

Youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean: a scoping review of the evidence

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■ Executive summary

Youth violence is reaching epidemic levels in some parts of Latin America. It is also a top priority for the region's policymakers, with growing investments in youth violence prevention and reduction. Yet the knowledge base on what works and what does not in terms of youth violence prevention is comparatively thin, and there is comparatively limited awareness of existing or planned impact studies. In order to fill this knowledge gap, this report assesses the state of the literature on youth violence impact assessments in 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Following a systematic review of published and unpublished articles and interviews with dozens of experts, just 18 studies were detected. And while most of these came from Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Jamaica, several large randomised controlled trials are planned or ongoing in selected Central American and Caribbean countries. Taken together, the report highlights opportunities and limitations in academic, advocacy and policy debates on youth violence prevention. It recommends the application of longer-term and stronger study designs in future research, particularly of early childhood- and family-oriented interventions. What is urgently required are more comprehensive evaluations and the development of standardised metrics to track the many dimensions of youth violence.

Introduction

Many Latin American and Caribbean countries are facing an epidemic of violence involving young people. This report considers the state of knowledge on youth violence prevention and reduction interventions in the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. It is the result of a preliminary scoping review of the academic and policy literatures on this theme. Limited to methodologically robust impact evaluations, the report highlights the diversity of the evidence base with a view to identifying knowledge gaps. The review finds the following:

- *There are comparatively few scientifically robust assessments of youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean.* Just 18 studies were detected through a systematic search of the literature, published or grey, online or offline, and correspondence with academic informants. Of the 18 studies identified, seven have yet to be undertaken and published.
- *A review of more than 20 thematic areas across the region revealed a concentration of research on specific themes and a small number of states.* With the exception of school-based and education projects, the evidence base on impact is comparatively thin. Just four countries account for the bulk of the evidence on what works: Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Jamaica.
- *Most impact assessments under review apply experimental or quasi-experimental design, often taking advantage of the staggered implementation of a policy or programme to isolate effects.* The most comprehensive studies were conducted in the very recent past or are ongoing. Violence assessment is a rapidly evolving field, with certain donors increasingly calling for random allocation studies to assess impact.
- *Several large randomised controlled trials are being planned for Central American and Caribbean countries.* Methodologically rigorous trials are being designed to assess youth projects in Central America and the Caribbean. These youth interventions are often replications of successful U.S. violence prevention initiatives. In the next five years evidence will emerge on their impact in terms of preventing violence among youth.

Context

Youth violence is one of the top priorities facing Latin American and Caribbean policymakers and civil society. Six of the top ten most violent countries in the world are in Latin America and the Caribbean, with most of the victims being young males under 30 years of age (Moser & McIlwaine 2006). In fact, for those living in low-income settings, there is a one in 50 chance that they will be killed before they reach their 31st birthday (Muggah & Aguirre, 2013).

Governments have typically resorted to hard punitive policies to deter youth violence. Interventions are often cast in “zero tolerance” terms, including so-called “*mano dura*” policies. There is a general consensus that these approaches, while effective in driving up arrest and incarceration rates, have not led to meaningful improvements in security. In some cases they have instead radicalised gangs, potentially pushing them towards more organised forms of criminality (Jutersonke et al., 2009).

Encouragingly, a second generation of softer approaches is being implemented and tested. Emphasising crime prevention, these approaches are often described as integrated and encompassing the broader concepts of citizen security as organising principles. And while these approaches are heralded in some quarters for promoting more participation, questions remain as to whether they are genuinely contributing to improvements in safety and security (Szabo et al., 2013).

Objectives and methods

The overall aim of this review is to assess the scale and diversity of the evidence base for youth violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean. Crucially, it does *not* attempt to synthesise the results or outcomes of existing impact evaluations. Rather, its specific objectives are to:

- identify high-quality impact evaluations and describe their approaches;
- assess the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence to date;
- predict the type of evidence that will emerge in the near future;
- identify emerging themes or “silences” in the debate about youth violence prevention in the region; and
- make recommendations for future primary research.

The report is focused predominantly on scholarly studies of youth prevention interventions across Latin America and the Caribbean. These studies are published or from the grey literature and are written in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Most are peer reviewed. In the initial phase of this assessment only studies published since 1990 are included, although the search may be broadened in subsequent rounds. Uniquely, this review also includes studies that have yet to yield results, since they were worthy, but incomplete at the time of the review.

