

Preventing violence: The public health approach

There is no simple or single solution to violence. It is a multifaceted problem with biological, psychological, social and environmental roots. Therefore, violence must be addressed on multiple levels and in multiple sectors of society simultaneously. In issue no. 7 of this series, the public health approach to the prevention crime and violence was briefly summarised. Here, some examples of specific violence prevention interventions are described. They are based on the understanding that programs and policies can be targeted at individuals, relationships, communities and whole societies, and delivered in collaboration with different sectors of society in schools, workplaces, other institutions and criminal justice systems.

- **Individual approaches** focus primarily on encouraging healthy attitudes and behaviours in children and young people as they grow up, and changing attitudes and behaviour in individuals who have already become violent. Types of individual approaches include educational, social and therapeutic programs. Effectiveness varies, but the most effective appear to be social development programs delivered to pre- and primary school children.
- **Relationship approaches** aim to influence the type of relationships that victims and perpetrators have with the people they most regularly interact with. Programs focus on problems within families, and negative influences from peers. Typical approaches include training in parenting, mentoring programs, family therapy, home visitation programs, and training in relationship skills. All of these have proven effective in some settings. However, properly understanding the setting for the program is vital if they are to be effective.
- **Community-based efforts** are geared toward raising public awareness about violence, stimulating community action, and providing care and support for victims. Types of programs include media-based public education campaigns, physical modifications to the environment (for example, improved lighting), activity programs for young people, training to assist workers and employers to identify and respond to violence, community policing partnerships, initiatives to modify policies and practices in specific institutional settings (such as hospitals), and coordinated community interventions geared towards improving services and programs.
- **Societal approaches** focus on the cultural, social and economic factors related to violence, and emphasise changes in legislation, policies and the larger social and cultural environment to reduce rates of violence in different settings and entire communities. Measures can include legislative and judicial remedies (such as mandatory reporting of child abuse); international treaties; policy changes to reduce poverty and inequality and improve support for families; efforts to change social and cultural norms (for example, attitudes to homophobic violence); and reduced access to weapons (such as gun control measures).

Further reading:

World Health Organisation 2002, *World Report on Violence and Health: Summary*, WHO, Geneva.

