

facts

Youth violence

Violence by young people is one of the most visible forms of violence. Both fatal and non-fatal assaults involving young people contribute greatly to the global burden of premature death, injury and disability. Youth violence deeply harms not only its victims, but also their families, friends and communities.

There are close links between youth violence and other forms of violence. Violent young people frequently commit a range of crimes and display other social and psychological problems.

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2000, an estimated 199 000 youth murders took place globally – equivalent to 565 children and young people aged 10-29 years dying on average each day as a result of interpersonal violence.

Rates for youth homicide, though, vary considerably by region and by country, and female rates are almost everywhere much lower than male rates.

In the decade 1985-1994, youth homicide rates increased in many parts of the world – a growth associated in many cases with a more frequent use of guns as the method of attack.

For every young person killed by violence, an estimated 20-40 receive injuries that require hospital treatment.

Non-fatal violent injuries involve substantially fewer firearm attacks than do fatal assaults and involve a greater use of the fists, feet, knives and clubs.

Studies show that drunkenness is an important immediate situational factor that can precipitate violence.

Physical fighting and bullying are also common among young people. A study of school-aged children in 27 countries found that the majority of 13-year-olds in most of the countries surveyed had engaged in bullying at least some of the time.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN RISK FACTORS FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE?

Individual factors

The principle personality and behavioural factors linked with youth violence are:

- hyperactivity
- impulsiveness
- poor behavioural control
- attention problems
- history of early aggressive behaviour
- low educational achievement.

Influences by family and peers

The home environment is key to the development of violent behaviour in young people. Some of the key family factors associated with adolescent violence are:

- poor supervision of children by parents and harsh physical punishment to discipline children
- parental conflict in early childhood
- a low level of attachment between parents and children
- a mother who had her first child at an early age
- experiencing parental separation or divorce at a young age
- a low level of family cohesion
- low socioeconomic status of the family.

Associating with delinquent peers has also been linked to violence in young people.

Social, political and cultural factors

- Gangs and a local supply of guns and drugs are a potent mixture, increasing the likelihood of youth violence.
- Low levels of social cohesion within a community have been linked to higher rates of youth violence.
- The quality of a country's governance – its laws and the extent to which they are enforced, as well as policies for social protection – has an important effect on violence.
- Factors such as income inequality, rapid demographic changes in the youth population, and urbanization have all been positively linked with youth violence.
- Cultures that do not provide non-violent alternatives for resolving conflicts appear to have higher rates of youth violence.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE?

A variety of approaches have been tried to reduce violent behaviour among young people. The most common interventions seek to change individuals' skills, attitudes and beliefs. These types of programmes are frequently carried out in school settings and are designed to help children and adolescents manage anger, resolve conflict, and develop the necessary social skills to solve problems.

Another common set of prevention strategies addressing youth violence focuses on early intervention with children and families. Such programmes provide parents with information about child development and teach them how to effectively discipline, monitor and supervise children,

as well as how to manage family conflict and improve communication. Parent and family-based interventions are among the most promising strategies for producing long-term reductions in youth violence.

Other approaches focus on community settings and some of the more prominent societal factors related to youth violence. They range from public information campaigns and community policing to improving settings such as schools and hospitals. Also included are legislative, judicial, and educational reforms as well as other policy reforms designed to mitigate the effects of rapid social change and tackle gun violence among youths. Most of these approaches, though, have not been evaluated.

EXAMPLES OF STRATEGIES TO PREVENT YOUTH VIOLENCE

Individual	Relationship	Community	Societal
Pre-school enrichment programmes ^a	Home visitation (involving regular visits from a nurse or other health professional to families in special need of support and guidance with child-rearing and care)	Improving school settings, including teacher practices, school policies and security	Public information campaigns
Social development programmes (particularly those that emphasize social skills and competency) ^a	Training in parenting ^a	After-school programmes	Efforts to reduce media violence
Bully prevention programmes ^a	Family therapy ^a	Extracurricular activities	Strengthening and improving police and judicial systems
Counselling ^b	Mentoring programmes ^a	Community policing	Reforming educational systems
Vocational training	Peer mediation/peer counselling ^b	Gang prevention programmes ^b	Policy changes to reduce poverty and inequality
Incentives for youths at high risk for violence to complete secondary schooling ^a		Modifications to the physical environment	Activities and polices to mitigate the effects of rapid social change and tackle gun violence among youths
		Improving emergency response, trauma care and access to health services	
		Training health care workers to identify and refer youths at high risk for violence	
		Reducing the availability of alcohol	

^a Demonstrated to be effective in reducing youth violence or risk factors for youth violence.

^b Shown to be ineffective in reducing youth violence or risk factors for youth violence.