Youth Crime and Violence Prevention: Strategies that Work?

EVENT SUMMARY

Online via Zoom

When: Thursday, April 16, 2020 | 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Moderator

Heidi Kar, PhD, MHS | International Violence & Trauma Expert/Licensed Clinical Psychologist, Education Development Center

Speakers

Erik Alda, PhD | Project Director, Citizen Security Practice, Creative Associates International
Trish Campie, PhD | Principal Researcher, American Institutes for Research
Tyler Grigsby | Program Facilitator, One Common Unity

Event Description

This online learning event focused on community-based youth crime and violence prevention. Webinar speakers came from the American Institutes for Research, Creative Associates International, Education Development Center, and One Common Unity. Topics included the latest research on what works in community-based violence prevention; the importance of using a trauma-informed lens; how to incorporate family-based approaches; and the importance of bringing youth voice into violence-prevention activities.
Key Takeaways

1 Researching and practicing community-based-violence prevention

Dr. Heidi Kar (Education Development Center or EDC) set the stage for the event by providing context for youth crime and prevention strategies. She mentioned that years of research in schools proved that children who witness violence between parents or in their community are at a higher risk of facing negative health effects than children who directly experience violence. Dr. Kar shared that neuropsychological and psychological research evidence shows that unresolved trauma leads to insufficient coping mechanisms that stimulate violence in the community.

Dr. Patricia Campie (American Institutes for Research) discussed potential strategies for preventing youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In her research, practitioners used a wide range of interventions to attempt to reduce youth violence, from gang prevention to therapy in foster care. 52 percent of studies saw positive intervention effects while 48 percent of studies reported mixed results.

Dr. Erik Alda (Creative Associates International) outlined the stages of the Proponte Más Secondary Violence Prevention Activity, which works to protect the youth of 800 families in Honduras who are most likely to join gangs. Based on the results of the initial risk evaluation, intervention, and re-evaluation stages of the program, Dr. Alda emphasized that supporting families with youth that are susceptible to violence can reduce their overall risk and increase resilience.

Tyler Grigsby (One Common Unity) discussed how youth are leading efforts to drive down violence prevention efforts in their communities. Mr. Grigsby highlighted that One Common Unity is committed to building safe communities that support and empower youth by advocating and breaking down oppressive systems for a more accessible life experience. Mr. Grigsby stressed that workers should develop relationships with youth in their communities and receive the necessary resources to be able to lead.

2 How to better assist families

Dr. Campie emphasized that funders, researchers, and policymakers need to prioritize implementation rather than the outcome to promote violence prevention. Researchers also need to focus on individuals in prison and work with the community to identify employers, counselors, and social services who would be willing to accept and work with the perpetrators of violence. Based on her research, she found several approaches to be effective in LAC countries, including psychological parenting programs, school-based intervention, and multidimensional family therapy. The less effective approaches include restorative diversion, bully prevention, and violence interruption.

Dr. Kar mentioned that the EDC’s goal is to enhance mental resilience and coping mechanisms in youth and their family members. They focus on preventing violence through various coping mechanisms that involve engaging in physical exercises, spending time with friends, and practicing meditation techniques to relax the body and mind. Teaching anger management skills in schools has also helped break the cycle of violence.
Key Takeaways

3 Using a trauma-informed lens

Dr. Kar shared that a trauma-informed approach begins with understanding how trauma can affect an individual’s physical, social, and emotional wellbeing. She emphasized that attachment problems, mental health problems, aggression, and bullying in school are all results of unresolved trauma. Therefore, when quality care and essential services are provided, affected individuals are more likely to recover from post-traumatic experiences.

4 Empowering youth voices through violence-prevention activities

Mr. Grigsby mentioned that the Fly by Light Five Pillars-artistic expression, social-emotional literacy, health and wellness, environmental leadership, and social justice are important vehicles through which youth can express themselves. Social-emotional literacy is vital to prevent violence, as it enhances mindfulness, compassion, and understanding. Mr. Grigsby also highlighted the importance of incorporating health and wellness into violence prevention activities for individuals to develop healthy practices for the body, mind, and spirit. These forms of activities are effective in further reducing violence in communities and promoting social awareness and understanding.