Inclusion criteria

In addition we applied the following inclusion criteria:

- *The studies explicitly set out to measure impact.* Only studies wholly focused on assessing impact were included in the review, while process evaluations were excluded, along with secondary reviews of the literature and descriptive reports.
- *The studies use robust methods to control for confounding variables.* Studies should ideally be of an experimental or quasi-experimental design. If randomisation is not used, then alternative robust methodologies must be employed to approximate the counterfactual.
- *The studies use violence or violence-related outcome metrics.* This review applies a broad definition of youth violence, including any indicator on violent behaviour and attitudes towards violence. We exclude studies that only look at risk or mediating factors of violence.
- *The studies focus on children and/or youth in their methodology and/or analysis.* Research and programmes addressing youth violence typically include persons between the ages of ten and 24, although patterns of youth violence can begin in early childhood. Ideally the studies in this review would measure violence perpetrated or experienced by this age group only, but – given the difficulties in obtaining age-disaggregated data – studies that used non-age-discriminated crime statistics are still included as long as the project or policy being evaluated focuses on children or youth.
- *The studies draw in large part on quantitative data.* Even if mixed methods are used, the focus of the review is on quantitative rather than qualitative findings. The emphasis, then, is on assessments that set out generalisable findings that may be applicable in more than one setting.

Search strategy

Studies were obtained through online searches of more than 50 relevant websites, as well as PubMed and Google Scholar using search terms in English, Portuguese and Spanish (see Figure 1). Furthermore, we contacted more than 120 leading experts on the subjects of youth violence and violence prevention, largely academics from across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Owing to the comparatively sparse scholarly literature on youth violence prevention, grey literature makes up a significant proportion of the studies included. While potentially lacking peer review, grey literature is considered an important source of information because it tends to be original and recent. It should be noted that if the original and full evaluation report or research protocol was not available, then the study was not included in the review.

The search strategy can be described as a modified “capture-recapture” approach, whereby studies from a population of evaluations are selected until a saturation point is reached when searches begin repeatedly yielding the same studies. Although the true size of the universe of

studies that fit our inclusion criteria is impossible to assess empirically, expert feedback suggests that our review has succeeded in gathering the bulk of the most rigorous studies currently available.

Figure 1: Main search terms used in English, Spanish and Portuguese



Limitations of the review

Some studies have most probably been missed, and of those found, it was not always possible to conduct an in-depth quality assessment. In particular, the lack of a precise and broadly accepted definition of a “quasi-experimental” design and the non-reporting of methodological approaches by authors suggest that some further reflection is needed.

There are also structural challenges inherent in undertaking a systematic review of youth violence prevention programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean – structural to the extent that they are not readily amenable to corrections on the part of the present researchers. Specific obstacles include: (1) a tendency for the most robust studies to be published in English (as opposed to Portuguese and Spanish); (2) a tendency for only studies showing a positive effect to be published (i.e. publication bias); and (3) the fact that several important initiatives are currently under way or at the planning stage and thus do not necessarily have an evaluation report or research protocol ready to be shared.

Findings

To those familiar with the literature, it should come as little surprise that few studies satisfy the high standards given above. The scoping review identified 18 studies that meet the basic inclusion criteria. These studies have been marked with an asterisk (*) in the list of references.

Of the 18 studies identified, only 11 are complete and have made their results available in published format. It is important to stress that a large proportion of the studies

featured in this report have yet to be undertaken and published (seven out of 18). Of the published studies, eight were in English, two in Spanish and one in Portuguese. Just five of the completed assessments are published in peer-reviewed academic journals, one is published as a book and the remaining five are published as institutional reports.

The majority of the studies included in this scoping review stem from a comparatively small number of countries. Just a handful of settings account for the bulk of the research: Brazil, Chile and Colombia from South America, together with Jamaica from the Caribbean. Even so, it is worth noting that a number of forthcoming evaluations are focused on specific cities and regions of Central American countries. There appears to be a stark absence of evaluations from Spanish-speaking Caribbean states. What is more, virtually all studies were conducted in the past decade, with the oldest published in 2003 and just under half (five of 11) published in 2011 and 2012.

Actors

Most of the studies included in the scoping assessment were commissioned and/or published by international agencies. These include organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), as well as non-governmental organisations such as Promundo in Brazil and the Population Council in the U.S. A modest number were undertaken and published by academic institutions, including the Universidad Adolfo Ibañez (Chile), the University of the West Indies (Jamaica) and Vanderbilt University (U.S.).

Given its engagement across Latin America and the Caribbean, it is not surprising that the IADB is heavily invested in undertaking comprehensive evaluations of youth violence prevention initiatives. Its evaluations vary in scope, from small-impact evaluations of access to justice programmes in Peru to more ambitious future projects such as an experimental evaluation of the National Youth Orchestra programme in Venezuela (IADB, 2011) and the Cure Violence pilot in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago (IADB, 2012), and others planned for Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.²

USAID is currently supporting scientific evaluations, specifically in Central America, including the A Ganar (“to win/to earn”) project in Honduras and Guatemala that uses sport and employment training to reduce the risks faced by youth (Duthie et al., 2012). Similarly, the agency’s evaluation in the form of a clustered randomised experiment of the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) is particularly ambitious (USAID, 2010).

² See <<http://www.iadb.org/en/projects/project-description-title,1303.html?id=BR-L1287>>. At the time of publication of the current review this study had been approved, but not yet implemented. It has not been included in the review due to the absence of access to a complete evaluation protocol.

