



TOOLKIT "GET YOUTH ON BOARD!"

Youth and Violence

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Extent and causes of youth violence

Young people as a group are strongly affected by violence and crime –both as victims and as perpetrators. A wide range of strategies to reduce and prevent youth violence are discussed, ranging from a “zero tolerance” policy to approaches that view violent criminals only as victims of society. The answers governments find to prevent youth violence are an indicator for good governance and future social, political and economic development.

Background information

Violence by or against young people, especially children, hits the newspaper headlines more and more often, and is becoming a frequent topic of political debate-not only in developing countries but also in European states. In some countries-especially in Central America and Africa-juvenile delinquents and violent youth gangs have whole districts under their control and hamper social and economic development. In the year 2000, approximately 199,000 people died as a result of youth violence, most of them in Latin America and Africa.¹ In 2002, worldwide, an estimated 53,000 children and youth died due to maltreatment and abuse.²

Violent acts perpetrated by young people, mainly young men, include bodily harm, homicide, robbery, demolition of public property, sexual violence against girls, extortion and bullying. Young men are often fascinated by violence and some use it as a method to deal with conflicts.

Causes of youth violence

The reasons for youth violence are diverse. In most cases the young perpetrators feel excluded from society and without prospects. As many young criminals have low self-esteem and poor tolerance frustration they perceive every criticism or sometimes even a “wry look” as a personal rejection. The exercise of violence gives them a feeling of power. The youth want to be respected by their environment and violence seems to them the only instrument to gain this respect.

Often violent youth have experienced violence themselves and do not know other methods of dealing with conflicts. They experience physical, psychological and sexual violence in various areas. The forms of violence that young people experience include neglect and mistreatment within the family; witnessing violence against other family members; physical, psychological and sexual violence in schools or education facilities; exploitative child labour; the abuse of young people as child soldiers, sex slaves or child prostitutes; and violence in prisons and within the community. In many cases young people experience violence through their peers. Young men between the ages of 15 and 24 are the main victims of youth violence. The young people learn to suppress their feelings of empathy with others and to use violence as a survival strategy.

Violence by or against young people attracts attention as a symptom of underlying social tensions and a challenge to the state; it is seen as an expression of insecurity and a loss of social control, and as a manifestation of conflicts between generations and individuals who lack minimal common morals and consensus. The prevalence of violence correlates with periods of political and social imbalance; it occurs wherever there are structural factors related to unequal power relationships such as injustice, unequal distribution of wealth and the exclusion of large groups; and it is triggered by risk factors such as drugs and alcohol abuse. Thus violence is rather a phenomenon of social disorder than a problem between individuals.

Factors which increase youth violence:

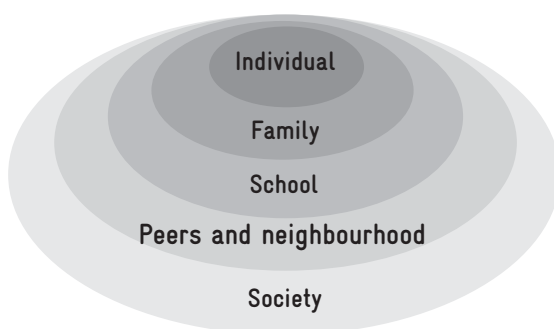
- **Deficient socialisation processes.** The most important instances for socialisation are the family, the school and the neighbourhood. The risk for young people to become violent is high when these instances produce and reproduce violence instead of transmitting values of peaceful coexistence.
- The **family** constitutes the incubator of emotions like love and peace as well as anger and hate. Domestic violence is at the same time an effect and a cause of social violence. There is a direct relation between broken family structures and the predisposition of children and youth to become violent.

