship program in professional trades such as mechanics and nursing. Most graduates find a job in their field after completing the total program.

SERVOL is an interesting example of community-based interventions directed at helping at-risk youth and preventing violence at the individual, family, and community levels. It appears to be very successful among the youth involved in the program and has been expanded to work with the Ministries of Social Development and Education. The program is also being expanded to a number of other Caribbean countries and could be useful in other countries in the Latin American and the Caribbean region.

*Source:* Authors' interviews in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, November, 1997.

Low self-esteem is interrelated with the interpersonal and social institutional levels in the way it links peer group and neighborhood characteristics. For many children and youth living in marginalized neighborhoods—where the role models and heroes are gang members—joining a gang is often the only way to achieve some status in the community and gain self-esteem. Successful programs provide an alternative path. For example, a theatre group can give children an opportunity to take on responsibility and become “someone” in an alternative way, while gaining important life skills (Box 4). There are many other examples of programs that offer alternatives to gang and delinquent life and help build self-esteem. Some are based on cultural activities—on the rediscovery of black culture, for example, as in Olodum in Salvador—others are based on joint efforts to improve the community.

**Box 4. *Nos do Morro* Theatre Group, Rio de Janeiro**

*Nos do Morro* (Us up the Hill) is a small community theatre group in Vidigal, one of the most violent *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. It was founded in 1986 by Guti Fraga and has about 120 members (adults and children). The group has a small theatre and facilities in a school in Vidigal. They work as a collective and everyone is expected to help with all the different tasks. This has inadvertently led to a change in gender roles and perceptions as boys become accustomed to doing work such as cleaning. The group has been very successful, and some of its members have gone on to work in cinema and television. They also have links with the Royal Shakespeare Company in London, members of which came to Vidigal to give workshops.

The plays are rotated between Brazilian classics and their own productions. The topics that surface most often during improvisation and in the plays are school, sex, pregnancy, single parenthood, and domestic violence. The subjects of violence and drugs and trafficking often comes up in workshops but not in the official plays, as part of the gang “code of conduct.”

The principal qualities of the project appear to be the way in which it provides an alternative path to gangs to build self-esteem and a sense of responsibility and equips members with new life skills. As Guti Fraga says, by joining the group youth take a position. This position complicates their life—in their relationships with parents, siblings, and peers they defy gender stereotypes. This transformation results in the acquisition of life skills that go far beyond those skills directly related to the theatre.

*Source:* Authors’ interviews in Rio de Janeiro, December 1997.

*Interpersonal level*

Family demographics (the socioeconomic status of a family or household in which a youth is raised) is an important factor in determining the developmental path of that youth. The impact of poverty, poor housing, health, and educational opportunities, increased stress and frustration levels—which can lead to alcohol and drug abuse—has been widely proven. Youth development and violence reduction programs need to address the socioeconomic needs of the family. For example, they need to create employment opportunities, address housing needs, drug abuse prevention, and parenting skills.

Children who live in a dysfunctional family or come from a disintegrated family are at particularly high risk of becoming violent adolescents. Observing the antisocial behavior of parents or siblings or witnessing marital violence in the household often leads to a repeat of these behavior in adult life, thereby generating cycles of domestic abuse. Children will learn and know how to resolve conflict only through the use of violence in the home and when dealing with conflict situations outside the home. Similarly, poor parenting techniques (for example, the lack of monitoring, inconsistent discipline, harsh

and continuing physical punishment, as well as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of children by the parent or other adult can lead to low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, and the use of violence to resolve conflict. Many studies have shown that adults who suffered neglect or abuse as children themselves have a higher tendency to repeat such behavior with their own children (Pepler and Slaby 1994; Schneidman 1996; Burt 1996).