Replication

We know from research in certain U.S. cities, for instance, or other large metropolitan areas in more developed country contexts that crime prevention programmes are effective over the long term. Yet solid evidence is lacking from developing country settings, including Latin America and the Caribbean. Fortunately, in this regard there are a couple of major exceptions in the making.

The Cure Violence pilot programme in Trinidad and Tobago is based on Operation CeaseFire in Boston, and is an important example of a project from the U.S. that has been replicated in Central America and the Caribbean (IADB, 2012). Cure Violence pursues a scientifically tested, cost-effective public health approach that prevents the escalation of violence through the deployment of “violence interrupters”. These are individuals from the at-risk community who are well respected and well placed to diffuse violence before it spreads. Similarly, the Incredible Years Teacher Training evaluation in Jamaica is another successful case of an evidence-based model from the U.S. being applied and tested in the region (Baker-Henningham et al., 2012).

A South-South application model to foster gender equality (and prevent violence against females and between males) is promoted by the Brazilian organisation Promundo. Originally developed in Latin America in collaboration with national and international partners, Programmes H and M have now been adapted for use in the Balkans, India and Tanzania, and, as explained later in this report, these programmes have also been well evaluated.

High-quality impact evaluations will assess both the extent to which different groups benefit from an intervention and the potential effect of context on its impact. Therefore, the degree that results are generalisable to other contexts (study heterogeneity) will determine the applicability of lessons learned and thus the potential for replication. In fact, replication and its challenges are rarely discussed in depth by researchers, nor did the authors of this report locate any mechanisms in place – in the region or outside it – allowing for the tracking and application of “promising” or “model” projects across and within countries or continents.

Evidence

The limited number of high-quality impact evaluations of youth violence interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean suggests that there is a weak evidence base for determining what works and what does not. Indeed, there is only one area that the evidence can be said to be comparatively strong, which is school-based and education projects. A small number of relatively robust evaluations have been undertaken of communication campaigns, youth development projects and gender-based violence reduction initiatives.

School-based and education projects

A wide range of school-based and education interventions are featured in the studies under review, often focused on reducing specific behavioural patterns and promoting more oversight and care. School-based interventions aim to prevent violence both in and outside schools. Interventions are often classroom based and delivered by teachers, but may also include the modification of school policy, parent-led programmes and communication campaigns.

An example of a well-evaluated project is the UNESCO-led Open Schools initiative in Brazil. One particularly rigorous assessment of Open Schools, which includes more than 400 schools in its sample, demonstrates a strong positive effect of the project in Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, concluding that it could be successfully replicated to other areas of Brazil (Waiselfisz & Maciel, 2003). Meanwhile the innovative Aulas en Paz programme in Colombia earned an award from the University of Chile in 2011 for its methodological rigour. Several evaluations were undertaken of this particular programme, including one large and robust study with more than 1,000 students, while a further two studies are under way.³ So far the results are showing positive impacts on violence reduction, as summarised by Chaux (2012).

There is also evidence from Chile suggesting that extending the school day can potentially reduce violence (Kruger & Berthelon, 2011). Researchers exploited the gradual introduction of a national change in school policy to conduct a natural experiment. They find that access to full-day schools reduces the probability of becoming an adolescent mother among poor families and in urban areas, and that these modest educational reforms reduce youth crime too. A related programme in Mexico – Construye T – is currently being evaluated, with results expected in April 2013. This World Bank-sponsored initiative encourages youths to spend more hours at school, helps them tackle life challenges and aids their personal development (Neirotti, 2010).

Finally, a Colombian study compared common interventions delivered through teachers and parents to reduce aggressive and anti-social behaviour and increase pro-social behaviour (Klevens et al., 2009). While the teacher-only-delivered approach is successful, a surprising finding is the comparatively weaker effect of the teacher-parent-combined intervention on pro-social behaviour. The authors conclude that, contrary to conventional wisdom, “multicomponent” studies are not necessarily more effective than “single-component” ones, and they recommend the lower-cost strategy of using teachers only to improve classroom management as an effective means to cut aggressive behaviour in youths.

Communication campaigns

The Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales initiative in Nicaragua is heralded as a highly successful communication

3 Personal communication with Enrique Chaux.

campaign in the region. Although the main aim was to limit the spread of HIV infection among youths by means of mass entertainment-education programmes – specifically the now-famous *Sexto Sentido* soap opera – the evaluation also looked at violence-related outcomes. This two-year longitudinal study found that young people who had been “greatly exposed” to the communication programme were 33% more likely than those “less exposed” to know of a domestic violence support centre in their area and 48% more likely to have attended one in the last six months (Solórzano et al., 2008).

Communication campaigns are usually only a component of broader violence prevention strategies and are intended to complement other programme components by raising awareness and changing attitudes. A three-prong quasi-experimental study in Brazil was conducted to isolate the different impacts of a programme (Programme H) that aims to help young men question traditional gender norms and behaviour, including violence against women. It detected a strong positive effect of their “group-education project”, but no additional benefit of combining the intervention with a “community-based lifestyle marketing campaign”. The findings suggest that an intense and interactive process is necessary to change deep-seated attitudes towards gender (Pulerwitz et al., 2006).