¹ WHO (2002): *World Report on Violence and Health*

² UN Study on Violence against Children, <http://www.violencestudy.org>

- In many countries the **education system** is obsolete, and of bad quality and insufficient coverage. Instead of transmitting models which allow identification and build life prospects, outdated knowledge and irrelevant theories are taught. Many teachers confuse authority with authoritarianism and act violently against their pupils.
- The **neighbourhood** with its social networks, peers, community organisations, cultural and sporting activities has a strong influence on violent behaviour. Easy access to drugs, lack of space for recreational purposes and youth culture, indifference towards social problems and neglect of public space encourage violent activities.
- In many countries there is a growing tendency to treat young people as adults-as consumers in the commercial world, as entities in the legal system and with the right to vote at an earlier age. Despite this, they enter adulthood later and later, remaining dependent on their parents as they can not find appropriate employment and do not earn their own incomes. This paradoxical situation produces frustrations and may be an additional cause of violence.
- Further violence-generating factors include, for example, deficits in urban management, inefficiencies in the police and legal systems, the lack of a functioning youth custody system or strategies for social reintegration of young perpetrators, stigmatisation of young people, easy access to firearms and mob justice.

Levels of influence on young people in the development of violent behaviour



Youth Gangs

Violence by organised youth gangs is a special, and in many countries increasing form of youth violence. Many young people join gangs, or create their own, to get a sense of belonging and identity. This is especially true for those who lack stable and inspiring family structures. Although plenty of gang members are not violent criminals and may only commit petty crimes, some truly dangerous and violent youth gangs do exist, which are sometimes even connected to mafia-like structures or terrorist groups.

The spectrum of youth gangs encompasses:

- informal groups of youngsters who like to test their limits and get involved in petty crime and acts of petty violence
- formalised identifiable street gangs with a hierarchy and some criminal involvement
- gangs with links to organised crime
- institutionalised gangs and organised armed violence.

The term “gang” should be used with caution, and it can depend on various cultural and media influences. It is often used to refer to a wide range of different youth groups, most of which should be clearly distinguished from youth gangs which are characterised by the following criteria:

- illegal activities
- Hierarchical structure with authoritarian elements
- Segregation from other gangs and adult world by language, customs, clothes, music and drugs
- Social self-exclusion and brutal rites.

Gangs use violence to defend their territories and identities, to test the loyalty and courage of their members (initiation and punishment rites), to maintain cohesion and to generate income. They are engaged in endless war-like conflicts with competing gangs as well as with the police or security forces. These conflicts generate a spiral of violence which often ends in homicide and massacres as extreme forms of youth violence.

Prevention of youth violence

According to the WHO the general objective of violence prevention is “to stop acts of interpersonal violence from occurring by intervening to eliminate or reduce the underlying risk factors and shore up protective factors or to reduce the recurrence of further violence and its effects”.³

Three levels of prevention

There are three levels of violence prevention:

- **Primary prevention** is directed at young people who have not necessarily experienced or applied violence. The objective is not only to prevent victimisation and violent behaviour, but also to support the development of a peaceful, healthy and self-confident personality.
- **Secondary prevention** is addressed at vulnerable children and youth at risk, who may have been victimised and/or may have used minor forms of violence. It is intended to keep them from more serious forms of violence by showing them, for example, peaceful means of conflict resolution.
- The target group of **tertiary prevention** are victimised youth and violent perpetrators. In the case of victims, the objective is to help overcome the trauma of victimisation; for the violent perpetrators it is to facilitate their reintegration into society and prevent them from entering the spiral of violence.

For a long time in many countries, especially in Central America, prevention focused purely on severe punishment for young violent criminals (zero tolerance). However, they have now realised that this strategy does not bring success if the underlying causes for youth violence are not addressed. Several countries are currently looking at ways to promote the social integration of young people and of developing a positive attitude towards community life.

Integrated multi-level approach

The prevention of violence by or against young people requires an integrated, multi-level approach:

- At the **political level** precise strategies and legislation are needed to fulfil children's and young people's rights to full physical, mental and emotional develop-

ment. Furthermore, coordinated and holistic approaches are necessary to prevent young people from experiencing violence in their families, in schools and in society as a whole. These are all important ways of contributing to the prevention of youth violence.

