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Young Men and Violence Prevention

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Australia was a less violent society at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, violence is a major part of some people's, notably young men's, lives. The office of the Minister for Justice and Customs initiated consultation with a group of young men from around Australia. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) facilitated this consultation with 22 young men and 10 youth workers in Canberra on 15-16 December 1999 to examine their experience of violence as perpetrators, victims, or both. This paper begins by outlining issues the young men raised at the consultation. It then proceeds to discuss violence and how it relates to young men, effective means of violence prevention, and promising areas for policy development and program implementation.

The consultation upon which this paper is based found that young men identified relations with police as a problem. The young men perceived a need to access anger management courses and recreational and sporting facilities and wished that drugs were less available. The AIC is examining these issues and building them into the work program.

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A n Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) project with young men is focussed on violence and violence prevention. Two days of discussion with a selected group of young men identified a range of violent activities which were part of their lives. The form of violence was not discussed in depth and was assumed to be physical violence.[1] Evidence of knife wounds could be seen on the young men's bodies and at least one young man had suffered incest. The young men had many practical ideas about strategies for change.

The discussion here is a reflection of current approaches to crime prevention. The enthusiasm for crime prevention will be enhanced by attempts to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of those programs that have been implemented. One might also note that prevention efforts vary in scope—some focus specifically on violence, others on delinquency in general. Moreover, many initiatives in furtherance of health and education can make a significant contribution to violence prevention, although this may not be their objective.

Issues Emerging from the Summit

A number of issues emerged at the Summit. There was little evidence that the young men considered they had a responsibility to society. However, many expressed a desire to change and avoid violence. They perceived that things were not working for them in certain areas:

- An antagonistic relationship exists between the young men and police.
- The young men wanted help to manage their anger.
- The young men could not access or afford recreational facilities to legitimately expend their energy.
- They wanted to make drugs harder to get.

These issues are discussed in a major report prepared by the Institute and confirmed in the literature as discussed below.

Young Men and Violence

Violence in the Family

Violence in the family has been made visible over the last 30 years, largely as a result of major enquiries about domestic violence and child abuse. Recently, the Women's Safety Survey found that in the 12 months prior to the survey, about 6.2 per cent of Australian women experienced either physical or sexual violence by a male perpetrator (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1996, p. 4). The study found that 23 per cent of women who have been married or in a de facto relationship experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship (ABS 1996, p. 50).

Police statistics are an indication of the extent of violence towards children in families. Few offences are reported to the police. However, the statistics show that in 1998, 109 per 100,000 children up to the age of 9 and 575 per 100,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 were the victims of assault (ABS 1998, p. 50). The level of reported sexual assault is similar amongst young children, 109 per 100,000 children up to the age of 9 and 210 per 100,000 children between the ages of 10 and 14 were victims of sexual assault (ABS 1998, p. 38). The reported relationship between the victim and the perpetrator varies considerably between states. On average, over 50 per cent of perpetrators in sexual assault cases are either a family member or known to the victim (ABS 1998, p. 51).

Violence is characteristic of many families, and it has implications for how young men grow up—violence is learnt. In 1990, the National Committee on Violence (1990, p. 78) referred to families as "the training ground for violence". The Women's Safety Survey also found that 38 per cent of women who experienced violence by a current partner, and 46 per cent of women who had experienced violence by a former partner, said their children had witnessed violence (ABS 1996, p. 52). Expe-riences early in life must have some influence on young men who exhibit evidence of violence later in life. Young men between the ages of 20 and 24 experience the highest rate of assault compared with the rest of the population (ABS 1998, p. 39).

It should be noted that it is important to distinguish violent acts from violent actors. Thus, a young man who commits a violent act (for example, involved in a fight) does not necessarily become a violent offender ("repeatedly" engaging in violence).

Risk Factors that Indicate the Likelihood of Aggressive Behaviour

Not all families or young men are violent. Certain risk factors indicate the likelihood of behaving aggressively or engaging in violence. These include:

- having a history of violent behaviour;
- being male;
- being a young adult;
- having experienced difficulties in childhood, including inadequate parenting, troubled relationships within the family, and low levels of school achievement;
- having problems of psychotropic substance abuse, especially problematic alcohol use;
- having severe mental illness, the symptoms of which are not being adequately identified or controlled through therapeutic regimes; and/or
- being in situations conducive to self-directed or interpersonal violence, including having access to firearms (McDonald and Brown 1996, pp. vii-viii).