The usefulness of communication strategies in preventing youth violence in Latin America and the Caribbean is still difficult to determine with certainty. However, its potential, especially among youth, has been noted. For instance, an experiment conducted in Bogotá, Colombia, found that reading a pamphlet that described trends in homicides and robberies positively shaped public perceptions of security, and that this “information effect” is seen regardless of the real level of violence in the community and is strongest among younger cohorts.⁴

Youth development

There is a renewed interest among key actors in promoting multisector and integrated strategies for positive youth development (USAID, forthcoming). Such projects emphasise life skills development to aid youth to enter the workforce and are in theory expected to reduce incentives to enter gangs or become entangled in criminal violence. While these programmes are not necessarily specifically focused on violence prevention as such, a few of those that meet minimum rigour criteria are included in this report.

A key example of a strong evaluation in this area is Guerra et al.’s (2010) study of the Kingston YMCA project in Jamaica. This experimental evaluation finds that the programme reduced aggressive behaviour among males who had dropped out of school and were receiving counselling and skills training. The Todos somos Acapulco intervention in Mexico is another example of an ambitious

multicomponent programme with a quasi-experimental study under way (Gutiérrez Reyes, 2012). Meanwhile the up-coming evaluation of USAID’s A Ganar projects in Honduras and Mexico, and the IADB’s trial of the Venezuelan Youth Orchestra represent excellent examples of how truly randomised trials can be undertaken to assess youth project impacts. In all cases violence prevention is not a principal aim, but rather a desired indirect impact.

Several randomised controlled trials of youth employment projects in Latin America have been undertaken, but few have included violence outcome measurements, focusing instead on employment indicators as a measure of progress. More illuminating results can be expected on this subject in the near future. For example, USAID and Vanderbilt University are currently administering a multi-year randomised CARS field experiment in 90 at-risk neighbourhoods across El Salvador, Panama and Guatemala. CARS places particular emphasis on education and employment opportunities for at-risk youth (USAID, 2010).

Early childhood development

There is growing awareness that early intervention is crucial for preventing the subsequent perpetration of violence, either by addressing harsh and abusive parenting or child conduct problems. The review encountered two challenges in locating impact evaluations that fitted our criteria. Firstly, studies would need to be longitudinal in design, potentially spanning decades to capture change effects on actual youth violence, and are therefore costly and rare. Secondly, they may use intermediary outcomes, such as child development, parenting styles and mothers’ mental health, as risk factors for future violence perpetration, which were outcomes not included in this review. In fact, a recent systematic review of parenting programmes in low- and middle-income countries found only three studies from Latin America and the Caribbean (Knerr et al., 2013), of which only one fitted our inclusion criteria (Aracena et al., 2009).

Another study from Jamaica, uniquely longitudinal in design, demonstrates how the effects of a given intervention focused on young children can be documented by researchers more than 20 years later (Walker et al., 2011). The study shows that an early psychosocial intervention in growth-retarded children benefits adult educational attainment and psychological functioning in addition to reducing violent behaviour in adulthood. This has important policy implications and indicates that both beneficiaries and society will gain from early child development programmes in developing countries. This study, while not originally designed to assess violence impacts, nevertheless included such measures in follow-up surveys.

It is also worth highlighting two interesting studies sponsored by the Children and Violence Evaluation Challenge Fund⁵

⁴ Personal communication with Ana Corbacho, IADB; see also Ardanaz et al. (forthcoming).

⁵ See <<http://www.evaluationchallenge.org>>.

that specifically focus on early childhood development and violence prevention. In the Dominican Republic one study aims to use a quasi-experimental design to assess community-based programmes that seek to provide family-strengthening services and work to identify and report child maltreatment (Parada et al., 2012). Meanwhile, in Colombia a randomised controlled trial is planned to measure the effect of a psychosocial intervention aiming to reduce the risk of harsh discipline and corporal punishment, with results expected by 2015 (Skar et al., 2012).

Gender-based violence prevention

Although a theme of pressing concern throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, there are surprisingly few comprehensive evaluations of the impacts of gender-based violence prevention interventions. A global assessment of sexual violence prevention programmes found that of the 65 evaluated interventions, just one was from the region: Program H in Brazil led by Promundo (Ricardo et al., 2011; Pulerwitz et al., 2006). The experimental evaluation detected improved attitudes among programme participants towards females, and that more “equitable” attitudes were associated with less reported partner violence and higher reported contraceptive use.

More recently, Promundo conducted a four-country evaluation of a sports-based project in Brazil, a health-sector intervention in Chile, a community-based project in India and a workplace-based project in Rwanda (Promundo, 2012). For this review, only the Chilean component met the inclusion criteria, which again demonstrated significant positive changes in males’ attitudes to violence and gender (Obach et al., 2011). Unusual for a small organisation, Promundo has conducted numerous evaluations in this area, but for practical and financial reasons is not always able to use a quasi-experimental design with a control.