- However, clear **legislation** is also needed concerning the treatment of young criminals and the establishment of a **youth custody system**. Social (re)integration and the empowerment of young people should be an underlying principle of all legislation and strategy development.
- **Teaching values of tolerance** and mutual respect and **methods of peaceful conflict resolution** should be integrated in the curricula of formal and non-formal education.
- To implement existing laws and policies the **communal justice and police** should be strengthened, along with the **youth welfare offices** and structures.
- Beyond the development of legislation and institutions, **capacity development** is also needed to introduce approaches and methods for **youth (social) work, violence prevention, rehabilitation of violent youth and psychological counselling** and care for victims. The target groups for such training programmes should be local institutions (e.g. health centres, youth offices) and NGOs as well as police officers and juvenile justice staff.
- **Community structures** should be strengthened and Networks should be established between the relevant stakeholders to promote a regular exchange of experiences and a common strategic approach.

Direct approaches for violence prevention and rehabilitation with young people can include:

- Awareness raising and sensitisation on methods of peaceful conflict resolution, for example through the training of young conflict mediators at community level, sensitisation workshops with young people and community members, campaigns on the situation of street children and child labourers, theatre for peace, literature competitions and exhibitions or anti-violence TV-spots.

- To prevent violence against young people (domestic violence, violence in schools etc.) it is important to sensitise the whole community and to create a sense of responsibility among community members. The early intervention to discourage violent behaviour against young people is also a relevant step to prevent youth violence.
- Support of socially disadvantaged families and single mothers through social workers and counselling. Current surveys show that children who grow up in deprived households often receive less parental care and support than other children and thus are more likely to become delinquent or violent. Children who have already experienced violence in their family or in other environments need psychological support and life skills training.
- Establishment of emergency hotlines (telephones, email hotlines or online counselling) for children who experience violence and abuse, as well as for parents who feel strained and in danger of resorting to the use of force against their children. However, to provide effective help, the hotlines must be embedded in a network of decentralised youth and family promotion services.
- Promotion of intercultural dialogue, for example through “intercultural camping” which brings together young people from different regions. A week-long cultural camp can help to dismantle the mistrust and intolerance which exist between different cultural, ethnic or social groups. Afterwards the young participants can act as mediators within their communities. Another more complex approach is to organise a “peace caravan”-a cross-border event with artists from different countries and ethnic groups. The caravan uses music, theatre, acrobatics or other artistic performances to put across a message of peace and reconciliation.
- Sporting activities such as boxing or football for peace often attract vulnerable young people (including gang members and former child soldiers), who would otherwise be hard to reach. The young people can exploit their energy and channel it positively at the same time. Furthermore communication skills, team building and feelings of responsibility and solidarity are promoted. Sporting activities can be used to introduce vulnerable youth gradually to further services.
- Anti-violence training for young criminals (As the young criminals would not normally volunteer to participate in such training, they can be committed by a court order.): The training teaches the youth to reflect on their violent acts, to take on responsibility, to respect social rules and to feel empathy with their victims. Anti-violence training should also include the promotion of employability and life skills. Training for young criminals should create new perspectives for these youths and present alternatives to violence, such as ways to catch up on their education, youth employment promotion or leisure time activities.
- Drop-in centres for children at risk (street children, orphans, school drop-outs etc.) are contact points where the young people can spend their time and-if necessary-get food and clothing, or access to counselling services and psychological help. The services should not, at the beginning at least, be too prescriptive as the young clientele might be scared off easily.

There are various concepts and methods of violence prevention and rehabilitation. However, for a sustainable impact young people need perspectives for their future life. Thus youth employment promotion and the creation of job opportunities for young people are essential steps in their long-lasting social integration (see Fact Sheet “Youth unemployment”).

Relevance for development cooperation

Violence by young people generates high economic and social costs. These include the cost of health care and those accruing from damage to property. There is also the cost of the young people’s lost potential for development. Youth violence is a crucial challenge to developing countries where often more than 50% of the population are below 24 years of age. Armed conflicts and political instability, as well as social and economic changes and the impact of extreme poverty all have a direct bearing on young people. They affect their social integration and their readiness from a very young age to exercise violence.

