Urban Peace Program Series


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Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU
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Foreword

This document is part of a series of papers produced by the Urban Peace Program of the Latin America and Caribbean Region’s Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit (LCSES). The Urban Peace Program is funded jointly by the World Bank and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). The program focuses on the dynamics of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, its effects on poor communities, and the development of appropriate multisectoral strategies for violence reduction that would in turn help promote peace and development.

Violence has emerged as a significant economic, social welfare, health, and governance issue throughout the region. It is important not only in countries experiencing political unrest, such as Colombia and Peru, but also in war-to-peace transitional societies, such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, where levels of crime and violence remain high. Crime and violence erode physical, human, natural, and social capital, undermine the investment climate, and deplete the state’s capacity to govern. Previously regarded as an issue of criminal pathology or human rights, violence is now recognized as a macroeconomic problem.

These papers synthesize information generated by one stage of activities of the Urban Peace Program. In turn, they are a contribution to the growing information infrastructure of the World Bank’s Knowledge Management System in the area of Social Development.

The papers are published through the LCR Sustainable Development Working Paper series produced by LCSES. The series seeks to share the results of analytical and operational work, present preliminary findings, and describe “best practices” with regard to major sustainable development issues confronting the region. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in these papers are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed to the World Bank, members of its Board of Executive Directors, or the countries they represent.

John Redwood
Department Director, Acting
Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU
Latin America and the Caribbean Region
The World Bank
INTRODUCTION

Violence and crime increasingly dominate the lives of people of Latin America and the Caribbean—particularly the poor. According to reported rates of homicide and crime victimization, Latin America is the world's most violent region. Political violence occurs in countries experiencing political unrest, such as Colombia and Peru, and in the war-to-peace transitional societies of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Economic and social violence are also widespread throughout the region. Growing inequality in the urban areas of countries such as Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, and Venezuela contributes to rising levels of youth, gang, and community violence. The increasing visibility of intrafamily violence indicates that levels of this violence remain high.

Violence is now recognized not only as a human rights or social justice issue but also as an economic development problem—hampering economic growth and productivity and raising levels of poverty, inequality, and exclusion. Its significance as a development problem in Latin America was highlighted in 1997 when the World Bank's Country Assistance Strategy for Colombia—using participatory consultation with representatives of civil society, private sector, and the government—identified violence as the priority obstacle to the country's economic development.

At the same time that countries such as Colombia are beginning to acknowledge the need to reduce violence if they are to create the necessary conditions for sustainable development, the World Bank is seeking to increase its understanding of this new but important area of concern. In 1997 the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Sector Management Unit (LCSES) of the World Bank's Latin America and Caribbean Region launched an Urban Peace Program. A first component of this program was an exploratory "brownbag" lunchtime seminar series with the specific objective of increasing Bankwide theoretical, empirical and operational knowledge of violence.

More than 12 presentations were made during 1997-98, the majority of which detailed either recently completed research or work in progress. While initially there was no intention of publishing any proceedings, the series raised so much interest, with so many requests for further information, that it was decided to produce this short document summarizing the main presentations. The summaries reflect the varying styles and formats of the presentations themselves.

While this seminar series was organized with the working title "Governance, Social Capital, and Violence," in practice it focused mostly on social capital and violence—both the multifaceted nature of violence and the relationship between violence and social capital. The seminar proceedings have been

1. Due to insufficient information we were unable to include the presentation by Walter Ewing, "Life in the Barrios of Caracas," in these proceedings.
2. These proceedings were drafted from completed papers of Marc Chernick, Larry Cohen, Lori Heise, Daniel Lederman and Norman Loayza, Alejandro Reyes, Dennis Rodgers, and Mark Rosenberg. Speaking notes and other supplementary materials were used to draft reports of the presentations by Pamela Hartigan, Anne Kubisch, Moustafa Maroud, and Peter Paproski.
3. Social capital is embedded in social institutions, both formal and informal, that are critical for society to function; at the local level it is consolidated through reciprocity within communities and households based on trust. Social capital is strengthened by both the density and heterogeneity of informal networks and associations (Narayan 1997; Moser 1998).
ordered into three sections, reflecting the main themes of the seminars, although there is considerable overlap between the sections:

**Policy Approaches for Understanding Violence and Their Related Interventions**

In the past ten years, analytical approaches to understanding and measuring violence have shifted fundamentally. This was usefully highlighted by four general presentations, each of which focused, directly or indirectly, on one such approach. Daniel Lederman and Norman Loayza based their modeling of the causes of crime and violence on a criminal approach emphasizing the control of violence. Mark Rosenberg conceptualized violence as a public health problem, concentrating on the prevention of violence. Ann Kubish—introducing a very recent approach that aims to rebuild social capital—described the way in which the concept of social capital is being integrated into new neighborhood-level community development policy in the United States. Finally, Lori Heise introduced an ecological model—considering the interplay between personal, situational, and sociocultural factors—as a tool for understanding gender-based violence. This ecological model is useful for understanding the causes of economic and political violence as much as social violence.

**Recent Empirical Findings on Violence and Social Capital in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Two presentations from Colombia, by Alejandro Reyes and Marc Chernick, highlighted historical findings on changing types of violence at the national level, as well as perceptions of the causes of violence and associated implications for policy. Reyes focused on the manifestations of violence in rural Colombia, the influence of the drug trade on the demographic situation in the country, and the need for agrarian reform to be an integral part of a negotiated settlement. Chernick provided a historical analysis of the efforts of different Colombian presidents to negotiate peace with the armed guerilla groups.

Two very different papers, by Peter Paproski and Dennis Rodgers, provided links between violence and social capital in urban areas. Paproski highlighted the importance of community assets in a Haiti slum, while Rogers showed how criminal youth gangs in Nicaragua play a critical role in a context where citizen insecurity has eroded social capital.

**Innovative Interventions to Strengthen Social Capital and Reduce Violence**

Three presentations focused on community-level interventions. Moustafa Mourad described how an asset building framework is being used to help poor communities in the United States mobilize their existing assets and strengthen their social capital. The presentations by Pamela Hartigan and Larry Cohen described specific projects designed to strengthen the capacity of communities to reduce levels of violence through cross-sectoral institutional linkages. Hartigan outlined the Pan American Health Organization’s *Ruta Critica* project, which addresses violence against women in the family. Cohen described the Contra Costa Country prevention program in San Francisco, a violence prevention initiative based on collaboration between the health department and community-based organizations, emphasizing community responses and cross-sectoral institutional linkages.

This preliminary seminar series provided a very useful opportunity to learn from experts in different fields who share a common interest. From the wealth of information provided, three clear messages
emerged. First, violence is multifaceted, highly complex, and context specific. Second, while different analytical approaches still have very distinct policies associated with them, the problem of violence is increasingly being approached cross-sectorally. Finally, since violence erodes the social fabric of communities, rebuilding trust and social capital is critical for reducing violence. In order to rebuild trust and social capital in violence-stricken communities, we need both a far greater understanding of violence in terms of those who experience it—victims and perpetrators alike—and more knowledge about community perceptions of how social capital should be strengthened to best contribute to the reduction of violence.

