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# Youth violence

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## Key facts

- Worldwide about 193 000 homicides occur among youth 15–29 years of age each year, which is 40% of the total number of homicides globally each year.
- Homicide is among the leading cause of death in people aged 15–29 years, and the vast majority of homicides involve male victims.
- For each young person killed, many more sustain injuries requiring hospital treatment.
- When it is not fatal, youth violence has a serious, often lifelong, impact on a person's physical, psychological and social functioning.

## Overview

Youth violence refers to violence that occurs among individuals aged 10–29 years who are unrelated and who may or may not know each other. It generally takes place outside of the home. It includes a range of acts from bullying, both offline and online, and physical fighting, to more severe sexual and physical assault, gang-related violence or homicide. Youth violence results in deaths, injuries, disability and long-term health consequences including mental health problems and increased health-risk behaviours, which can lead to chronic diseases. It is further associated with higher rates of school-dropouts, negative impacts on cognitive development and opportunities to contribute to their communities.

# Scope of the problem

Worldwide an estimated 193 000 homicides occur among young people between 15–29 years of age each year, making it one of the leading causes of death for people in this age group. Youth homicide rates vary dramatically between and within countries. Between 2000–2019, rates of youth homicide decreased in most countries, although the decrease has been greater in high-income countries than in low- and middle-income countries. The majority of youth homicide victims are males, and most perpetrators are males too.

For every young person killed by violence, more sustain injuries that require hospital treatment. Firearm attacks end more often in fatal injuries than assaults that involve fists, feet, knives and blunt objects.

Sexual violence also affects a significant proportion of youth. For example, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 7 boys report sexual abuse (1).

Physical fighting and bullying are also common among young people. A study of 40 developing countries showed that an average of 42% of boys and 37% of girls were exposed to bullying.

Youth homicide and non-fatal violence not only contribute greatly to the global burden of premature death, injury and disability, but also have a serious, often lifelong, impact on a person's psychological and social functioning. This can affect victims' families, friends and communities. Youth violence increases the costs of health, welfare and criminal justice services; reduces productivity; decreases the value of property.

## Risk factors within the individual

- attention deficit, hyperactivity, conduct disorder, or other behavioural disorders
- early involvement with alcohol, drugs and tobacco
- low intelligence and educational achievement
- low commitment to school and school failure
- involvement in crime
- unemployment
- exposure to violence in the family.

## Risk factors within close relationships (family, friends, intimate partners and peers)

- poor monitoring and supervision of children by parents
- harsh, lax or inconsistent parental disciplinary practices
- a low level of attachment between parents and children

- low parental involvement in children's activities
- parental substance abuse or criminality
- parental depression
- low family income
- unemployment in the family
- associating with delinquent peers and/or gang membership.

## Risk factors within the community and wider society

- access to and misuse of alcohol
- access to and misuse of firearms
- gangs and a local supply of illicit drugs
- high income inequality
- poverty
- the quality of a country's governance (its laws and the extent to which they are enforced, as well as policies for education and social protection).

## Prevention

Promising prevention programmes include:

- life skills and social development programmes designed to help children and adolescents manage anger, resolve conflict, and develop the necessary social skills to solve problems;
- whole school approaches to violence prevention in educational facilities;
- programmes that support parents and teach positive parenting skills;
- preschool programmes that provide children with academic and social skills at an early age;
- therapeutic approaches for youths at high risk of being involved in violence;
- reducing access to alcohol;
- interventions to reduce the harmful use of drugs;
- restrictive firearm licensing;
- community and problem-oriented policing; and
- interventions to reduce concentrated poverty and to upgrade urban environments.

Preventing youth violence requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes the strong correlation between rates of youth violence and economic inequalities. The most impoverished sectors of societies, marked by significant wealth gaps between the rich and the poor, consistently exhibit the highest rates of youth violence. Economic disparities exacerbate frustration and despair among disadvantaged youth, leading to an environment where violence becomes a common outlet. To achieve sustainable prevention gains, it is important to address income inequality, increase economic mobility, and enhance access to education, social protection and employment opportunities.

Preventing youth violence requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the social determinants of violence, such as income inequality, rapid demographic and social change, and low levels of social protection.

Critical to reducing the immediate consequences of youth violence are improvements in pre-hospital and emergency care, including access to care.

## WHO response

WHO and partners decrease youth violence through initiatives that help to identify, quantify and respond to the problem, these include:

- drawing attention to the magnitude of youth violence and the need for prevention;
- building evidence on what works to prevent youth violence, including in the online space;
- strengthening school-based violence prevention programmes;
- working with Member States and all relevant sectors to prevent youth violence and strengthen responses to it; and
- advocating for the integration of evidence-based prevention strategies to prevent youth violence in adolescent and youth health initiatives; and
- collaborating with international agencies and organizations to prevent youth violence globally.

## References

1. Unicef. Sexual violence. October 2024. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/sexual-violence/#status>