Violence in the family is no longer considered a private issue. Moreover, it has implications for broader social policies. The relationship between violence in the family and subsequent violent crime is complex. However, aggressiveness and antisocial behaviours are considered to be predictors of delinquency (Day and Hunt 1996).

Violence in Public Places

Some young men are involved in a culture of violence, well beyond issues concerning the family. In 1998, almost 60 per cent of re-corded assaults occurred outside of residences (ABS 1998, p. 45). Alcohol plays a part in a significant number of these offences (Ireland and Thommeny 1993, p. 146). Some young men enjoy a fight (Tomsen 1997), a fight can result from a trivial incident. Polk's study (1994, pp. 59-61) of homicide presents evidence that violence amongst working class young men often evolves quickly from "honour contests", which are often trivial. Nevertheless, young men can feud for several months (Polk 1993, p. 42).

Fights can relate to illegal activities, such as drug dealing, that do not allow young men to resort to legitimate forms of conflict resolution. As a result, groups may develop for protection. As members become hardened, for example, by experience in jail, they may view the world as consisting of the strong and the weak, and as a place of conflict and struggle. They may believe that only the strong can prosper. They ritualistically convey their ruthlessness and act brutally (Shover 1996, pp. 87-88). People who are members of groups or gangs may observe the values of conventional culture in most situations, but in certain contexts may exhibit this behaviour (Sampson 1997, pp. 39-40). In some instances, groups or gangs have emerged around issues of ethnic solidarity (Chin 1996). While groups or gangs may emerge as a result of illicit activities, this is not always the case. Young men may feel safe in groups, and when police see 3 or more young men together they may define them as a gang.

Violence in Schools

Violence occurs at school. Although Australia is fortunate enough to have been spared the school yard shootings that have occurred in the United States in recent years, less lethal forms of violence are not uncommon. Bullying may or may not be intended to hurt and may take the form of physical, non-physical, or non-verbal action undertaken by the bully or by someone co-opted to do so (Rigby 1996, pp.

14-21). Bullying is hurtful and may have health consequences (Rigby 1999).

Effective Violence Prevention Strategies

The AIC's consultation with a group of young men in December 1999 identified strategies known to be effective and promising for policy development.

Parenting, Education and Support
Families were characterised as a location of conflict for many young men. They reported that early in their lives parents argued and violence occurred in the family. It is difficult to recommend a program of intervention into families which has demonstrated effectiveness in improving behaviour by adults. The evaluation of domestic violence programs demonstrates weak and/or inconsistent evidence of deterrence from repeat victimisation or offending (Fagan 1996). Some studies show that police actions intended to prevent crime can increase the frequency of future violence (Sherman and Strang 1996, p. 17). Fagan attributes some of the problems in understanding the effectiveness of current strategies to the complex nature of domestic violence and the limits of research design to date. A recent review of Victorian domestic violence support group programs shows that facilitators tend to evaluate programs by asking participants to make proposals that will help improve the content (Bondy and Ogilvie 1999, p. 36). Nevertheless, it is important to develop programs to support families in a rapidly changing society where the structures and relationships are often not available to support parents with child rearing.

Early intervention programs with young, single mothers have consistently reduced the injury suffered by children in the first two years of their life. Breaking the cycle of violence results from regular infant weekly home visits by qualified and specially trained pediatric nurses, which reduce child abuse and injuries (Olds 1992; Sherman 1997(b), pp. 4.10-

4.15). Also, pre-school programs, including parenting interventions, have reduced some children's antisocial behaviour and delinquency (Farrington and Welsh 1999, pp. 288-93). A number of programs have been implemented in Australia based on these principles (Choi 1999, pp. 7-10; Calvert 1999).

In spite of the attention juvenile delinquents attract, cost-effective policy proposals emphasise committing resources to early intervention programs because of the cumulative pay-offs later in life (Tremblay and Craig 1995, p. 224). It is difficult to make comparisons between the costs and the benefits of crime prevention because researchers use non-comparable estimates and do not always use rigorous economic evaluation (Welsh and Farrington 1999, p. 365). However, the Elmira Study of prenatal home visitation conducted in the United States showed that the costs of the program was recouped within 4 years because the women involved used less government services than women who were not part of the program (Olds 1992, p. 4). In most instances, targeted funding represents the best use of resources, but delivery should avoid stigmatising recipients (Sherman 1997(b), pp. 4-3; for examples of effective early intervention programs, see Grabosky and James 1995).