Also worth mentioning, although technically not included in this review owing to its limited focus on youth, is an IADB-commissioned analysis of domestic violence data from demographic health surveys in Peru. The authors use the national expansion of CEMs (emergency centres for women) as an exogenous source of variation for the prevalence of domestic violence. The results show that domestic violence has negative consequences beyond the direct impact on the women victims and also affects the health of children living in violent households. Peruvian children whose mothers suffer from domestic violence weigh less, are less likely to receive vaccines and are more likely to suffer from disease (Aguero, 2013).

Excluded themes

While casting a wide net, the assessment nevertheless misses a number of critical thematic areas involving youth violence prevention by concentrating on the most “youth-

focused” areas. It is worth mentioning three of these excluded key themes here in order to appreciate the breadth of interventions applied across Latin America and the Caribbean to curb youth violence in the region.

Policing initiatives, often combined with broader preventative measures such as alcohol and drug restrictions and arms seizure initiatives, have a long-standing role in violence prevention in Latin America and the Caribbean. Yet there are comparatively few robust evaluations of their effectiveness. While not necessarily youth specific, exceptions are worth noting such as the Plan Cuadrante (policing) evaluation in Colombia, the staggered implementation of which allowed for an experimental design and initial results that have attributed a 22% reduction in homicides to the plan (García et al., 2013).⁶

Another important exception is Cano’s (2012) assessment of the positive impacts of pacification on lethal violence in selected poor neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Also in Brazil, a study was conducted on policing initiatives in the state of Minas Gerais following the introduction of information management systems and organisational changes (IGESP). Using interrupted time series analysis of crime rates according to staggered dates of entry into the programme, the evidence points to a causal effect of the IGESP on reductions in crime. The most conservative estimates indicate a drop of 24% in property crimes and 13% in personal crimes (Soares & Viveiros, 2010).⁷

Again, while technically not included in this report, it is worth drawing attention to a couple of key intervention modalities that are of interest to researchers and donors alike. For example, conditional cash transfers (CCTs) were originally conceived as anti-poverty measures, although there is now growing recognition of their violence prevention potential. A study of the Bolsa Família programme in Brazil – the largest CCT programme in the world – detects a robust and significant negative impact on crime, with the effect working through increased household income or changed peer group rather than from “incapacitation” from time spent in school (Chioda et al., 2012). A study of the Familias en Acción programme in Colombia found startlingly similar results (Camacho & Meija, 2013). Meanwhile, another analysis of Bolsa Família found no robust violence-reducing effect, suggesting that further research is necessary to isolate the various effects (Loueiro, 2012).

Finally, one additional prominent issue for the region that has not been specifically assessed here is whether harsher crime punishment for youth helps deter crime. The IADB recently commissioned studies in Colombia on precisely this topic. Results indicate that crime is halved once youths reach 18 years of age, although the effect disappears as they grow older (Guarín et al., forthcoming). The probability of attending school fell after punishments were made

⁶ See also Llorente et al. (2011) and Llorente et al. (forthcoming).

⁷ See Soares and Viveiros (2010); Silveira et al. (2010) conducted a similar analysis.

lighter (Ibáñez et al., forthcoming). This study raises some interesting questions about the factors that deter youth from committing crime and how these may depend on age.

Evaluation methodologies

A basic question for any serious evaluation of an intervention is what would have happened in its absence. Indeed, disentangling project effects from intervening factors is a major challenge. The most robust, accurate and successful evaluations are those that are able to control for confounding effects through the use of comparison groups or control groups.

When defining a suitable control, studies on crime and security issues must account for possible displacement, whereby the success of an intervention in one area displaces the problem into a neighbouring area. Methodologically this can be referred to as “spillover” and “contagion”, when members of the comparison (control) group are affected by the intervention. Moreover, “contamination” occurs when members of treatment and/or control groups have access to another intervention that also affects the outcome of interest. Unfortunately, the present review has had to deliberately exclude a large number of otherwise compelling impact evaluations for this particular reason: the absence of serious controls. That said, there appears to be an increasing appreciation of the importance of random allocation studies, as demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the most recent/ongoing studies are experimental.

Publication bias is another important threat to validity in systematic reviews, including scoping reviews such as the one featured in this report. Indeed, scholars may elect not to submit results that are negative or not significant. What is more, journals may not publish such studies. Yet such information is tremendously valuable from a policy and practitioner perspective, potentially highlighting what does not work. While it is not possible to determine the extent to which publication bias is present in the current review, it should be noted that ten out of the 11 studies that were included showed positive impacts of the interventions they were designed to measure. This may be an indication of publication bias. No study solely reported negative findings.