Profound thanks go to Annika Tornqvist and Bernice van Bronkhorst for setting up the seminar series and organizing the meetings, to Sarah Lister for editing the papers, and to Derek Thumber and Fiona Clark for editing the final document. Lastly, my appreciation to Maritta Koch-Weser, former Director of LCSES, for her inspiration in developing the Urban Peace Program in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development SMU
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The World Bank
Section 1

Policy Approaches for Understanding Violence and Related Interventions

What Causes Crime and Violence?
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The Ecological Model as a Tool for Understanding Gender-Based Violence
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WHAT CAUSES CRIME AND VIOLENCE?

Daniel Lederman and Norman Loayza
World Bank, Washington, D.C.

Background

A growing concern around the world is the heightened incidence of criminal and violent behavior. Violence and crime have increased notably in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Sub-Saharan Africa, but they also remain a major concern in a number of other countries, including the United States. The growing public awareness is justified because rampant crime and violence may have pernicious effects on economic activity and—more generally—because they directly harm the quality of life of many citizens by reducing their sense of personal and proprietary security. Crime and violence are emerging as priority items in national policy agendas worldwide, although we still know very little about the economic, social, institutional, and cultural factors that cause some countries to have higher crime rates than others.

Since the late 1960s economists have analyzed the determinants of criminal behavior from theoretical and empirical points of view. Many empirical studies have addressed issues associated with criminal behavior within cities and across regions of countries, especially the United States; yet very few empirical studies have addressed the question of why crime rates vary across countries and over time. This study is an attempt to fill this vacuum.

Procedure

Using a new data set assembled from the United Nations World Crime Surveys for a large sample of countries for the period 1970-94, we develop a simple model of the incentives for individuals to commit crimes. We explicitly consider possible causes of the persistence of crime over time (criminal inertia) and aggregation effects. Our basic assumptions are that potential criminals act rationally, basing each decision to commit a crime on an analysis of the costs and benefits associated with a particular criminal act. We assume that individuals are risk-neutral, responding to changes in the probability of apprehension and the severity of punishment. Thus, individuals will commit a crime whenever it appears that net benefits outweigh risks of punishment.

The empirical implementation of our model estimates a variety of econometric models, attempting to capture the determinants of crime rates across countries and over time. In our model the dependent variable is the national crime rate—measured through the incidence of intentional homicide and robbery—and the explanatory variables are national economic and social characteristics, including income inequality, education levels, and the existence of profitable criminal "industries." First we link these characteristics with the elements entering the individual decision to commit a crime. Then we aggregate our results over individuals in a nation to obtain a reduced-form expression for the country’s crime rate in terms of underlying socioeconomic variables.
A version of the regression equation derived from our model is run for simple cross-sections, then applied to panel data. The cross-sectional regressions are illustrative because they emphasize cross-country variation of the data, allowing us to analyze the effects of variables that do not change much over time. Working with panel data (pooled cross-country and time-series data) allows us to consider the effects of both the business cycle (GDP growth rate) and criminal inertia—a time lag in crime reduction—on the crime rate (criminal inertia is accounted for by including the lagged crime rate as an explanatory variable). Using panel data also allows us to account for both unobserved country-specific effects and the likely joint endogeneity of some of the explanatory variables.

Results

Cross-sectional regressions

Results show that the Gini index of income distribution has a significant positive coefficient in all the regressions, revealing that countries with more unequal distributions of income tend to have higher crime rates than those with more egalitarian patterns of income distribution. In addition, one of the regressions includes an alternative measure of the distribution of income, the share of national income received by the poorest 20 percent of the population. The significant negative coefficient of this variable tells us that crime tends to decline as the poorest quintile receives a greater share of national income. GNP per capita seems to be negatively associated with the incidence of intentional homicides, as reflected in its negative coefficient, but this result is significant at conventional levels in only one of the 16 regressions presented as part of this study. The combination of an insignificant effect of income per capita on violence with a significant effect of income distribution on violence may indicate that changes in income distribution, not changes in absolute levels of poverty, are associated with changes in violent crime rates.

Results show that the average years of schooling, (or the level of educational attainment of the population), has a negative coefficient in 12 out of the 15 regressions that include this variable, but the coefficient is not significant in any specification. When the secondary enrollment rate is used instead of the attainment variable, the coefficient is positive, but also insignificant. As elaborated in our theoretical model, the relationship between educational variables and crime rate can be ambiguous. However, from an empirical point of view, these results may be explained by an implicit relationship between the extent of crime underreporting and the level of education of the population; people with higher education levels may report more crimes, producing a rise in reported crime rates. In support of this explanation, the two education variables are negatively correlated with the homicide rate and highly correlated with both per capita GNP and the Gini index. It is quite possible that the expected crime-reducing effects of education are captured by the measures of income per capita and income distribution also present in the homicide rate regression equation.

The relationship between deterrence and incapacitation effects and homicide rates is also examined. The presence of police seems to reduce crime, but the negative coefficient is not significant. The coefficients corresponding to the conviction rate are statistically different from zero, even after including the variable that controls for the existence of the death penalty, which may indicate that high conviction rates tend to deter criminal activity independently of the incapacitation effect of the death penalty. Neither the index of rule of law nor the index of absence of corruption in bureaucracy turned out to be significant, perhaps showing only that these indices are highly correlated with other important
explanatory variables in the regression: per capita GNP, the Gini index, and the measures of educational level.

The incidence of intentional homicides is statistically larger in countries that produce drugs. The drug possession crime rate, which serves as a proxy for the effects of illegal drug consumption and the violence emanating from the distribution of illegal drugs, is positively associated with the intentional homicide rate, but this correlation is significant in just 2 of the 16 specifications. Still, these results give credence to the popular view that violent crimes increase with drug trafficking and consumption. It remains to be studied, however, whether the high incidence of homicides in drug producing and/or consuming countries is directly affected by drug-related activities or results from externalities of these activities. The latter would be the case if, for example, criminal organizations established to deal with drugs were also used to manage other forms of criminal endeavors.

The urbanization rate appears not to be significantly associated with the homicide rate. This result may be due to the high correlation between the urbanization rate and other economic variables, such as income per capita, the Gini index, and especially the education variables. Interestingly, the urbanization rate seems to have a positive and significant association with the robbery rate—possibly indicating that robberies are related to population density and social interactions that arise from it.

Panel regressions

The most robust and significant results using panel data (pooled cross-country and time-series data) are:

- The business cycle effect, measured by the coefficient on the GDP growth rate, holding constant average per capita income. This indicator is statistically significant and shows, as expected, that crime is counter-cyclical; stagnant economic activity induces heightened homicide rates.

- Higher income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, increases the incidence of homicide rates; this result survives the inclusion of lagged homicide rates and is strengthened when unobserved country-specific effects are taken into account. The Gini coefficient loses its statistical significance only in the regression that allows for time-specific effects. The combination of significant effects of the business cycle and income distribution tell us that poverty reduction may be associated with declines in drug production and consumption rates.

- Higher drug-related activity, represented by both drug production and drug possession, induces a higher incidence of intentional homicide.

- The lagged homicide rate has a positive and significant impact on current rates, which is evidence of criminal inertia, predicted by recent crime theoretical models. Controlling for country-specific effects decreases the size of the coefficient on the lagged homicide rate but the coefficient remains significant, indicating that country-specific factors explain only a portion of criminal inertia.

