

Bulletin

Investing in Youth: International Approaches to Preventing Crime and Victimization

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This Bulletin is a summary of a Report by the same title that focuses on promising strategies and programmes being developed around the world to tackle crime and victimization among young people aged 12 to 18 years. It shows how policy-makers, practitioners, and the voluntary sector can exercise their leadership in developing effective prevention.

Thinking Differently

Children and young people under 18 make up a major sector of a country's population. Internationally, many countries are thinking differently about policies and strategies to prevent crime and victimization among young people of 12-18. They now recognise that there are strong links between *offending* and *victimization* among young people, as well as their *health* and *development*.

They also recognise that major social and economic changes have affected the lives of young people over the past twenty years, and that future trends indicate continued changes. These factors underline the importance of taking preventive approaches much more seriously than in the past by *investing* in and *supporting* young people and their families through preventive approaches, rather than excluding or incarcerating them.

The circumstances that place young people *at risk* either as victims or offenders are very similar across countries - they are points for *intervention* and *protection*.

International Strategies

Many countries now have **national** strategic plans to tackle youth offending through social prevention. This includes Australia, Scandinavian countries, the UK, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. Their *national*

strategies are closely linked to *regional, provincial or state strategies*, encouraging partnerships **vertically** (federal, state, municipal) and **horizontally** (between ministries, agencies, organizations and business partners) and *local* strategy development. In some countries the development of safety partnership strategies is mandated and considerable financial and technical support is being invested in youth prevention strategies.

Youth Include is a multiple intervention package targeting at-risk 13-16 year-olds in highly deprived areas in **England & Wales**. Up to 70 schemes will be developed by local youth action teams under the management of Youth Justice Boards. They aim to reduce neighbourhood crime, school exclusion, and truancy through interventions with the school, family and community, modelled on successful interventions developed elsewhere.

Acting differently

There is a strong new focus on:

- the problems of *exclusion of young* people from mainstream society
- *young peoples' rights* to public space and the importance of *including them* in the planning and delivery of programmes
- *gender and diversity*, and the different needs and experiences of young women and men, and Aboriginal and other ethno-cultural minorities
- using *mediation and restorative practices* with young people

A number of countries like Canada now have **national strategies** that include the development of preventive programmes for this age group, and also include *regional, provincial or local policies*. They often provide some project funding, technical support and evaluation as well as stress the importance of:

- *partnerships* at the local and community level
- the *implementation* of programmes and their *transferability*
- the mapping and *evaluation* of good practice and the *continuity* of care over time
- and the *costs and benefits* of prevention

The Challenge

Youth Crime: Internationally

- adolescence is the *most common age period* for law-breaking throughout the life-span

12-18 are the peak years for offending and victimization.

- the majority of offending involves *boys* and consists of *minor property offences*
- *most adolescents grow out* of law-breaking
- *serious offending is infrequent* - across many countries around 7% of young offenders are charged with violent offences
- a small number of offenders (6-7% of young males) are responsible for 50-70% of all crime and 60-85% of serious violent crime.

In many Western countries, from the 1980s to the mid-1990s there were marked *increases* in officially recorded crime and in violent crime by young people - mainly minor assaults. Since the mid 1990s there has been a *decline in youth violence* in those countries, but rates still remain higher than in the 1970s.

Surveys from a number of countries have established that some 6-7% of young males commit between 50-70% of all crime and 60-85% of serious violent crime. (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1998)

Youth Victimization: Evidence from many countries indicates that there are strong links between young offenders and young victims:

- *Levels of victimization among young people are high* - this includes property as well as violent offences inside and outside the home.
- *Young people tend to victimize others who are about the same age and known to them* - the *majority* of individual victims of youth offending, whether property or violence, are likely to be other young people living in the same community, attending the same school.
- *Young offenders are often themselves young victims* - this includes victimization in childhood, and offending behaviour, which places them in risky situations inviting victimization. The kinds of behaviours and circumstances leading to law-breaking and especially serious offending are often similar to those leading to victimization. Youths who are *isolated* or *excluded* may turn to bullying others or to offending in order to survive.

Linking Health and Development: International surveys show that youth offending and victimization is closely linked to health and development in childhood and adolescence.

- In *early childhood* family relationships and care, a healthy environment and living conditions are crucial for mental and physical health, & social and intellectual development. Family disruption, conflict and violence, and poor parenting skills are exacerbated by poverty, poor housing and environmental conditions, and can lead to the development of difficult and aggressive behaviour, ill-health, accidents, victimization, running away, homelessness, depression, and later offending.

- In *early adolescence* those who have poor relationships with parents and at school tend to feel excluded, bullied and criticised. They are more likely to have physical and mental health problems, feel anxious or depressed, and develop more serious smoking, drinking and drug habits.
- In *later adolescence* - the crucial period for transition from school to work - anxiety and depression may lead to truancy, school drop out or exclusion, homelessness, serious drug and alcohol abuse, offending and victimization, as well as self-injury and suicide.