Cost-benefit analyses compare the relative value in monetary terms across different programme outcomes when the costs of achieving a specific outcome can be measured. Although this review deliberately excluded cost-effectiveness analyses, it should be noted that few complete or noteworthy cost-effectiveness evaluations of youth violence prevention interventions were uncovered in the process.

Emerging approaches

There is mounting evidence that donor-supported attempts to reduce youth violence are becoming more sophisticated. Indeed, bilateral aid agencies are giving more attention to “holistic”, “comprehensive” and “integrated” approaches that go beyond narrowly addressing a single risk factor, whether unemployment, access to drugs or arms availability (Cunningham et al., 2008).

For example, USAID’s A Ganar project currently operates in 16 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, supporting a combination of sporting and musical interventions to improve the life skills and resilience of youth (Duthie et al., 2012). It combines a regional approach with a comprehensive suite of interventions. Meanwhile the Armando Paz project, operated by the Organisation of American States across Central America, aims to build a culture of peace through the arts, media and social dialogue, and has been praised for grass-roots and innovative methods, including the organisation of a small grants contest, the use of social media and the creation of youth networks.⁸

A lingering question is whether (and how) evaluative methodologies will keep up with the needs and requirements of the violence prevention community. Will those sponsoring scientific evaluations be in a position to manage the complexity of violence prevention programming while maintaining a commitment to rigour? Looking forward, there is likely to be a growing emphasis on replicating successful programmes from the U.S. in Latin America and the Caribbean, with evaluations to follow. Donors are trying to guide and facilitate this process. The IADB, for example, has presented a protocol on “evidence based crime prevention” for the region (Sherman, 2012).

Concluding reflections

This report constitutes the first of its kind to apply strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to review only the most robust evidence on youth violence prevention emerging directly from Latin America and the Caribbean, much of which has been gathered very recently or is ongoing. It identifies just 18 robust impact evaluations of youth violence prevention programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, conducted between 2003 and 2012. What is more, seven of these have yet to be published. It is likely that an update of the present review in 2014 would include at least an additional four robust evaluations, if not more.

The evidence base was strongest for schools-based education projects. A modest number of evaluations have also been undertaken of communication campaigns, youth development projects and gender-based violence prevention initiatives. Among forthcoming and planned projects, there is a strong emphasis on “starting early” and taking a “holistic” approach. Within the next five years we expect to

8 See <<http://www.armandopaz.com>>.

see growing evidence on the role of specific early childhood development initiatives and multicomponent youth development programmes in preventing youth violence.

This report has identified both opportunities and silences in the academic and policy debates on youth violence prevention. In order to bridge knowledge gaps, it is recommended that future research apply stronger study designs in evaluations of early childhood development projects and family-based projects, specifically including longitudinal assessments that explore the transition from child to youth to adulthood. Also, comprehensive evaluations that compare multiple project components – not just in terms of intended beneficiaries, but more broadly – and apply different and mediating outcome metrics for a full cost-effectiveness analysis are necessary. Finally, the report recommends the development of standardised indicators to track youth violence, including young people's own perceptions of security and safety, that can be applied and analysed across multiple settings and sectors (Moestue & Muggah, 2012).

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Annex 1. List and brief descriptions of impact evaluations included in this review, published and ongoing or forthcoming

a) Completed and published

No.	Study	Country	Language	Intervention	Evaluation methodology	Key findings
1	Aracena et al. (2009)	Chile (Santiago)	English	A home-visit intervention programme for adolescents throughout their pregnancy and during the early stages of motherhood	Experimental study: a randomised controlled trial of pregnant women treated in 2 health centres in a poor neighbourhood (intervention N = 45; control N = 45) to assess change over 15 months. Relevant outcomes: self-reported measures of parent attitudes and knowledge, and official reports of child abuse	There was a non-significant effect on parent attitudes and knowledge compared to control group, and no cases of child abuse or negligence in either group were detected by the health centres.
2	Baker-Henningham et al. (2012)	Jamaica (Kingston)	English	The Incredible Years teacher training ¹ intervention: a low-cost, school-based intervention to prevent child behavioural problems	A cluster randomised controlled trial of community pre-schools (intervention N = 12, control N = 12): 3 children from each class with the highest levels of teacher-reported conduct problems were selected for evaluation, giving 225 children aged 3-6 years. Outcomes: observed and reported child behaviour	Children in intervention schools showed reduced conduct problems and increased friendship (observation); reductions in teacher-reported and parent-reported behaviour difficulties and increases in teacher-reported social skills.
3	Chaux (2012) ²	Colombia	Spanish	Aulas en Paz: a school-based programme for the promotion of peaceful relationships and citizenship skills in children	Experimental study: a randomised control trial, pre-post-test: 27 schools in 4 geographical zones were randomly allocated into intervention or control groups. Levels of aggressive and pro-social behaviour were measured at baseline and follow-up after 6 months.	Experimental group showed less aggressive behaviours than the control group, along with more pro-social behaviour, as reported by both teachers and students. No differences were found in empathy, assertiveness and interpretation of intentions.
4	Guerra et al. (2010)	Jamaica (Kingston)	English	Kingston YMCA Youth Development Programme: this programme is designed to provide at-risk, low-income males with intensive remedial education, social skills training, and personal development training over 3-4 years in order to reduce aggression-related cognitions and aggressive behaviour.	Quasi-experimental design with control; post-hoc analysis. 2 samples of youth were included: (a) enrolled: 180 males, 125 of whom were currently enrolled in the programme for at least 6 months and 55 of whom were in a wait-list control group; (b) graduated: 117 males, including 56 programme graduates and a matched sample of 60 community controls	For the currently enrolled sample, significant reductions in aggressive behaviour were found after controlling for aggressive propensity. For the graduate sample, significant reductions in aggressive propensity and aggressive behaviour were found.

