PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE: WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

UI IPRC and partner research | June 2024

Protective Factors for Individuals

Skills in Solving Problems Through Non-Violence

- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are correlated with verbal and physical aggression later in life. The effects of ACEs on young adults last even longer than recent life circumstances like stress, or substance use (Berg et al., 2020).
- Youth programs should increase efforts towards the popular, academically oriented youth who engage in pseudomature (or adolescent adult-like) behavior. Such youth are often seen as largely successful and brimming with promise, but they are engaging in harmful behaviors that may reduce their potential (Simons et al., 2018).
- Youth who experience violence in multiple settings and forms (polyvictimization), are more likely to live in disordered communities, engage in all types of delinquency, have elevated lifetime adversity, experience low levels of family support, and have the highest scores for trauma symptoms (Turner et al., 2016).

Protective Factors Related to Relationships

Connection to a Caring Adult

- Male youth are significantly less likely to engage or continue in violent behaviors when they have a positive role model or male mentor *outside* the family (Warner & Berg, 2020).

Family Support/Connectedness

- Youth's commitment to violent behaviors changes in response to environmental conditions occurring at the same time (i.e., neighborhood violence, peer interactions, and family hostilities).
- Commitment to "street code," or violence-related activity, increases in childhood, peaks in late adolescence, and declines in emerging adulthood (Berg et al., 2021).

Association with Prosocial Peers and Connection/Commitment to School

- Youth are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors, when they see preferred caring adults, family and their community embrace this mentality. A prosocial identity includes characteristics related to helping others and benefiting society (Na & Paternoster, 2019).

- Youth who commit to school (grouped as conventional youth) are likely to succeed in school and build prosocial behaviors and connections as they mature. Pseudomature youth succeed academically but are more likely to practice more adult-like social and health behaviors, such as substance use, use of weapons, and/or sexual activity. Delinquent and pseudomature youth groups frequently engage with each other throughout their educational years. Youth delinquency is correlated with later violence altercations. The impact of pseudomature youth socializing with delinquent youth is not strongly correlated with violence perpetration, but instead with teen pregnancy and lower education success rates (Simons, et al., 2018).
- A prosocial identity mediates violence when youth avoid association with delinquent peers (Na & Paternoster, 2019).

Protective Factors Related to Community

Community Support/ Connectedness

- Improved neighborhood and physical environment (e.g., street lighting, fixed buildings), youth driven campaigns, workforce development and school reform, and reframing social norms/biases (for youth and towards youth) (Nation et al., 2021).

Protective Factors Related to Society

- Society-level interventions to prevent youth violence are currently being studied. Some are evidence-based, but research on their impact on protective factors is still underway.

Prevention Examples for Youth Violence

Intervention Strategy	Examples of Community Change Levers	Ecological Level	Behavior Change Strategy
Parent, family, and community engagement	Identify and disseminate information to parents, youth, and community on local youth programs and opportunities	Individual	Providing information and enhancing skills
	Increase the number of agencies or organizations that facilitate "effective" or "well-supported" evidence-based youth or parenting classes with culturally appropriate content (Lifeskills Training, Project Build, Promoting Alternative THinking Strategies-PATHS)	Relationship	Barrier removal, enhancing access and opportunities
	Supporting youth and families through evidence-based therapy models that reduce impact and likelihood of youth violence (Functional Family Therapy)	Individual/ Relationship	Removing mental health, ACEs, and family trauma barriers - creating healthy family boundaries
Trauma, social services, and support	Implement a hospital-based violence intervention program for youth who are admitted to ER for intentional injury	Individual	Enhancing services and supports
	Develop an injury and fatality review board to review youth-related incidents of homicides and youth violence	Societal	Changing consequences and broader policies
Youth advisory board	Establish peer support groups for teens to explore ways to resist youth violence, sexual coercion, and/or becoming involved in gang activity	Relationship	Enhancing services and supports
	Develop youth advisory for analysis of issues and development of solutions	Society	Joint decision making and collective impact
	Establish an ongoing system to provide public recognition for specific community o youth efforts to prevent assault or violence	Community	Changing consequences and broader policies
Youth justice and crime prevention	Improve night and street lighting and supervision in public parks and recreational areas through crime prevention through environmental design principles	Community	Barrier removal, enhancing access and opportunities

Youth justice and crime prevention (cont.)	Establish and promote use of silent witness and related youth crisis hotlines for reporting violence	Community	Enhancing services and supports
Youth opportunities	Provide safe and affordable transportation to supervised recreational opportunities	Community	Barrier removal, enhancing access and opportunities

Table adapted from:

Watson-Thompson, Jomella, et al. "Together helping reduce youth violence for equity (ThrYve): Examining the development of a comprehensive multisectoral approach to youth violence prevention." American journal of community psychology 66.3-4 (2020): 244-255; *Shared Framework for Reducing Youth Violence and Promoting Well Being.*

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