Gender differences: Many countries now pay much more attention to the specific experiences and needs of girls and young women and plan specifically for them. Some of the risks of offending or victimization are similar to those of boys - poverty, poor environment, family disruption and violence, but there are some important differences. For example:

- *more controls* exercised over many aspects of girls' lives
- *how they spend their leisure time* and the kinds of risks this entails
- boys are more prone to *accidents and risk-taking behaviours* and to suicide, girls to self injury, depression and eating disorders
- the *type and extent of physical, emotional and sexual abuse* experienced by girls and boys both in the family and outside
- the *rate at which girls and boys mature* as they grow up - boys are more likely to drop out or do poorly academically than girls
- young women are much *more likely to cease offending* as they reach adulthood than young men

Race and Diversity Differences: In most countries there is an over-representation of indigenous and ethno-cultural minority groups in youth offending. Much of this has to do with poverty, and their much poorer social and economic circumstances than the majority population, and with systemic racism and discrimination.

Changing societies

Poverty, Family Patterns, Youth Populations: Over the past twenty years social and economic changes in many countries have had a marked impact on the lives of young people with:

- increasing income *disparities* between wealthy and poor
- more family breakdown and single parent families

In **Britain**, the numbers of children living in poverty rose from 1.4 million in 1968 to 4.4 million in 1998. While incomes increased by two-thirds for the top 10% of the population, they fell by 8% for the bottom 10% (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Woodward, 2000).

- an increasing concentration of poverty among minority populations and immigrant families. The numbers of minority and immigrant youth are expected to grow in many countries over the next decade.

Social Exclusion, Unemployment, Drugs and Homelessness:

These changes have resulted in the virtual *exclusion* of people living in poor inner-city, or suburban and rural areas, from the increased prosperity experienced by others. Changes in the labour market have led to increases in *youth unemployment* in many countries.

Drug use and poly-substance use by young people has become much more prevalent, especially in areas of high unemployment. It is closely linked to offending and victimization.

Youth homelessness has increased. Young people with mental health problems, those who have been in care, and minority youths are over-represented among the homeless.

In **Germany**, the proportion of ethnic minorities in youth custody increased from 10% in 1990 to 35% by 1998.

An **international survey** of 14-20 year-olds in 12 countries shows that drug use has a big impact on property crime and drug trafficking. On average, property crime was ten times higher among users of hard drugs than non-users, and three times higher among soft drug users (Killias & Ribeaud, 1999).

Acting Effectively

Risk Factors: Studies from many countries confirm the range of *family, individual, school, and community* factors that place children and young people **at risk** of offending and victimization. For adolescents, additional sets of risk factors – poor school performance and school drop out, peers, gang involvement, drugs, a poor local environment – require different preventive strategies and ones that are adapted to their age and interests.

Protective factors are those which *protect* children and young people from developing aggressive behaviour, dropping out of school or drifting into offending or being victimized.

Prevention programmes should aim to *strengthen* the family, individual, school and local community to *reduce* school drop-out, teen pregnancy, homelessness, depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as offending and victimization.

Internationally, these studies provide clear evidence that **intervention** to reduce *risk factors* is effective and that:

- the *earlier* the intervention, the more effective it is
- treatment that lasts a *relatively long time* is more effective and long-lasting than short interventions
- interventions starting before adolescence are more effective
- programmes targeting *multiple problems* are more effective than those dealing with only one risk factor

The *Dalston Youth Project* (Benioff, 1997) in England uses “**Mentoring-plus**” with 15-18 year-olds. It is an intensive community-based project for the most disadvantaged youths. It aims to reduce crime and risky behaviour by helping youth back into education, training and work. Community volunteers mentor youth for a year, a special pre-college course and employment training is provided. An evaluation has shown that 73% of those who went through the first programme were in college, training or employment, and arrests were reduced by 61%.

Effective intervention includes early visits to school and pre-school training, home care, family therapy and parent training, school organizational change, whole-school anti-bullying programmes, family-school partnerships, mentoring and education programmes, incentives to complete school, work experience, job training and placement programmes, targeted youth club programmes and holiday programmes in high risk areas.

Costs and Benefits:

Targeted intervention is very cost effective when compared with the long-term costs of criminal justice, and provides considerable benefits for every dollar invested e.g. youth programmes such as *Job Corps* and *Quantum Opportunities* in the US produced benefits of \$1.45 & \$3.68US for every \$1 invested.