Examples

Nearly all nations have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have committed themselves in Art. 19 to taking "all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, ...".⁴ Many states have also ratified the optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

German Development Cooperation

In the Program of Action 2015, which is its contribution to implementing the MDGs, the Federal German Government has committed itself to promoting the fulfilment of the Convention of the Rights of the Child as well as its optional protocols and the ILO Convention 182.

German Development Cooperation took over a leading role in youth violence prevention and rehabilitation in the nineties, for instance by implementing "Violence prevention through youth promotion", a transnational programme in Latin America undertaken in cooperation with the Pan-American Health Organisation. Many projects integrate general youth issues and aspects of violence prevention, such as life skills, youth participation, capacity development, peer-to-peer education, awareness campaigns, rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-combatants and gang members. An important component of German Development Cooperation is the support provided to national governments to establish national strategies and policies of youth promotion linked to violence prevention, and to anchor them in national action plans and legislation.

Violence prevention through youth promotion

Violence prevention through youth promotion in South and Central America

Since 2003 the GTZ has cooperated with the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) in the implementation of youth promotion methods to strengthen violence prevention and build a culture of peace in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru und Argentina. The target group consists of socially disadvantaged children and young people, mainly from low-income households living in poor settlements at the edge of metropolitan areas. These young people are at risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence. The programme is anchored at local, national and regional levels, and focuses on innovative approaches to violence prevention at the community level. Firstly a detailed situation analysis was conducted to assess the state of youth violence and existing programmes in selected countries. Based on the results of this analysis, steps were taken to promote the development of alliances and institutional and social support systems to sustain youth violence prevention activities. The measures involve awareness raising, promoting political compromise, generating legal and institutional support, and documenting and publicising youth violence prevention policies. At the local level, the programme combined youth promotion activities with conflict resolution and prevention of substance abuse in the family, at school and in the community.

Football for Peace

Football for Peace “El Golombiao – El Juego de la Paz” – Colombia

El Golombiao-Football for Peace is a pedagogical initiative involving peace education and conflict prevention, which specifically addresses young boys and girls. It uses football as a medium to tackle violence and strengthen community values; it instils peaceable attitudes and promotes gender integration and team building, while also developing skills for dealing with conflicts and creating a culture of a peaceful coexistence. Using the popular game played with simplified rules, young people-who before would have viewed each other as enemies, and met in armed violence-learn how to deal with their frustrations and conflicts in a constructive manner. Furthermore, Football for Peace promotes dialogue between representatives of the community and the youth. This can, in turn, encourage further participation in other community activities.

The initiative was introduced in Bogotá, in 2003, by Colombia Jóven in cooperation with the project management of the integrated settlement upgrading project “SUR con Bogotá”. The pilot initiative involved more than 440 young boys and girls.

The rules of the game are adapted to serve its special aim as a violence prevention strategy. The basic rules of Football for Peace are as follows:

- teams are composed of eleven players, who must include boys and girls.
 - The first goal for each team, in each half, has to be scored by a girl to ensure the active participation of girls.
 - There is no referee guiding the match; the players themselves have to manage potential conflicts on the playing field; if possible they are supported by a trained mediator.
 - Scoring goals is not the only criterion for winning a match; points are also gained for sticking to the established rules of fair play, for respecting the opponents and for appropriate handling of conflicts.
 - Every match is played under a certain motto chosen by the players themselves at the beginning of the game, for example “unity is our strength” or “no discrimination”.
- At the beginning of the match the players come together with the mediator to agree on the motto and some specific technical and social rules for the match. During the match the teams put the previously agreed rules into practice without a referee. At the end of the match the teams themselves define the result of the match, summing up the points given for respecting the rules of peaceful play and adding the goals scored.