Integrated programs need to intervene with the affected child and with the parent, through counseling and, if necessary, by taking the abused adult or child out of the abusive situation. However, programs also need to work with families by teaching them anger management, conflict resolution skills, and parenting skills within the context of understanding and meeting the family's socioeconomic needs. Providing children and youth with the opportunity to develop stable and successful relationships with competent and caring adults can go far in mediating the adverse impacts of a dysfunctional family background.

Gender-related family issues are considered important causes of youth violence in the Caribbean. These issues include the perceived breakdown of the family and the resulting high levels of physical abuse—of partners and children (as well as the absence of fathers, and a lack of positive male role models). However, to date there has been little policy-focused research, either on the breakdown of the family (Lewis and Carter 1995), or “masculinity”—the associated and relatively new field. It is important to consider to what extent the family is really breaking down, or changing and restructuring, and whether the nuclear family was ever the dominant family type in the Caribbean.

Finally, if parents or siblings are involved in violent acts, crime, gangs, or the criminal justice system this can contribute to the development of similar behavior among their children or siblings. Delinquent peer associations are also linked to the development of violence and delinquency. This often involves a vicious cycle in which a child's aggressive and disruptive behavior contributes to poor peer relations, and the subsequent strengthening of relationships with peers like themselves in deviant peer groups.

### *Institutional level*

Many neighborhood characteristics can contribute to the development of youth violence. Poverty and the lack of youth employment opportunities usually provide the overall context for the presence of other causal factors such as high levels of crime, gang activity, and violence in the community. Others include easy access to alcohol and drugs (rising fast in the region), the availability of firearms, and lack of safe space (Spiegel 1995; Mercer and others 1993). Community development programs that effectively address youth violence include working with the neighborhood to establish community laws and norms to reduce drug use, crime, and violence. These programs also build on the community's assets, create social capital, and support community organization.

Criminal justice issues involving institutional racism, a perceived lack of justice, and high levels of impunity often relate to poor policing and contribute to the acceptance of high levels of generalized violence at the community level. Poor policing practices can be due to a lack of trust between the police and the community, police corruption, and brutality. There are numerous programs for police reform, reeducation, and community policing. They include the training of police officers and the building of trust between the community and the police. In addition, there is a possible role for community policing programs in directly addressing the needs of at-risk youth as well as in preventing

youth violence. For example, instituting after-school sports and homework clubs run by community police officers and picking up truants and taking them to their schools or parents.

One of the most influential institutions is the education system. Good schools and school-based programs can mitigate many of the adverse impacts of violence on youth. A poor education system, however, contributes to negative outcomes such as high repetition and drop-out rates and a lack of necessary skills (Pepler and Slaby 1994).

The first issue is one of access. There must be schools to go to, they must be safe to attend, and they must provide an environment free of gangs and violence. The second issue is the quality of the education. There must be a sufficient number of well-trained teachers, adequate resources, and a relevant curriculum. School-based programs that help to reduce and prevent youth violence include school drop-out prevention programs, substance abuse counseling, sex education and family planning, life skills programs, and work placements. Box 5 describes the Bolsa-Escola program in Brasilia, Brazil, a successful school drop-out prevention program (Veja 1997a).

**Box 5. Bolsa-Escola, Brasilia, Brazil**

The *Bolsa-Escola* program (School-Scholarship) was started in 1994 in the Federal District (Brasilia) with the dual objectives of keeping children in school and helping poor families financially. Families that qualify for the program receive R\$120 (approx. US\$120, or one minimum wage) per month, provided that *all* children ages 7–14 in the family attend school regularly.

Of the participating families, 51 percent are headed by single women. Since its inception 42,480 children have participated in the program, costing 0.6 percent of the overall budget of the Federal District. The project has been very successful in keeping children in school and improving school performance. Only 0.4 percent of enrolled students have dropped out of school—previously the drop-out rate was 10 percent. Repetition rates are down to 8 percent from the average rate of 17 percent.

*Source:* Veja 1997a.