Childhood and Adolescent Interventions
While interventions early in life are most effective, programs with youth as their focus may also be effective. Research suggests that the greatest likelihood of success results from programs implemented with children before they reach adolescence, that address more than one risk factor (for example, a child's disruptive behaviour and parenting), and that last for an extended period (at least one year) (Tremblay and Craig 1995, p. 219). Further, programs should target multiple risk factors, including those at the level of the community, the family, the school, and the indi-

vidual/peer, which contribute to youth violence (Wasserman and Miller 1998 p. 244).

School Programs
Research in the United States and Australia is beginning to assess school-based intervention programs. In the United States, very few programs address school violence explicitly and these are not systematically evaluated (Gottfredson 1997, pp. 5.38-5.40). Some have established baseline data, with a view to improving programs (Powell and Hawkins 1996). Two Australian school-based programs aimed at reducing bullying are known as the P.E.A.C.E. Pack (Slee 1996) and Peacebuilders (Christie, Petrie and Christie 1999).[2] Evaluations of the programs have found a reduction in the overall amount of school bullying. In Victoria, programs that measure the changes in young people against a checklist have established that they showed improvement. However, no longitudinal study of change has been implemented (Bondy and Ogilvie 1999, pp. 63-64). This is an encouraging area of research, as school-based programs that address antisocial behaviour and delinquency generally have found that parenting training and skills-based training with children can be effective (Farrington and Welsh 1999, pp. 293-94).

Illicit Drug Use and Alcohol Abuse
Some young men reported that drug use was an issue. They said that people got involved in drug use due to peer pressure and the requirement to fit in, and that they started without knowing the harm that would result from regular use. Intervention programs in the area of drugs are most effective when undertaken in the family setting. Young people's involvement in drug and alcohol use usually results from peer influences. However, research demonstrates that the most influential means of deterring drug and alcohol use involves intervention in the family (Kumpfer and Alvarado 1998). The most effective programs focus on the family dynamics and

entail improving parenting skills early in a child's life-cycle. Preventive programs first improve the parent and child relationship and then focus on developing skills in family communication, parental monitoring, and discipline (Kumpfer and Alvarado 1998, p. 9).

One approach to intervening in drug-related activity entails employment. The link between legitimate and illegitimate employment is complex. Illegitimate employment in gangs can provide status opportunities not available in a labour market that offers little satisfying work and low status employment (Fagan 1999, p. 162). Nevertheless, research in the United States has found that youth who sell drugs (in gang and non-gang settings) would prefer to receive a regular income through employment. Further, they would often accept a lower income than they received through selling drugs. The youth reported that they were "tired of living with the fear that accompanies drug sales" (Huff 1998, p. 5). Other research has shown that offenders are more likely to terminate their criminal careers when their current legal earnings are higher than their illegal earnings (Pezzin 1995, p. 46).

An extensive United States program which aims to address drug issues and related criminal activity in a community is known as Weed and Seed (Dunworth and Mills 1999). The program entails the police focussing on weeding out of the community violent offenders and drug traffickers using enhanced resources. Meanwhile, police and human service organisations initiate activities seeding new values. This entails after school, weekend, and summer youth activities, adult literacy classes, parental counselling, and neighbourhood revitalisation efforts. The most effective examples entailed bottom-up, participatory decision making (Dunworth and Mills 1999). A major limitation of projects such as Weed and Seed is that they are expensive to implement.

Alcohol plays a significant part in violence that occurs in and around hotels. Success has been demonstrated and repeated in a significant Australian study that aimed to reduce the level of violence related to alcohol in and around licensed premises (Homel et al. 1994; also see Hauritz et al. 1998 for a replication of the study; Felson et al. 1997). The project entailed the development of a Code of Practice relating to the serving of alcohol by night-club managers, and changing of the regulation and policing of licensed premises in an area of Surfers Paradise. Although there were limitations in the research design,[3] the project achieved a reduction in aggression, violence, and street offences. The Code of Practice and reduced promotional activities, which had brought about binge drinking and high levels of drunkenness, resulted in reduced levels of violence (Homel et al. 1994, p. 37).

Policing

Many youth have generally poor relationships with the police. However, some involved in the Summit were keen to build a sense of trust and good relations. Police need to develop an understanding of the youth culture and take young people seriously. Police also need to be more understanding and open minded on youth issues, which would lead to mutual respect.