The first series of championships produced the following important results and impacts:

- Young people increased their ability to solve conflicts harmoniously through dialogue; they exploited their energy and at the same time channelled it positively.
- Many adolescents from broken families experienced authority, respect for rules, leadership and positive role models for the first time in their life.
- Communities began to recognise young people as individuals and social actors in their neighbourhood.
- Security increased around the public spaces used; people won back the public spaces for constructive uses.
- People-both young and old-were able to move around in areas they previously could not enter.
- Conflict levels between youth groups and gangs decreased and intergenerational conflicts declined.

Young Conflict Mediators

Community Peace Workers – South Africa

In South Africa, violence and crime are among the largest obstacles on the road to peaceful social and economic development. In South Africa's cities violence has reached threatening proportions for all sectors of the population. Young people are the most heavily involved, both as victims and as perpetrators of violence. The South African government has recognised the problem and adopted several action plans designed to curb violence, but the resources needed to implement them are not available, and the police and judiciary are struggling to cope.

GTZ has been implementing projects in a number of South African towns and cities since 1997 with a view to helping implementation of the government's strategies and contributing to the prevention of urban violence. The aim is to encourage the inhabitants of selected urban areas to apply peaceful conflict resolution strategies, while at the same time promoting the interests of young people. The project deploys young people as community peace workers (CPW) on a voluntary basis. They are out and about in their communities every day, ready to step in and arbitrate in conflicts; they are present in schools and they make a contribution to health education. In return they are offered a one-year bridging course, which is designed to make it easier for them to find a job afterwards. The course covers mathematics, business English, computer skills, and careers training and advice.

The work of the CPWs has helped to bring about a sharp fall in the crime statistics in the communities concerned. More and more inhabitants are requesting the support of these young people. Moreover, the fact that about 80 percent of the young people who have taken part in the programme have since found a job can be regarded as one of the project's achievements.

Sensitisation workshops

"Possession of hand-guns" in schools – El Salvador

More than ten years after the end of the civil war in El Salvador, thousands of weapons are still circulating uncontrolled in the country. The easy access to weapons has led to a widespread culture of violence. El Salvador has one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America. Violent acts are usually committed with the help of hand guns, and gangs of armed youths known as "maras" threaten the safety of the population. These gangs deal in drugs, live from armed robberies and terrorise whole areas. School pupils, parents and teachers are powerless in the face of this situation. Even in the schools, the use of weapons is commonplace. Because of the perceived threat, there is also a danger that the weapons culture will expand, with ever more young people arming themselves for protection. The phenomenon of the weapons culture at schools has so far hardly been researched or documented; constructive solutions and alternative methods for resolving conflicts are also missing in most cases.

The GTZ project "Armed Violence in Schools" collaborated with the Salvadorian Education Ministry, UNICEF and 20 state schools to investigate the scale of hand gun misuse in the period June 2003-December 2004. The research was both qualitative and quantitative. At the same time, planning workshops were carried out for sensitisation and to develop measures for limiting armed violence at schools.

Workshops were held just for members of a particular affected group, such as school pupils, parents or teachers; there were also meetings between these participants and representatives of the police and school authorities. Based on the results, joint strategies were developed that now contribute to the decreasing misuse of fire-arms and increased security at Salvadorian schools.

Relevant literature and websites

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Eurogang Project: www.umsl.edu/~ccj/eurogang/euroganghome.htm

European Crime Prevention Network: www.eucpn.org/

European Forum for Urban Safety: www.urbansecurity.org/fesu/home.aspx

German Congress on Crime Prevention (DPT): www.praeventionstag.de/index_english.html

Global Youth Action Network: www.youthlink.org

International centre for the prevention of crime (ICPC): www.crime-prevention-intl.org

PAHO: www.paho.org

TakingITGlobal: www.takingitglobal.org

The White House, Helping America's Youth: www.helpingamericasyouth.gov

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre: www.unicef-irc.org

United Nations Office on Drug and Crime: www.unodc.org

World Health Organisation: www.who.int

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