5	Klevens et al. (2009)	Colombia	English	2 school-based interventions: the first intervention delivered by teachers to reduce aggressive and anti-social behaviour and increase pro-social behaviour in students (classroom management); the second intervention combined the above with a parent-led intervention of similar design.	Experimental study: a 3-arm cluster randomised controlled trial (N = 2,491) with pre-post assessments of outcomes among first and second grade students in public schools. Arm 1 was the teacher/parent-combined intervention, arm 2 was the intervention delivered only to teachers, and arm 3 was a no intervention control group. Relevant outcomes: aggressive/anti-social and pro-social behaviour	The findings show that both interventions prevented increases in aggressive and anti-social behaviour. The difference was due to aggressive behaviour remaining constant over time in both intervention groups while increasing in the control group. The teacher-only intervention also had a positive impact on increasing pro-social behaviour.
6	Kruger & Berthelon (2011)	Chile	English	A school policy: the national change in policy to lengthen the school day (from half to full day) was evaluated. The hypothesis was that by increasing the number of hours spent in school, the reform curtails opportunities to engage in risky behaviours that may lead to early motherhood and crime.	Quasi-experimental, pre-post test with control. The staggered implementation of reform provided the conditions for a quasi-experimental design. Key outcome: annual municipal crime rates	An increase in full-day schooling coverage of 20 percentage points reduced average total crime rate in the municipality by 21.7 crimes per 100,000 population, or 17.5%. Property crime dropped the most, by 22%.
7	Obach, Sadler & Aguayo (2011) ³	Chile (Metropolitan region)	Spanish	A school and health-sector based intervention: educational workshops held for young men (via the public health sector and in public schools) on the prevention of violence against women, alternatives to violence and gender equity	Quasi-experimental design, pre-post-test with control. Sample sizes: intervention (pre-test N = 260, post-test N = 153) and control (pre-test N = 250, post-test N = 150). Outcomes: reported attitudes on violence and gender equality	Significant improvements in experimental group relative to control regarding attitudes on violence and gender equality
8	Pulerwitz et al. (2006)	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro)	English	Program H ⁴ uses educational activities and community campaigns to help young men question traditional gender norms and behaviour, including violence against women.	Quasi-experimental survey design in 3 low-income communities (N = 780): the first group received the group education intervention only, the second received both group education and the community lifestyle campaign, and the third received a delayed intervention after a control period. The GEM (gender-equitable men) scale was used to gather data.	At 6 months, significant positive changes in 10 of 17 gender attitude items were observed, with no changes in the control group. The effect was equally great in both intervention groups, suggesting group education was most important. More equitable attitudes were associated with less reported partner violence. The changes observed at 6 months and at the end of activities, and were maintained at 12 months and 6 months after the end of activities.

9	Solórzano et al. (2008)	Nicaragua	English	Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales was a communication for social change strategy (2002-05) that aimed to prevent future HIV infections in Nicaragua by means of mass communication actions, including entertainment-education programmes (e.g. the <i>Sexto Sentido</i> soap opera).	Longitudinal panel study; no control. This included a major quantitative evaluation as well as a smaller qualitative assessment. 3 surveys were administered in October 2003, 2004, and 2005 to the same group of young people, whose ages ranged from 13 to 24 years in 2003. Multivariate regression analysis was used to account for confounding.	In terms of violence, those who were “greatly exposed” to the programme were 33% more likely than those “less exposed” to know of a domestic violence support centre, and 48% more likely to have been to one in the last 6 months.
10	Waiselfisz & Maciel (2003)	Brazil (Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco)	Portuguese	A school-based programme: <i>Abrindo Espaços</i> (part of the Open Schools programme). The programme seeks to construct citizenship, give a sense of voice to youth and publicise positive youth activities.	Quasi-experimental, post-test with control. Sample size: N = 102 schools in Rio de Janeiro, N = 120 in Pernambuco. The control groups were composed of an equal number of schools in both states, outside the programme, but with similar characteristics. Rapid assessment techniques were used to gather data, including asking school directors whether there had been an improvement in 18 aspects of school life, such as robberies, vandalism and parental participation.	Rates of violence in participating schools were 16% (Rio de Janeiro) and 14% (Pernambuco) lower than for control groups. The rates were lower for schools entering the programme earlier, suggesting increased impact over time: in each year of operation the level of violence declined by 30% on average.
11	Walker et al. (2011)	Jamaica (Kingston)	English	Early childhood development intervention: 129 growth-retarded children aged 9-24 months took part in a trial to receive stimulation and/or nutritional supplementation for 2 years. The children were followed up at 22 years of age (including those that had emigrated).	Longitudinal panel study; no control. Multivariate regression was used, weighted to account for loss to follow-up. Key violence outcomes: involvement in physical fights, violent crime, use of weapons, arrests and convictions	The stimulated group reported less involvement in fights and in serious violent behaviour than the control group, although there were no differences in the number of arrests or convictions.