As in the cross-sectional regressions, the level of income per capita in the panel regression does not have an independent, significant effect on the homicide rate. The results concerning the urbanization rate are not robust to the issue of country-specific effects; in the model without country-specific
effects, the urbanization rate does not significantly affect the homicide rate. However, urbanization is associated with higher homicide rates when country-specific rates are controlled.

The puzzle concerning the lack of a significant negative association between a country’s educational level and its homicide rate is somewhat clarified in the panel regressions that account for country-specific effects. When a country’s secondary enrollment rate is used as a proxy for its educational level, the effect on homicide rates is significantly positive, but when the average years of schooling in the adult population is used as a proxy for the country’s educational position, it has a significant crime-reducing impact. The contrast between the results obtained using secondary enrollment rates and average years of schooling may indicate that efforts to educate the young may not reduce crime immediately, but may instead have a longer-term effect.

Summary and Conclusions

Intentional homicide and robbery rates tend to decline as income per capita rises and as wealth is distributed more equally. Homicide conviction rates have significant “deterrence” effects on crime. Contrary to our expectations, national enrollment rates in secondary education and the average number of years of schooling of the population appear to be positively (but weakly) associated with higher homicide rates. Drug production and drug possession rates are both significantly associated with higher crime rates. Regarding dynamic effects, we find that the homicide rate rises during periods of low economic activity. In addition, crime tends to persist over time (criminal inertia), even after controlling for other determinants of criminal behavior. All of these results are robust to models that take into account the likely joint endogeneity of the explanatory variables, the presence of country-specific effects, and certain types of measurement errors in reported crime rates.

The policy implications and future directions suggested by this research fall under two headings: the bad news and the good news.

The bad news. The dynamic panel estimation methods show that economic downturns and noneconomic shocks, such as a rise in drug trafficking—as in Colombia in the 1970s—can raise the national crime rate. The econometric results also suggest that arise in the crime rate may be felt long after the initial shock, as countries are engulfed in a crime wave. Policymakers should act to counter the crime wave; if they do not, the excessively high crime rate may persist.

The good news. Two important determinants of crime rates—inequality and deterrence—are, we believe, policy sensitive variables. Policymakers facing a crime wave should consider a combination of counter-cyclical redistributive policies (such as targeted safety nets) and increases in the resources devoted to apprehending and convicting criminals—a “carrots and stick” policy response. This response would seem to be especially appropriate during economic recessions. The crime-inducing effect of inequality shown by our empirical findings suggests that there is an incentive to reduce inequality that is independent of ethical or social welfare considerations. Our empirical findings regarding criminal inertia imply that crime rates tend to lag in their response to policy variables.

Future research in this area should attempt to solve the crime—education puzzle in our empirical findings. One of our results may be a clue to solving the puzzle: there is a delayed effect of educational effort on crime alleviation; the crime-reducing effect of education does not materialize when the young are being
educated but mostly when they become adults. Another clue to the puzzle may be the indirect effects of education on inequality.

This study was motivated by the impression that crime has pernicious effects on economic activity, and may also reduce welfare by reducing individuals' sense of personal and proprietary security. A fertile area for future research is the quantification of the effects of criminal behavior on economic growth and welfare. We suspect that there are many ways of measuring the economic costs of crime, ranging from the costs of maintaining an effective police and judicial system to estimates of the foregone output. However, the overall effects of crime on welfare may be more difficult to assess.

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VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

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Introduction

It is now widely recognized that violence is a major contributor to premature death, disability, and injury. In recent years there has been a shift in thinking about ways to address violence, from a focus on reacting to violence to a focus on changing the social, behavioral, and environmental factors that cause it. The public health approach, focusing on prevention through the reduction of individual risk factors, has been extremely powerful in some areas of violence reduction and has produced a useful typology of violence as intentional injury (see Figure 1). A public health perspective allows for a multidisciplinary approach. It employs the rigor of science to generate findings and, when successfully applied, fosters integrative leadership among scientists and practitioners. This approach has been applied successfully to a wide range of infectious and noninfectious diseases and other public health problems.

From a public health perspective, effective policies for preventing violence must be firmly grounded in science and attentive to community perceptions and conditions. Scientific research provides information essential to developing such policies and prevention strategies, and attentiveness to community factors can help engender a sense of ownership of the problem and its solution in communities.

Figure 1. A Public Health Typology of Violence
Epidemiological Data on the Scope of Violence in the United States

The public health approach regards violence as a health issue and consequently uses injuries—both fatal and nonfatal, psychological and physical—to quantify its impact. Violence has a disproportionate impact on specific subgroups in society:

- **Young people** are disproportionately represented among the perpetrators of violence. Arrest rates for homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault in the United States peak among older adolescents and young adults. This group also faces an extraordinarily high risk of death and injury from violence; homicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans age 15–34 and the leading cause of death for African-Americans in this age group.

- **Women** are frequent targets of physical and sexual assault by partners and acquaintances. Many of these assaults are fatal. In 1990 in the United States, 60 percent of women murdered were killed by someone they knew. Homicide is the leading cause of women's death in the workplace, accounting for 41 percent of all occupational injury deaths among women during the 1980s. However, 99 percent of assaults on women result not in death but rather in physical injury and severe emotional distress. The consequences for women include increased risks of attempted suicide, alcohol and substance abuse, and abusing their own children.

- **Children** are frequent targets of abuse. It is estimated that in 1988 more than 1,000 children died from abuse or neglect in the United States. The long-term consequences for abused children include increased likelihood of depression, low self-esteem, alcohol and substance abuse, self-destructive behavior, and aggression. These patterns often persist through adolescence and into adulthood.

- **Poor people** consistently bear a disproportionate share of the public health burden in the United States. Homicide victimization rates are highest in the parts of cities where poverty is highest. In 1991 the risk of becoming a victim of a nonfatal violent assault was three times greater for people from families with incomes below $7,500 a year than for those whose family incomes were above $50,000 a year.

Public Health Contributions to Violence Prevention

Public health approaches place prevention at the forefront of violence reduction efforts, emphasizing policies and programs to prevent violent behavior, injuries, and deaths. The wide variation in the homicide rate among developed nations supports the view that violence can be prevented. For example, the rate of homicide among young males in the United States—the highest such rate in the world—is more than eight times higher than in Italy, which has the next highest rate.

Although most violence prevention efforts have not been adequately evaluated, at least a few show promise of being successful. Regular visits by health practitioners to the homes of poor, unmarried, teenage mothers have been shown to reduce the incidence of child abuse. Providing training in communication, negotiation, and problem-solving to middle school youth with behavioral problems has reduced the number of suspensions attributed to violence. Laws that prohibit carrying guns in public and impose a mandatory sentence for crimes perpetrated with firearms have small but positive effects in reducing firearm homicides.
A broad array of potentially effective violence prevention intervention strategies exists. Table 1 presents examples of these interventions, grouped by each one’s primary goal.

Strong emphasis must be placed on addressing the role of social and economic deprivation in causing violence. Recent research points to numerous dimensions of poverty that are related to high community rates of violence, including high concentrations of poverty, transience of the population, family disruption, crowded housing, weak local social structures, and the presence of dangerous commodities or opportunities associated with violence (such as readily available gun and drug distribution networks).

