What Works to Prevent Youth Violence: A Summary of the Evidence 2021

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Summary

Youth violence, which occurs between individuals aged 10 to 29, can take many forms and has health, social, and economic consequences for individuals, families and communities (World Health Organisation, 2015). The What Works to Prevent Youth Violence (WWPYV) report was undertaken to draw together high quality international evidence about what works to prevent youth violence and is intended to inform policymakers and practitioners about the extant evidence base and effectiveness associated with different approaches and interventions.

Some of the key findings of the WWPYV report are useful to practitioners working within the field of community safety. These include the following:

- There is evidence to suggest that school and education-based approaches are effective in reducing youth violence. These include both bullying prevention programmes (e.g. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, KiVa) and social and emotional learning programmes (e.g. PATHS).
- Interventions that have been identified as promising include: school based programmes which seek to prevent violence in dating and intimate partner relationships, parenting and family-focused approaches, mentoring programmes, and community-based coalitions.
- There is mixed evidence about the effectiveness of out-of-school activities and early childhood home visitation programmes.

- Deterrence and fear-based approaches have been identified as having no effect on youth violence outcomes and, at worse, are potentially harmful to young people.

The WWPYV report categorises different programmes of youth violence prevention work into Effective, Promising, Ineffective and Inconclusive. An example from the first three are provided below to demonstrate how useful this approach is for practitioners who are considering planning interventions to reduce and prevent youth violence.

EFFECTIVE

Social, emotional, and life skills development	Effective: There is evidence to suggest that programmes that seek to develop young people's social, emotional and life skills can have a positive impact on a range of violence related outcomes (e.g. *PATHS*)	Potential facilitators: • Implementation fidelity[3] • Incorporates the teaching of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills • Competence enhancement and empowerment approaches • Interactive teaching methods • Well-defined goals • Provision of clear teacher guidelines

PROMISING

Dating violence prevention programmes	Promising: There is promising evidence that school-based programmes which seek to prevent violence in dating and intimate partner relationships (through developing life skills, improving knowledge of abuse, and challenging social norms and gender stereotypes that increase the risk of violence) are effective.	Potential facilitators: • Content underpinned by evidence-based theory and appropriately tailored to the target audience • Multiple sessions over time, that aim to change attitudes and norms rather than simply provide information • Should be incorporated into school policies • For men, programmes delivered in mixed male and female groups are more effective than

INEFFECTIVE

Deterrence and fear-based approaches	**Ineffective and potentially harmful effects:** Programmes using fear-based approaches are not effective, and may be associated with an increased risk of offending. Their implementation should be avoided.	

Conclusions The impact of the COVID-19 crisis has the potential to contribute to a rise in youth violence. Moreover, the direct and indirect consequences of violence are broad, extending beyond victims and perpetrators to families and communities. As such, the evidence presented within this report can contribute to decision-making in work to prevent youth violence. School and education-based approaches have been shown to be effective however there is limited evidence regarding who is more likely to change (e.g. in relation to age, gender, and sociodemographic status) and when programmes should be implemented. For those working within the field of community safety and youth violence prevention the WWPYV report can help provide evidence-based recommendations for what works and could be a useful tool in planning and decision-making environments.