INVOICE

To: **American Public**
For: **One lost youth**

<u>Description</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Crime	\$1.5-\$1.8 million
Drug Abuse	\$200,000-\$448,000
High School Drop Out	\$470,000-\$750,000

Total Loss \$2.2-\$3 million

Cohen (1998) adapted in OJJDP (1999:28)

Working with 12-18 year-olds

Targeting Age and Development: Preventive programmes need to be directed to four major groups within the 12-18 year-old youth population:

- **young people in general** who are at the most vulnerable age for offending and victimization
- **youth at risk**, including those in poor areas and those with multiple risk factors
- **youth in care**, and those with mental and physical health concerns
- **youth coming out of the justice system**

Universal prevention programmes for 12-18 year-olds provide services for all young people in a community or school.

Targeted programmes are directed at high risk groups and areas, those with specific behavioural problems, or specific populations (e.g. ethnic minority youth).

Such programmes must also be **appropriate to:**

- age and development
- gender
- ethnic and cultural background
- levels of risk
- specific needs

Young People in Public Space

Countries are focussing on young people in public space and are recognising:

- the increasing privatisation and commercialisation of public space
- the *exclusion* of young people or their over-policing
- that young people also have rights to access and use public and commercial space

France and **Belgium** both fund local security contracts to support local strategic partnerships - France has created 15,000 new security jobs and 20,000 new **social mediation** jobs to be filled mainly by youth from disadvantaged areas.

Young people are now being consulted and involved in project development, e.g. creative use of existing places, art and drama projects in public space, planning transport to meet young peoples' needs, and commercial site management. **Youth Action Groups** are

Some of the key requirements in working with young people include: involving young people, stressing strengths rather than weaknesses, setting clear objectives and goals, expecting problems but having strategies to deal with them.

developing in a number of countries. In England and Wales they **must** now be included in all local community safety planning.

An increasing number of projects are designed around the needs of **girls and young women**, to meet specific needs of **minority youth**, targeting specific crime problems such as gangs, drugs, violence, or homelessness.

Cyber Café, Northern Territory, **Australia**: This is an Internet site at a high school, established and managed by youth, which acts as an actual or virtual drop-in centre after school hours for isolated rural youth. It has involved computer and network training, management skills, development of a project booklet, a newsletter, and the “linking-up” Aboriginal schools (White, 1998).

Is it that simple?

The growth of inter-agency and community-based projects in a number of countries over the past 15 years has provided much **practical experience** on the problems of:

- *developing*
- *implementing*
- *sustaining* and
- *evaluating* programmes.

Problems found especially with youth projects: are likely to be greatest with at-risk groups and include motivating young people to participate; a lack of existing youth networks on which to build; the difficulty of accessing those most at risk for consultations and keeping them involved; the need to counter negative views/fears about young people.

Problems affecting most project development include: inflexible local or provincial policies; unwillingness to share information; lack of initial funding; lack of on-going or sustaining funding; over-ambitious project goals; over-ambitious time-table; under-ambitious goals; difficulties in transfer of projects; lack of attention to monitoring and evaluation; lack of funding for monitoring and evaluation. There are now a number of guides to anticipating and avoiding some of these problems.

Success in working with young people requires good knowledge and skills in community and inter-agency organizations such as ‘**embedding**’ projects within a strong existing organization with a good ‘track record’ or history of youth services.

The major characteristics of **successful projects** seem to be having a track record in developing community partnerships; commitment by local partners; good leadership; committed and experienced staff who *like* young people; strong agency support for their workers.

An increasing number of programmes that have been evaluated and tested as well as organisations that provide training and technical support for project development and implementation now exist.

Working with marginalized and at-risk youth requires agencies and partnerships to have good planning and evaluation, a youth-oriented philosophy, appropriate staff, collaborative networks for referral and consultation, flexibility, multi-disciplinary management and good tools for enhancing success.

Pulling it all Together – Working in Partnerships and Using Strategic Approaches

Many countries are now using a **collaborative and targeted** approach to youth programme development. Decisions about universal or targeted programmes, partnership development, selection of projects, and anticipation of implementation problems all require **careful local analysis** through safety audits, and the **development of action plans** based on a clear assessment of community strengths and resources.

Basic Requirements for Successful Intervention:

- **co-ordinated local partnerships** with key people in the area or community
- **pooling information** between agencies on **risk and protective factors** as well as resources
- **a careful analysis or diagnosis** of the problems in the area – including safety audits to locate specific problems and areas
- **developing and implementing an integrated plan** of action which matches intervention projects to the problems and needs identified
- **monitoring and evaluating** the interventions

The leadership role: Support for the development of local youth strategies and projects needs to come from **national, provincial regional governments and local community leaders**. This includes funding and evaluating pilot projects and best practice, strengthening the tools for undertaking community safety audits, providing training and support for project development and evaluation, initiating best practice seminars and training to build on successful projects and experience, and supporting local youth strategy co-ordinators.

What many countries now recognise is that targeting the links between mental and physical health, and risky behaviours, social exclusion, and offending and victimization is **the best way** to plan for healthy communities and ensure the inclusion and support of young people and their families.