*Structural level*

The structural level is where the broader policy environment, macroeconomic tendencies, and cultural norms permeate and inform the other three layers of the integrated framework. At this level there are a number of factors that clearly affect the levels of youth violence. The first is the country's overall socioeconomic conditions and policies, including levels of employment and unemployment, economic activity, countrywide poverty and inequality, and the way in which these in turn affect the regional/local/household socioeconomic environment. Programs designed to reduce violence necessarily operate within the larger context of national conditions and policies.

The presence of other types of violence in society also has a direct impact on the levels of youth violence. The links between family violence and youth violence have already been established. It is also clear, however, that the presence of political violence leads to a legitimization of violence to resolve any conflict in the culture at large. Countries such as Colombia that experience high levels of political violence also display a high level of tolerance for economic and social violence. For example, a recent survey in Colombia found a considerable sympathy for, and even approval of, the vigilante killing of a rapist (Rosenthal 1997). Post-conflict societies such as El Salvador and Guatemala are facing very high, and rising, levels of violence, even after the ending of the political conflict and

violence. Policies to reduce youth violence consequently cannot operate in isolation from those addressing other types of violence in society.

The media also plays a role in legitimizing violence to resolve conflict through the intense (and often sensationalist) reporting and glorification of violence. In the Caribbean there is particular concern about the importation and airing by local radio stations of “Gangsta Rap” from the United States. This is a form of African-American rap music that exalts the use of violence against others, for example, women and the police. Conversely, the media can participate in violence reduction programs by raising awareness to delegitimize the use of violence. For example, some innovative programs have used the popular “telenovelas” to raise awareness about domestic violence.

A country’s level of impunity and corruption, racism, perceived lack of justice, and its links to social exclusion all contribute to the legitimization of violence and affect the other three layers of the framework. Situations in which membership in a particular group in society—which could be based on race or class—leads to a different application of the rules of law will eventually create resentment and seriously undermine the credibility and functioning of the legal system. Box 6 summarizes issues raised by a group of adolescent, low-income males in Port-of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The violence reduction policies they suggested encompass all four levels of the integrated framework and raised issues from counseling to education, employment opportunities, dysfunctional families, the media, and equality and justice.

**Box 6. Focus Group Discussion with Adolescent Males (Ages 12–15) at Mucurapo Junior Secondary School, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago**

The following is the summary of the main issues raised by a group of young men in Trinidad during a focus group discussion to determine what policies they thought would help reduce violence in their community:

- Create jobs
- Facilitate sports (for example a soccer field)
- Crime counseling—against violence, drugs
- Build more schools
- Provide better teachers—teachers that listen
- Facilitate drug rehabilitation
- Institute equal rights and justice for all
- Help people from broken homes
- Enforce the law
- Talk to them—preach the word of God
- Provide homes for the homeless
- Take violence out of television (controversial)

The following were discussed heatedly, but were rejected because the young men felt they made the situation worse rather than better:

- Pay drug lord
- Give everyone a gun

*Source:* Authors’ field work in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, November 1997.



## 5. CONCLUSION: A PLANNING AND INTERVENTION STRATEGY TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS YOUTH VIOLENCE

Extensive reviews of programs that attempt to meet the needs of youth and reduce the levels of youth violence point to a number of general issues about effective programs that were also raised in this paper. Programs need to be:

- Preventive
- Long-term
- Address the needs of youth holistically and within the context of their families, peers, and neighborhoods
- Multisectoral and based on an assessment of community needs and assets
- Recognize gender differentials during assessment, design, and evaluation
- Involve the participation of youth as well as their parents and families, from the early phases of the program onwards.

Boxes 7 and 8 present a comprehensive summary of recommendations given for successful youth-serving programs (Schneidman 1996; Barker and Fontes 1996; Burt 1996). The conclusion that can be drawn from these recommendations—and from the more detailed look at causes of and interventions for youth violence—is that there is need for an effective planning and intervention strategy that is community-based, holistic, and participatory. This is a strategy that incorporates the lessons from the field of youth development, identifies causal linkages and works at the four levels of the integrated framework, and includes and draws from community assessment data to better comprehend the interrelationships among different manifestations of violence, and simultaneously, to better understand an individual manifestation such as youth violence.