A very promising area of crime prevention concerns police adopting a more legitimate approach, especially to high-risk juveniles, which may lead to effective long term outcomes (Sherman 1997(c), pp. 8-1). Research has shown that people stopped by police in Chicago developed a negative attitude towards them. However, those who were stopped and were treated well and professionally had a substantially more positive view of police (Skogan and Hartnett 1997, p. 217). Fairness should be a part of encounters with police and in criminal justice procedures. The benefit of legitimate policing can be seen in the area of domestic violence where it

has limited the amount of repeat offending (Paternoster et al. 1997, pp. 192-93). The process of policing may have implications for how people see themselves in the broader society, and may result in compliance if they are considered to share values (Braithwaite 1989, p. 184). The issue of procedural fairness is currently being tested in Canberra (Sherman et al. 1998; Strang et al. 1999).

Anger Management Services

The young men considered that there is a need to recognise anger and talk about what gets passed through the family. Violence counselling or anger management services can also assist young men to break the cycle of violence. A number of Australian anger management programs are in place to assist young men, although the successes of these are unclear. This area of intervention is in early stages of development where considerable attention is being devoted to program development (see Hearn 1998). A review of Victorian programs in the areas of male violent perpetrator programs show that men in groups believe that they benefit. However, no strategies for the evaluation of effectiveness have been developed (Bondy and Ogilvie 1999, pp. 54-55).

Counselling and mentoring programs have shown promising rewards. Multi-systemic therapy programs individually tailored for the particular needs of young offenders, which include family, peer, school, and community interventions, have been demonstrated to reduce the level of re-offending (Farrington and Welsh 1999, p. 297). Mentoring programs, which introduce long-term older counsellors into boys' lives, have demonstrated success, especially in reducing the number of people using drugs. There also appears to be an effect on reducing violence, as there was also a reduction in the frequency of hitting someone (Sherman 1997(a), pp. 3-24).

Recreational Facilities

When violence occurred in the family or when the young men felt explosive and possibly violent

and a danger to others, they said they did not have anywhere to turn. They had few places to go for time out. Recreation and sport are legitimate ways to expend energy. Young men would benefit from access to sporting and recreational facilities, such as skating parks and bicycle tracks. Expenses associated with organised sport (registration, uniforms, and transport) may be prohibitive. A strategy may entail setting up sporting competitions locally and subsidising the services so that they are inclusive and available to all youth.

The success of the introduction of recreational activities as a means of stopping violence has not been assessed. There are Australian examples where local governments have introduced skating parks to improve safety and decrease property damage; according to a review of one program, it has been successful (Shaw 1998, p. 6). Research on the introduction of recreational activities show strong effects on the reduction of offending and drug use (Sherman 1997(a), pp. 3.26-3.27). One program showed that young people in a housing complex who participated in activities reduced vandalism and cost far less to implement than the cost associated with police and fire fighting (Jones and Offord 1989).

Discussion

The AIC consultation with this particular group of young men showed that violence pervades many young men's lives and is something that is often learnt in the family. However, violence occurs beyond these boundaries, it happens in schools and other places.

The young men hoped that their families would change, but this proves to be a difficult area of violence prevention. More effective are those programs that work with young people. In particular, early intervention and school-based intervention programs have been shown to be successful violence prevention strategies.

Programs that appear promising for working with violent young men include new approaches to policing and the provision of anger management programs and recreational facilities. Relations between police and young men can be antagonistic and confrontational. As a result, many more people may unnecessarily enter the criminal justice system. Moreover, better relations with police may result in young people sharing mainstream values and integrating into society. A change in policing philosophy may have long-term violence and crime prevention rewards.

Anger management courses have proliferated over the last few years. This is an important development because it represents willingness amongst some to challenge the dominant notions of masculinity and the place of violence in society. However, their effectiveness as a tool for violence prevention is unknown. This is an area that could benefit from policy development and systematic evaluation.

At a time when social problems are very often dealt with by treatments that require individuals to change, it is important to recognise that some issues can be dealt with in a healthy, fun way given appropriate facilities. Exercise and recreation are important ways through which young men can legitimately expend energy and manage their feelings. Although the effects of the provision of services have not been tested, the benefits appear positive. Finally, it is important that interventions are designed carefully that lend themselves to evaluation.

Notes

[1] For a discussion of how men describe their violence, see Hearn (1998, pp. 84-103).
[2] For an assessment of bullying programs, see Farrington 1993.
[3] The budget did not allow for the assessment of control groups in the design of the evaluation (Homel et al. 1994, pp. 5-6).

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