

BEYOND SUPPRESSION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH VIOLENCE

Edited by Joan Serra Hoffman, Lyndee Knox, and Robert Cohen
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IN 1985, US SURGEON GENERAL C. EVERETT KOOP SUGGESTED that the United States take a public health approach to prevention of violence. *Beyond Suppression* could not have been written then, because the epidemiology of homicide in other countries and continents was unknown because of poor surveillance. Accordingly, after 35 years of violence prevention in the United States, it is interesting to read a book that provides a global perspective on youth violence prevention.

It is now known that 200 000 young persons aged 10 to 29 years die each year as a result of interpersonal violence. Public health experts in the United States constantly point out the country's high homicide rates (12.9 per 100 000), but this book's international perspectives appropriately enlighten readers that homicide rates in Latin America are 36.6 per 100 000, followed by the Caribbean, with rates of 31.6 per 100 000. In contrast, homicide rates in Africa are 16.1 per 100 000; in Europe, the rates are 1.2 per 100 000.

Scientists understand the need to scientifically prove what works to effectively and efficiently intervene in public health problems, to prevent wasting resources on interventions that do not really work. Because homicide is an event with a low base rate, large sample sizes (eg, 600 000) are required to provide the statistical power necessary to prove the efficacy and effectiveness of homicide prevention interventions. However, most of the interpersonal violence prevention interventions discussed in this collection do not meet this criterion. Despite these scientific impediments, the editors of this fascinating 4-part book have collected 14 naturalistic case studies on violence prevention from around the world. These case studies emphasize both single-sector interventions—ie, those that work in only 1 sector, such as criminal justice or mental health—and multisector interventions, ie, those that seek to influence more than 1 sector. Regardless of whether an intervention works in a single sector or in multiple sectors, the editors appropriately underscore the need for prevention interventions to be ecologically comprehensive. Accordingly, violence prevention initiatives at individual, family, and community levels—as well as those at municipal, state, and national levels—are discussed, along with public policy approaches and interventions to address violence.

The chapters in part 1 appropriately highlight interventions in the United States, such as Nurse Family Partnership programs, functional family therapy, and interventions in the US Surgeon General's Youth Violence Report,¹ and discuss risk and, more importantly, protective factors that reduce the likelihood of violence. Part 2, "Single-Sector Interventions," underscores violence prevention case

studies in Singapore; Basrah, Iraq; Kingston, Jamaica; Israel; Northern Ireland; and South Africa.

Part 3, "Multi-Sector Interventions," emphasizes youth violence prevention efforts in Los Angeles, New York, Australia, Canada, Haiti, Brazil, Bogota, the Caribbean, Japan, and Central America. The international authors accentuate strategies familiar to US violence prevention experts: school-based efforts, such as after-school and weekend programs; mental health and child welfare programs working synergistically; and programs involving hope and connectedness to promote self-esteem, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, coping skills, and prosocial orientation. In addition, programs that use education, technical skills training, leadership development, counseling, support and placement of graduates in jobs, self-employment, and continuing education or training, as well as programs aimed at reducing alcohol-related violence, have seemed successful but frequently cannot secure sustained funding or funds to expand the initiative. Furthermore, culturally sensitive efforts such as African music and drumming for peace are strategies being used in various countries.

Part 4 acknowledges that each city and country needs to shape violence prevention in a way that fits its unique circumstance and cultural norms. Political will and community support are deemed essential for success. The editors likewise admit that violence prevention is difficult, requiring passion and endurance sustained by skillful and careful planning, because 1-dimensional approaches that depend on suppression of violent behavior through tough enforcement laws do not work. Strength-based approaches toward youth, families, and communities are advocated as the best solution.

The authors of *Beyond Suppression* note that it is best to address youth violence with community and school efforts, because such efforts are more welcomed by community residents than criminal justice approaches. Furthermore, multidisciplinary community teams are challenging to maintain, because staff retention and ongoing training are difficult to sustain. Collaborating with well-respected community-based agencies that can deliver high-quality, strength-based youth programs is vital. Restorative justice has value in addressing youth violence because it focuses on rebuilding relationships rather than extracting retribution, and it provides youth with a second chance. Furthermore, if violence prevention efforts are citizen-led, trust and respect for the criminal justice system can increase. Currently, violence prevention initiatives depend on the vision, dedication, resourcefulness, and compassion of staff, while violent youth also need to draw on internal strength and direction to make their lives over.

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1. Department of Health and Human Services. *Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: Dept of Health and Human Services; 2001.