The next step is to test and refine such a strategy in a variety of field settings with the use of community-based, participatory assessments of violence—including youth violence—and the design and implementation of associated, better-integrated and targeted, multilevel and multisectoral intervention strategies. This process naturally needs to incorporate the experience of effective youth programs to date, but allows these programs to become part of an overall violence prevention and reduction strategy.

### **Box 7. Lessons Learned about Successful Youth-Oriented Activities**

- Programs need to start early, work with youth for years, and holistically and comprehensively address the needs and aspirations of youth, including those of their families, peers, and neighborhoods.
- In addition to helping with concrete problems, programs need to promote positive behaviors, offer activities and opportunities that give youth reasons to expect a decent future, and promote the capacity for participation and self-determination.
- The opportunity to develop stable relationships with competent and caring adults is an especially critical component of successful programs.
- In the pursuit of a more holistic approach, it is not necessary, and may not even be desirable, for a particular program to do everything itself. Programs that address different needs and provide different skills and knowledge are forming *networks* that enable them to meet the multiple needs of youth in a flexible and efficient manner.
- The program's goals should be based on a *local community needs assessment* and an assessment of services already available, whether formal or informal. The full range of stakeholders should be included in the planning process, including a critical role for youth themselves.

*Source:* Burt 1996.

### **Box 8. The Ingredients of Success in Youth-Serving Programs**

(From a review of two dozen international youth-serving programs)

- **Case management.** The use of case management systems (interdisciplinary groups of professionals who oversee the needs of youth) allow for the provision of individualized care and for addressing the interdisciplinary needs of youth.
- **Communitywide multi-agency collaborative approaches.** An important feature of successful programs has been the reliance on inter-institutional networks or umbrella organizations, which tap the resources available within communities and organizations.
- **Private sector involvement.** Fostering private sector participation is another key ingredient for success. This can involve community participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs (for example, the use of volunteers from the *business* sector to provide training and to organize fundraising) or parental or peer participation in programs.
- **Youth participation and empowerment.** Youth participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs has been shown to be essential to their success, particularly for programs catering to older adolescents. Early involvement of youth and their families and communities at the design and planning stage has proved critical in establishing a dialogue, enlisting their support, and facilitating sustainability. Peers are often used as role models and mentors in successful programs to increase the acceptability of messages. Some programs include assistance for empowering youth to assess their needs, identify remedial strategies, and take an active role in their implementation.
- **Replicability.** Replicating and scaling up exemplary programs is a difficult task and will probably not be feasible in many cases, particularly for community-based efforts. The emphasis should, therefore, be on adopting successful elements of these programs to other environments.
- **Sustainability.** The sustainability of programs serving at-risk youth depends on a number of factors: diversification of funding sources to include a mixture of private and public support; participation of the local community, including the business sector; involvement of youth and their families; and advocacy efforts to generate broad-based support from communities, governments, and donor agencies.

*Source:* Schneidman, 1996

The lack of monitoring and evaluation of youth-serving and violence prevention and reduction programs is a serious obstacle to better understanding these programs. Therefore, a strong monitoring and evaluation strategy essential to any program. Very few programs routinely collect data on implementation, performance, process, outcomes and impacts, and costs. This not only complicates the issue of improving, replicating, and upscaling existing programs, but it also weakens the justification for program costs and future investments in the prevention of youth violence and its associated costs to society.

Youth violence is a complex social phenomenon that has only recently been recognized as not only a criminal justice issue, but also a development problem in Latin America and the Caribbean. A great deal more analytical work is needed, particularly in integrating the fields of youth development and violence and in understanding the issues that youth face, their needs, and their own perceptions. The suggestions and recommendations given in this paper are provisional and are intended to contribute to this analytical process.

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