The public health approach works by defining the problem and progresses to identifying risk factors and causes, developing and evaluating interventions, and implementing interventions through programs as shown in Figure 2. Although the figure suggests a linear progression from the first step to the last, in reality many of these steps occur simultaneously.

Public health priorities for violence prevention include preventing injuries from firearms, interrupting the “cycle of violence,” developing and evaluating community approaches to violence prevention, and changing public attitudes and beliefs regarding violence. Attention to these areas offers the greatest promise of saving lives, preventing injuries, and reducing the overall impact of violence on our society.

### Table 1. Strategies for Preventing Violence and Its Consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary goal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples of intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change individual knowledge, skills,</td>
<td>Deliver information to individuals to:</td>
<td>Conflict resolution education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or attitudes</td>
<td>- Develop pro-social attitudes and beliefs</td>
<td>Social skills training</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Increase knowledge</td>
<td>Public information and education campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Impart social, marketable, professional skills</td>
<td>Training of health professionals in identification and referral of family violence victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Deter criminal actions</td>
<td>Parenting education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mandatory sentences for crimes with guns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change social environment</td>
<td>Alter the way people interact by improving their social or economic</td>
<td>Adult mentoring of youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>circumstances</td>
<td>Job creation programs</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Respite day care</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Battered women’s shelters</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic incentives for family stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enforcement of anti-discrimination laws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deconcentrated lower-income housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change physical environment</td>
<td>Modify the design, use, or availability of:</td>
<td>Restrictive licensing of handguns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Dangerous commodities</td>
<td>Prohibition or control of alcohol sales at events</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Structures or space we move through</td>
<td>Increased visibility in high-risk areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disruption of illegal gun markets</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Metal detectors in schools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy Implications of the Public Health Approach

The public health approach to violence prevention has important implications for policy development. Six principles provide the foundation for this policy:

1. **Invest in prevention.** Special emphasis should be placed on primary prevention, which aims to prevent violence from occurring rather than trying to identify people who have already perpetrated or been victimized by violence. The target audience for injury prevention programs is much broader than those who are already victims of violence.

2. **Address the root causes.** Economic and social problems such as poverty, joblessness, and racism are inextricably linked to violence. These fundamental societal issues must be addressed at the same time as taking immediate action to prevent violence.

3. **Adopt a learn-as-we-go approach.** While immediate action is necessary to prevent violence, progress in learning what works depends on rigorous evaluation of specific policy innovations. An approach that emphasizes thorough evaluations of violence interventions, policies, and programs will advance an understanding not only of prevention but also of the etiology of violence.

4. **Emphasize coordinated action.** Interest in violence prevention has grown dramatically in recent years. This interest is shared by a broad range of governmental and nongovernmental agencies and organizations, and new prevention initiatives and programs have emerged from many different sectors of society. These activities must be coordinated for two reasons: to take advantage of the synergistic benefits of cooperation across the various entities sponsoring these activities; and to learn from these diverse prevention efforts and share that knowledge broadly. The more coordinated these disparate
initiatives and programs are, the easier it will be to ensure adequate evaluation and to derive and share prevention knowledge from the initiatives and programs.

5. Intervene early. The most effective interventions in the long run may be those that start with very young children, shaping attitudes, knowledge, and behavior while the subjects are still open to positive influences. The impact of early intervention may be felt over the course of a lifetime and passed on to successive generations.

6. Work with the community. Policymakers must listen to communities affected by violence and understand what these communities consider the best approaches to preventing violence among their residents, given their resources and the patterns of violence that occur. The success of a program is likely to hinge as much on the community environment and a program’s connection to the community as on the nature of the community itself.

Developing and implementing public policies that lead to violence prevention is a formidable challenge. To address the complex and deeply rooted problem of violence, a sustained and coordinated effort is necessary at all levels of society. The new vision for violence prevention put forward by the public health community provides a reason for optimism in this task.

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This presentation summarized Mercy, Rosenberg, Powell, Broome, and Roper (1993).
HOW SOCIAL CAPITAL IS DEFINED AND OPERATIONALIZED IN CURRENT SOCIAL POLICY AND ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES

*Anne Kubisch*
The Aspen Institute, New York

Changes in Social Policy in the United States

Institutions dedicated to improving the well-being of individuals and families in distressed neighborhoods can be categorized according to their main emphasis. Such institutions emphasize:

- Human development, focusing on improving the well-being of individuals through, for example, social service agencies and schools.
- Physical and economic development, focusing on improving the physical and economic infrastructure of the neighborhood through, for example, community development corporations (CDCs) and other groups designed to foster housing, economic, and business development.
- Social and political development, focusing on strengthening what is variously called “civic life,” “the social fabric,” or “a sense of community.” Groups that work in this area tend to be local religious, cultural, and civic organizations, or community organizers.

Approaches to social policy and antipoverty became highly vertical, with little horizontal interaction or synergy across programs. There was a general sense among policymakers and practitioners that many program interventions were not reaching their fullest potential. By the mid-1980s neighborhood actors and their funders began to recognize the limitations of operating solely within these specialized niches. As a result, the three types of institutions described above began reaching out beyond their traditional boundaries. The human services field began addressing the “ecological” dimensions of poverty and developing programs that attended to the physical and economic conditions of the neighborhoods surrounding the individuals whom they served. Housing developers began to realize that their investments would quickly deteriorate if they did not attend to the social problems of the children and families residing in their units. At the same time, the services and development groups began to realize the important contribution that religious, civic, cultural, political, and other institutions make to the social capital of the neighborhood, and so the services and development groups began to incorporate principles of social and political development into their work as well.

In the past 6–8 years there has been a new generation of antipoverty interventions that embody this cross-sectoral approach, emphasize building partnerships for community development. These have become known as comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs). CCIs aim to combine the human, physical, social, and political elements of development to transform both poor neighborhoods and the circumstances and opportunities of individuals who live in them. They seek to bring about comprehensive change by focusing on community building—strengthening the capacity of neighborhood residents, associations, and institutions. They also work to transform the relationship between neighborhoods and the systems outside their boundaries, seeking to encourage the development of neighborhoods that are grounded in local life and priorities but incorporate external knowledge and resources.

Figure 1 illustrates how the three traditional sectors have moved toward each other, and how CCIs represent the integration of all three dimensions of neighborhood development.
Figure 1. Movement Toward an Integrated Approach to Social Policy

Examples of reform efforts:
Locating social services in CDCs; linking youth employment and construction; comprehensive neighborhood planning

Examples of reform efforts:
CDCs and housing organizations engaging in community outreach and mobilization; neighborhood churches embarking on housing production, new "consensus" organizing

Examples of reform efforts:
Services becoming more community-based, preventive, and developmental; neighborhood churches starting "secular" services; recreational services seen as youth development vehicles

PHYSICAL / ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Traditional:
Comm. dev. corps. (CDCs)
Housing organizations
Business developers

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Traditional:
Schools
Social services

COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

SOCIOPOLITICAL

Traditional:
Civic, cultural, religious, and recreational organizations
Different Concepts of Social Capital

As different sectors of social policy in the United States have begun to come together in the last decade, the sectors have begun to value the contribution that social capital can make to their overall objectives. Yet operationally the concept of social capital in U.S. social policy is constantly changing, highly variable, and still depends, to some extent, on the specific context in which it is used.