1 <<http://www.incredibleyears.com>>.

2 Several evaluations have been conducted and a further two large evaluations (1,000+) are under way (personal communication with Enrique Chau); only the largest published evaluation is included in this review.

3 This evaluation in Chile is part of a four-country evaluation by Promundo (2012). Other evaluations were conducted in Brazil, Rwanda and India. The Brazilian study has not been included in the present review because sufficient details of the methodology were not obtained.

4 See <<http://www.promundo.org.br/en/activities/activities-posts/program-h/>>.

b) Forthcoming or ongoing (N/A = not available)

No.	Study	Country	Language	Intervention	Evaluation methodology	Key findings
12	Duthie et al. (2012)	Honduras and Mexico	N/A	“A Ganar” is a job-training programme for at-risk youth. ⁵ It addresses youth unemployment by utilising soccer and other team sports to help at-risk youth find positive engagements in their communities.	Experimental study: a 2-stage randomised controlled trial; mixed-methods. Sample and control group size are both 650. Key outcomes: violence and aggression; gang involvement; drug use; and attitudes about gender, norms and roles	N/A
13	Gutiérrez Reyes (2012)	Mexico (Acapulco)	Spanish	The “Todos somos Acapulco” intervention aims to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, and has various components, including social programmes, open-school initiatives, and law enforcement, specifically targeting youth.	A 3-year quasi-experimental evaluation with matched controls. Data is collected from households and youths on delinquency experience, perceptions and social interaction.	N/A
14	IADB (2011)	Venezuela	Spanish	The Programme of the National Youth Orchestras of Venezuela ⁶ aims to use musical training as a means of prevention and social protection in risky situations for young people.	Experimental study: youth will be randomly assigned to treatment or control groups with follow-up over 24 months. Outcomes: risk behaviour	N/A
15	IADB (2012)	Trinidad and Tobago (Port of Spain)	English	The Cure Violence project ⁷ works to interrupt the cycle of violence and change behavioural norms through street outreach to at-risk youth, public education, faith leader involvement, community mobilisation and collaboration with law enforcement.	Evaluation design not yet finalised, but quasi-experimental or experimental design planned using data on shootings and homicide and surveys to monitor change in social norms around violence.	N/A
16	Ibáñez, Rodríguez & Zarruk (forthcoming)	Colombia (Medellín)	English	The implementation of changes to the judicial system that involved a restorative justice approach with regard to juveniles, which in practice involved a decrease in the severity of punishment faced by Colombian youths over 18 years of age	The authors estimate the effects of policy change through a difference in difference (DID) approach, using municipal panel data on crime rates and other municipal characteristics for the years 2003-10.	Preliminary findings suggest that after a decrease in the severity of punishment faced by Colombian youths, crime rates increased, most probably due to a reduced effort on the part of the police to capture youth suspects.

17	Parada, Silver & Burke (2012) ⁸	Dominican Republic (several municipalities)	N/A	2 community-based programmes ⁹ ; 1 providing child care/development and family-strengthening services to prevent intra-familial violence; the other working to identify and report child maltreatment and conduct public education on violence prevention	Quasi-experimental design with 3 matched groups of parents: 2 treatment groups with different levels of the treatment variable and 1 control group (N = 20 in each group); mixed methods	N/A
18	Skar, Sherr & Von Tetzchner (2012) ¹⁰	Colombia (Chocó)	N/A	A psychosocial early child development programme (ICDP) complemented with a violence prevention curriculum (VPC) aimed at enhancing parent-child relationships and reducing the risk of harsh discipline and corporal punishment	Planned experimental study: a randomised controlled trial will be used; 200 participants will be randomly allocated to intervention group 1 (ICDP), intervention group 2 (ICDP plus VPC) or to a control group. Relevant outcomes: reported physical and psychological corporal punishment	N/A

5 See <<http://aganar.org>>.

6 See <<http://elsistemausa.org/el-sistema/venezuela/>>.

7 See <<http://cureviolence.org>>.

8 Summary information available at <http://www.evaluationchallenge.org/grantees-2011/>.

9 These are the Centres for the Integral Attention of Children in the Dominican Republic and Local Community Organisations for Child Protection.

10 Summary information available at <<http://www.evaluationchallenge.org/grantees-2011/>>.

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