In the child development arena, for example, social capital is generally thought of as the set of formal and informal resources that are available to support family development, such as peer support groups for parents or other parent support services in times of crisis. In the employment arena, social capital often refers to the scope and quality of personal networks that can be tapped for information about or connections to jobs.

Examples of child development and employment focus on social capital as it enhances individual well-being; other organizations also recognize social capital as a community-level construct. CCIs, for example, work to enhance community social capital through community building, by strengthening the capacity of residents, neighborhood associations, and organizations to work toward positive change. Through community building CCIs seek outcomes such as

- A widely shared vision for the community and a strategic plan for achieving that vision
- Strengthened informal associations among neighborhood residents
- Effective community institutions
- Racial equity and healthy interracial dynamics
- Collaboration among neighborhood organizations.

Policy Issues Relating to Social Capital

The following policy-related questions surround social capital:

- Does enhanced social capital lead to improved outcomes in priority policy areas such as health, income, and crime?
- If social capital does improve these outcomes, how can it best be promoted?
- Are investments in social capital working? How can we define and measure levels of social capital?

These questions become extremely important in the context of efforts to improve conditions in poor communities. In poor neighborhoods, which have little capital of any kind—economic, human or physical—the stakes are high. Policymakers must always carefully consider the value of investing in one strategy over another.

A growing number of studies correlate some form of social capital with positive outcomes. The most famous, by Robert Putnam (1993), describes the positive correlation between the civic sector and good government in Italy. On a related question in the United States, Minkoff’s 1997 study shows that the development of a national infrastructure of social movement organizations has led to more political activism and representation on the part of groups who would otherwise not be very powerful. Another study found that youth who participated in organized projects and civic activities in high school are more likely to vote and join community organizations as adults (Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997). Other studies look at the relationship between social capital and other outcomes such as health, youth development, substance abuse, and “sense of community.”
There is much less evidence on whether social capital can be promoted through some kind of intervention. A 1996 report found that relationships within communities can be strengthened by the activities of community development corporations (CDCs), but only when the CDCs deliberately put into place activities specifically designed to achieve this outcome (Community Development Research Center 1996). In this case, an increase in "acquaintanceships" led to greater feelings of connection, greater "sense of community," and more faith in the ability of residents to work together to solve neighborhood problems. It also gave residents a greater sense that their neighbors would take action if negative events—such as break-ins or drug selling—were occurring.

Researchers are making some progress in measuring "social capital." Although it is clearly hard to measure the quality of relationships, a considerable amount of progress has been made on both qualitative and quantitative indicators used by practitioners and evaluators.

**Social Capital and Crime**

There is also some evidence linking increased social capital with reduced criminal behavior. A well-executed study related to violence in Chicago recently found that "collective efficacy" was strongly negatively associated with violence—even after controlling for the social and economic composition of the neighborhood (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997).

Related to the increased interest in social capital, there has been a shift in thinking about crime reduction strategies. While law enforcement will always be key, more emphasis is being placed on preventing and resolving the problem of crime within the community. A neighborhood strategy for crime and violence based on social capital involves an integrated approach and a combination of work with at-risk youth, community policing, the creation of safe places to play and go to school, and community-based crime prevention programs such as neighborhood watch schemes.

**Summary and Conclusions**

In recent years social policy has progressed toward a more holistic approach. Practitioners and policymakers no longer work within rigid sectoral boundaries, instead favoring a much more integrated approach to policy. Linked to this shift is a general appreciation for community attributes that might fall under the heading of "social capital." However, the definition of social capital is highly variable in formation; still it is very much a case of "where you stand depends on where you sit."

It is not necessarily a problem that social capital is defined differently within different sectoral contexts. Operationalizing the concept is messy and highly context-dependent. It does make research and measurement much more complicated, but the solution is not to standardize practitioners' perspectives on how to strengthen social capital in their communities. Rather, researchers need to develop better methods to identify and measure complex social constructs.

There is an increasing amount of research that correlates some form of social capital with desirable outcomes, and that is what motivates many of the current policies and programs. However, this correlation does not show causation. The important policy questions relating to social capital remain: Does increasing social capital increase positive outcomes? Can social capital be created?
References


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THE ECOLOGICAL MODEL AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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Introduction

Theories of violence against women have been strongly influenced by the disciplinary biases of psychology, sociology, and criminology and the ideological and political agendas of feminist activists. Theorists have tended to emphasize either individual or social and political explanations for violence; only recently have they begun to concede that a complete understanding of gender abuse may require acknowledging that factors operate on multiple levels. The framework presented here helps rationalize and integrate findings from different disciplines that have theorized the causes of gender-based abuse. The material used is based on a review of North American academic research on violence from the perspectives of anthropology, psychology, and sociology and from cross-cultural comparative studies that use statistical methods to analyze coded ethnographic studies (Sanday 1981; Levinson 1989; Counts and Campbell 1992).

The Ecological Model

The ecological model developed by Belsky consists of four levels of analysis—individuals, micro, exosystem, and macro—best visualized as four concentric circles (Belsky 1980; Figure 1).

Individual factors

The innermost circle of the figure represents the personal history factors that each individual brings to his or her behavior and relationships. These “ontogenic” factors are features of an individual’s developmental experience or personality that shape his or her response to microsystem and exosystem stressors. Most existing research on ontogenic factors relating to violence has emerged from case
studies that have sought to identify "risk factors" that can reliably distinguish victims or perpetrators of violence from matched controls.

Several reviews have attempted to use meta-analysis to identify markers that consistently predict either victimization or the perpetration of abuse (Hotaling and Sugarman 1984, 1986). However, very few factors have emerged that reliably predict which women are at risk of intimate assault. Hotaling and Sugarman (1986) found that of 42 "risk markers" studied in female victims, only one—having witnessed violence between parents or caregivers in childhood—was consistently correlated with being the victim of a male partner’s violence. Alcohol use, income, level of education, hostility, self-esteem, being a full-time housewife, and use of violence towards children were not found to be consistently related to victimization among women.

For husbands who are violent toward their female partners, only two developmental experiences have emerged as particularly predictive of future abuse: witnessing domestic violence as a child, and being physically or sexually abused as a child. A third factor—having an absent or rejecting father—is a possible, though less clear, predictor of future violent behavior.

Microsystem (situational) factors

The second circle represents the immediate context in which abuse takes place. The microsystem refers to interactions in which a person directly engages with others, as well as to the subjective meanings assigned to these interactions. For a violent man and his partner, the most salient "microcosm" is the family—generally the site and context for most abusive episodes. In the case of date rape, child molestation, or other forms of violence that take place outside the home, the microsystem is best conceptualized as the immediate context of the abuse.

A variety of "microsystem" factors have been shown to relate to increased risk of sexual coercion, childhood sexual abuse, and physical abuse of women. These include:

- Male dominance in the family
- Male control of wealth in the family
- Marital conflict
- Use of alcohol.

Exosystem factors

The third level, the exosystem, encompasses the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal, in which the microsystem is embedded: the world of work, neighborhood, social networks, and identity groups. The influences here are often a by-product of changes taking place in the wider social milieu. The literature has linked the following exosystem factors with violence against women:

- Low socioeconomic status and men's unemployment. There is strong evidence that wife abuse is more common in families with low incomes and unemployed men.
- Isolation of the woman and the family. Data suggest that social isolation is both a cause and a consequence of wife abuse. Regression analysis has shown that battered women are more isolated from friends, neighbors, and relatives, and family participation in public activities is less frequent.
- Men's delinquent peer associations. Peer group behaviors and attitudes seem to play an important role in encouraging male sexual aggression, especially among adolescent men.
Macrosystem factors

The final circle represents the broad set of cultural values and beliefs that permeate and inform the other three layers of the system. Macrosystem factors operate through their influence on factors and structures lower down the system. For example, male supremacy, as a macro-level factor, is likely to influence the organization of power within community institutions as well as the distribution of decisionmaking authority within intimate relationships.

Most feminist discourse and theorizing on violence against women has focused on macrosystem factors such as patriarchy. An ecological approach acknowledges the centrality and importance of such macro-level factors, but emphasizes the interrelationship of patriarchal beliefs and values with other factors elsewhere in the model.

Macrosystem influences on violence against women identified in the literature include:
- A notion of masculinity linked to dominance/toughness/honor
- Rigid gender roles
- A sense of male entitlement or ownership over women
- Societal approval of physical chastisement of women
- A cultural ethos that condones violence as a means for settling interpersonal disputes.

Advantages of the Ecological Model

An ecological model of violence against women provides a way to understand much of the existing research on gender-based abuse. It is by no means definitive or complete, but it does provide an interesting heuristic tool for conceptualizing future research. Which of the above factors are necessary conditions for violence? Which factors must appear together in order for violence to exist? Are factors from each level necessary for violence to appear? What factors are missing?

It should be possible to evaluate various renditions of the model by testing which sets of variables collectively account for the most variance between two matched sets of men: men known to beat their wives, and men known to be nonviolent. Alternatively, a particular theory of violence could be tested by comparing representative samples of assaultive men with samples of nonviolent men who have many of the same characteristics—such as demographics and degree of marital conflict.

The model can be applied either at the individual level (to develop a profile of those men most at risk of abusing) or at the community level (to better understand why rates of abuse vary by setting). Studies to determine which combinations of variables best explain rates of abuse across settings will be of particular importance to theory building.

Along with serving as a model for research, an ecological approach helps us design better intervention and prevention programs. It helps us to understand why a potentially abusive man might become violent in one situation but not in another. It gives us an understanding of how different factors interact. Consider the case of a man who was abused as a child (ontogenic) and has a strong need to feel in control (ontogenic), who lives in a culture in which maleness is defined by one’s ability to respond aggressively to conflict (macrosystem), and “good” women are supposed to be submissive (macrosystem). Suddenly he loses his job (exosystem) and his wife, who has become more empowered after participating in a community group, decides to get a job, leading to power struggles, conflict, and
violence in the relationship (microsystem). This man might not have become violent if he had not lost his job and become threatened by his wife’s growing autonomy. Alternatively, given sufficiently strong ontogenic and macrosystem factors, the man might have become violent even without additional exosystem stressors.

Acknowledging the influence of situational or personal history factors in the etiology of abuse neither excuses the perpetrator nor lessens the significance of macro-level factors in defining why women—especially intimate partners—are so consistently the targets of violence. It does, however, help activists and researchers grapple with the complexity of the issue.

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Section 2

Recent Empirical Findings on Violence and Social Capital in Latin America

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RURAL VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

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Violence in Colombia has expanded and escalated uninterruptedly for 50 years. This paper starts by tracing the historical background of the armed conflict and examining the role of the drug trade in this conflict. Then the paper considers demographic aspects of the conflict—particularly the conflict’s effects on rural land ownership. The paper concludes by considering the potential for peace negotiations and the need for substantial agrarian reform.

Historical Background

The start of contemporary violence in Colombia is closely identified with El Bogotazo. This violent urban uprising erupted in 1948 in response to the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, the liberal politician considered the first popular figure to protest against a social and political system sustaining an oligarchy which enjoyed arbitrary privileges and wealth. In order to consolidate its power base by 1948, the Conservative Party had already begun a wave of violence aimed at Liberal rural peasants and farmers. However, with the outbreak of El Bogotazo, systematic violence, known locally as La Violencia began, unleashing a flood of pent-up rage and hostility. The resulting undeclared civil war took the lives of some 200,000 Colombians between 1946 and 1964.

The impact of La Violencia was deep, lasting, and extensive: more than 2 million rural peasants and farmers were forced from their lands, slums and shantytowns sprung up in almost all the major cities, and a new wave of pioneers, displaced by the violence, migrated to marginal lands along the country’s borders. Social and institutional networks were destroyed, and widespread trauma frequently converted itself into violent waves of revenge killings and murder. Political party membership became the most important measure of identity—affecting people’s sense of citizenship and weakening respect for the legal rights normally indicative of belonging to a state.

Although there was some measure of agrarian reform in the second half of the 1960s, the peasant movement was effectively destroyed by political maneuverings in the 1970s. At this time, guerrilla groups capitalized on discontent in the rural farming regions—recruiting members from areas where peasants lacked land ownership and where property divisions and agrarian reform had failed. In 1983 three of the guerrilla groups—the FARC, M-19, and EPL—signed a truce with the government of President Belisario Betancur, but used the cessation of fighting to reorganize and recruit. In early 1985 they broke the truce. Since then, the growth of guerrilla groups has continued unabated; by 1998 they had reached some 16,000 active combatants and 60,000 total members (including support networks). Today the strongest groups are the FARC (with 10,000 fighters), the ELN (with 5,000 fighters) and the dissident EPL (with 1,000 members). In the principal cities there are urban militias under guerrilla influence in many lower class neighborhoods.

The slow but steady growth in the military power of guerrilla groups has not been able to break the domination of the great landowners and cattle barons, nor has it seriously affected their expansion. It has, nevertheless, caused a social and military reorganization the large farming areas, scared away new investment, and led to a devaluation of the land.
The Growth of the Drug Trade and Paramilitary Groups

In the late 1970s the first coca crops began appearing in Llanos Orientales and in certain colonized areas of the Amazon basin. The FARC decided not to oppose the economic bonanza that the coca represented to the farmers and thereby risk their ascendancy among the rural peasants. Instead, the guerrilla groups began to regulate the illicit market, requiring the farmers to grow three hectares of food crops for every hectare of coca. The guerrillas taxed the trade between farmers and buyers of coca leaves and cocaine paste, and also taxed production materials, intermediary production processes, and shipping. The implicit understanding was that in return the guerrillas would provide military protection to the farmers, their crops, and their processing installations.

There was a drastic shift in security policies at this time, from repression under Turbay to peace negotiation under Betancur. This temporarily froze and suspended the anti-insurgency wars and fostered a sense of betrayal among members of the military high command. In 1982, in an attempt to circumvent the official cessation of the war, the military high command created rural self-defense groups financed by landowners in the regions under the greatest threat from guerrilla activity. Since then a central element of the military strategy has been to give covert support and collaboration to paramilitary and self-defense campaigns to assassinate opposition politicians and grassroots social leaders in areas under guerrilla influence.

During the 1980s the paramilitary movement further extended its geographical influence. The drug lords effectively became military allies of the state in the anti-guerrilla war, with the government tolerating the creation of private armies to control the areas involved in drug production. In the 1990s, however, paramilitary activity underwent a transformation; paramilitary organizations changed from organizations that primarily served the drug traffickers to organizations that financed themselves by charging quotas to all large landowners, including drug lords. Currently, paramilitary groups enjoy significant support from the political class, large farmers, and many cattle ranchers. The most organized paramilitary groups are the “CONVIVIR” rural security cooperatives created by the government of Ernesto Samper.

Paramilitary groups are left virtually untouched by the armed forces who respect their territories. Massacres conducted, even openly, by paramilitary forces encounter no opposition from public forces, and the victims receive no support or defense. By fighting against the guerrillas, the paramilitary groups help to ensure their own immunity. Paramilitary activity is currently a large-scale military and political endeavor that contributes to the consolidation of land holdings and the expulsion of peasants and small farmers from strategic areas.

The War over Coca

The illicit growing of drug crops in rural areas is not just meeting a production demand: it is also the expression of an agrarian problem arising from the monopolization of land and resources, the internationally unfavorable market for rural crops; and the government’s abandonment of marginal and border regions—which have been settled by those displaced by violence and poverty in other regions.

Despite the failures of previous administrations in using force to eradicate coca and marijuana crops, in 1995 the Samper administration promised—in collaboration with the United States—to eradicate all coca and poppy crops in two years. Attacking the weak link in the drug trafficking chain, represented by some 50,000 peasant families, was considered more cost-effective in the short-term than confronting the entire network of drug cartels and their deep-seated political alliances. Moreover, it was these cartels and their political alliances which guaranteed the Samper government its stability. However, the massive
destruction of drug crops caused by eradication programs has been quickly compensated for by rural growers, who clear new lands and grow more of the crops in order to ensure at least some income. In this way the spraying to eradicate illicit crops indirectly increases the rate of deforestation of the Amazon.

In southeastern Colombia, behind the cover of an official war against the illegal cultivation of drug crops, there is a war for control of coca as the financial resource for both the insurgency and the counterinsurgency. Paramilitary groups have taken control of the trade routes and coca fields in Meta, Guaviare, Caquetá, and Putumayo, and the military presence as part of eradication programs provides them with enough protection to fight the guerrillas for land control. The simplistic concept of the “narco-guerrilla” helps hide the true business alliances between the drug cartels and the counterinsurgency.

**Demographic Aspects of the Conflict**

The Liberal–Conservative violence in the mid-twentieth century affected populations in the foothills of the Andes, especially in the eastern-central regions and the western coffee-growing zones. Many small- and medium-size landowners lost their lands as small and medium-size tracts were joined and the large ones were divided up. A broad synthesis of the last 20 years shows the expansion of the war has increased the concentration of land in large cattle ranches, while rural populations have been displaced towards the cities and border areas. Larger land holdings, which used to represent one-third of land under ownership, now comprise nearly half—at the expense of small and medium-size farms.

The violence of the 1980s and 1990s has affected nearly all of Colombia’s foothill areas and border areas settled by peasants evicted from their lands beginning in the 1950s—and a large part of the country’s Caribbean region, which is dominated by large-scale cattle ranching. The violence has been concentrated in, but is not exclusive to, eight large regions: Córdoba–Urabá, Bajo Cauca Antioqueño–Magdalena Medio, South César–Ocaña–Catatumbo, Cesar–Magdalena–Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Northeast Boyacá–Arauca, Meta–Guaviare, Caquetá–Putumayo, and Cauca–South Huila–South Cauca Valle.

In all of these regions there is armed conflict between guerrilla and paramilitary groups and, with the exception of Arauca, there have also been massive purchases of land by drug traffickers. Study of the geographic relationship between the paramilitary presence, the buying of lands by drug traffickers, and the rural land conflicts shows a clear pattern of support for the paramilitary groups by drug traffickers and large landowners.

One-fifth of forced displacement is a direct consequence of the counterinsurgency military operations that affect the rural population, including harassment, raids, bombings, and aerial attacks. According to the census conducted by the Episcopal Conference in 1995, between 1985 and 1995 Colombia had 586,000 internally displaced persons, representing approximately 108,000 households. CODHES, a nongovernmental organization that has done follow-up work to this census, claims that by 1998 the number of displaced persons exceeded 1.2 million. An estimated 65 percent of the rural displaced relinquished land ownership rights when they migrated.

By comparing rural population densities from the 1985 and 1993 censuses the regions from which rural peasants are being expelled by the violence can be identified. The process is a deliberate and forced relocation of the population in the affected territories. It has concentrated property ownership, expanded the areas dedicated to large-scale cattle ranching, and subverted rural agriculture. The process has also served to increase rural unemployment and reduce internal food crop production.
Rural poverty indices grew from 65 percent in 1991 to 72 percent in 1995. The gap between rural and urban income grew by 36 percent in the period 1990–93.

**Peace Negotiations and Agrarian Reform**

The agrarian crisis, reflected in the high levels of rural land concentration, inequality, poverty, and violence, shows the need for a state-brokered agrarian reform program. A new social pact is also necessary, in which all participants—guerrilla, counterinsurgency fighters, and peasants—have a voice. History shows that the political exclusion of one of these groups may lead to their military and territorial strengthening, as well as an escalation of violence.

Obstacles to peace negotiations include:

- The propaganda against the “narco-guerrilla,” strongly promoted in the international arena by the military forces, which defines the guerrilla not as armed political opposition but as an organized criminal element, with whom negotiation is out of the question.
- The military strategy and organizational structure of the military high command. The delegation of combat roles to paramilitary groups has left the army unprepared to effectively counter the guerrilla groups. The military high command is afraid of the peace process, because it is aware that peace may lead to an examination of the military's record on human rights.
- The unwillingness of the Colombian elite to submit themselves to the rule of law, fair taxing, and the loss of many elite privileges—all of which would be required by a peace agreement. Such an agreement would probably also entail such equalizing measures as recognition of popular rights, reorientation of public spending toward the masses, democratization of social relations, and more equal land distribution.
- The belief held by both guerrilla and paramilitary groups that they are gaining territorially, and that for this reason there is little advantage in negotiating peace—especially since the costs of the war are paid, in large part, by noncombatant populations.

Substantial agrarian reform is an essential part of any peace agenda. A reform program must take into account the changed agrarian situation. There has been an important demographic loss in many of the rural sectors and reform must address the problem of returning land to more than 1 million rural peasants. Drug traffickers have purchased more than 3 million hectares of the most productive lands and there is a growing battle over land use between traditional agriculture and massive cattle ranching. There must be a redistribution of the land accumulated using illicit profits from drug trafficking. This will require state-sponsored expropriations on behalf of small farmers and indigenous and black minority populations. Moreover, the expansion of settled land has been subsidized by the high-priced illegal crops in such a way that, without such crops, the distant and marginal agricultural lands currently under cultivation would not be economically viable.

The colonization of the Amazon must be halted and the settling and clearing of land must be moved, with land grants and state support, to nearby regions within the already established agrarian territory, in such a way that a legal and profitable agrarian economy can be fostered.

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Despite repeated efforts to negotiate or impose peace in Colombia, the conflict in this country is more entrenched and widespread today than at any point during the past three decades. Furthermore, new forms of violence related to paramilitary groups and drug traffickers have emerged. As the violence has changed, so too have the elements that must be incorporated in a successful peace strategy.

**Recent Attempts to Solve the Conflict**

Peace has been a significant issue during the campaign in every presidential election since 1982, and each elected president has developed a peace strategy. The peace processes can be periodized as follows:

**Betisario Betancur (1982-86)**

Betancur, a Conservative, declared that he would address the subjective and objective sources of violence. “Subjective” meant addressing the needs of individual guerrillas through amnesties and judicial pardons and by making funds available to help them reintegrate into legal society. Confronting the “objective sources” of violence meant the creation of policies to reform the political system, and programs to extend the state presence into the areas most affected by violence.

Echoing the politics of the Southern Cone and Brazil, Betancur called for “a democratic opening” in the political regime and a “national dialogue” among diverse members of civil society, the government, and armed organizations. He also presented reforms to Congress, the most significant of which was a constitutional amendment establishing the direct election of mayors. To build up the state’s presence he created a National Rehabilitation Plan (PNR) redirecting funds to the areas most ravaged by violence.

In 1984, Betancur succeeded in negotiating ceasefire agreements with four guerrilla movements: the FARC, EPL, M-19, and ADO. During the brief moment when most hostilities were suspended, local political actors in some regions took advantage of the opportunity to initiate “regional peace processes” consisting of dialogue and conciliation at the local level. However, most of these were quickly overtaken by a resumption of violence and largely forgotten.

The FARC founded the Unión Patriótica (UP) party, which ran candidates during the 1986 municipal, parliamentary, and presidential elections, but at the same time it continued to increase its military force and modernize its arsenal. The M-19 and EPL quickly withdrew from the ceasefire agreements, declaring that the armed forces had repeatedly violated the terms of the agreements and that the guerrillas freed by the agreements had been assassinated.

Contributing to the failure of the political settlements and to the spread of violence, the armed forces publicly opposed the negotiations with the guerrillas. When the president ordered a complete cease-fire, the military resisted. The military began to actively take advantage of its legal right to arm civilians—
rapidly organizing a network of paramilitary groups throughout the country. In the mid-1980s the violence became linked with the other major phenomena sweeping Colombian society: the rise of the drug trade, the investment in rural landholding by the new drug entrepreneurs, and the creation of drug-sponsored paramilitary armies. In many regions, beginning in Magdalena Medio, the drug- and military-sponsored paramilitaries joined forces. This situation led to a dirty war that has continued ceaselessly for over a decade. The first signs of this dirty war were the assassinations of amnestied guerrillas and elected officials from the UP party. The UP claims that over 2,500 of its followers and leaders have been assassinated, including senators, congressmen, mayors, and two presidential candidates.

Virgilio Barco (1986-90)

On reaching office, Barco appointed a new team of advisors to conduct the peace process. After analyzing the experience of the previous four years, they reached the following conclusions that were to guide the process for much of the next two presidential administrations:

- The state is legitimate and the guerrillas are outside the law.
- The state should enter into negotiations with the guerrillas only concerning their disarmament and reincorporation into society.
- If political, economic, and social reforms are needed, they should be pursued through existing institutional channels such as the Congress.
- The peace process should have definite timetables, deadlines and specific goals that must be agreed to by the guerrillas.
- If violence is caused by the lack of state presence, the state should actively attempt to extend its authority in civilian populations, but without recognizing the authority or legitimacy of the guerrillas in any areas.

In order to increase the authority of the state, Barco extended the National Rehabilitation Plan and created the Consejos Municipales de Rehabilitación, which explicitly excluded the guerrillas from participating.

Despite Barco's measures, social and political violence escalated, as did paramilitary violence. Barco's Minister of Government, Cesar Gaviria, announced in 1988 that there were 128 paramilitary groups in the country. Although the paramilitaries were outlawed in 1989, the state has been either unable or unwilling to dismantle them.

In 1989 the M-19 unexpectedly accepted a renewed offer from the government to negotiate. Despite the government's insistence that the M-19 announce a unilateral cease-fire before entering into negotiations and its requirement that they accept disarmament and reincorporation as the end result, these negotiations were successful. The M-19 surrendered their arms and converted into a legal political movement. Eight months after surrendering their weapons, the M-19 won almost 30 percent of the popular vote in a special election to choose delegates for a Constitutional Assembly. The positive results from these negotiations confirmed for Barco and his advisors that the M-19 model was the most effective one for achieving peace. When the next administration began, this became the model for continued negotiations with other guerrilla movements.

Cesar Gaviria (1990-94)

Gaviria's election coincided with an overwhelmingly approved popular referendum to convene a Constitutional Assembly. He used participation in the Constitutional Assembly as an incentive to further discussions with other guerrilla groups, and succeeded in negotiating the disarmament and reincorporation
of the EPL, Quintin Lane, and PRT. While the M-19 was given power via the polls, the other groups were offered direct participation in the Constitutional Assembly, bypassing the electoral process. Collectively, the former guerrilla movements controlled about a third of the Assembly.

Yet the success of the peace process with these movements had little impact on negotiations with the largest groups, the FARC and ELN. These groups refused to accept the Barco-M-19 model of negotiations—unilateral ceasefire, disarmament, reincorporation. They insisted on negotiating on major structural issues before handing in their arms.

Following the conclusion of the Constitutional Assembly Gaviria entered into a new round of negotiations with the FARC and the ELN, first in Caracas, and then in Tlaxcala, Mexico. These meetings did not lead to any agreements and were abruptly broken off. As a result, the final two years of the Gaviria government saw a further increase in armed conflict and a continued escalation of the violence. Gaviria soon declared that the guerrillas had lost their earlier ideals and were now principally drug traffickers and criminals.

**Ernesto Samper (1994-98)**

During his first six months in office, Samper signed Protocol II of the Geneva Convention, establishing a code of conduct for internal wars. He also instructed his peace advisor to explore the willingness of the guerrillas to return to the negotiating table. In so doing, he restored their political legitimacy and downplayed the notion that they are principally criminals and drug traffickers.

Unfortunately this promising beginning was derailed by the political crisis that overwhelmed the Samper administration when tapes surfaced linking the newly elected president to the Cali drug cartel. Yet during that first year, the government both outlined a general strategy and moved to develop an alternative model of negotiations that substantially departed from the Barco-Gaviria models of assembly-disarmament-reincorporation. For the guerrillas, this was essential; after the political demise of the M-19 and the unrelenting dirty war against the Unión Patriótica, unilateral disarmament and standing for elections within the quicksand of Colombian politics held few incentives for the remaining guerrilla groups.

Samper also invited national and international organizations, such as the International Red Cross, to verify compliance by both sides with the international norms for domestic war and insurgency.

In his final peace initiative, launched in late 1997, Samper recognized the need to address the paramilitary question directly. He decided to classify the groups as "semi-autonomous," meaning that they have an ill-defined relationship with state actors, and they should be viewed neither as insurgents nor simply as criminals. He proposed that the government begin to explore ways to open up a separate dialogue with the paramilitaries. These negotiations would be restricted to agreements leading to their dismantling in the context of a peace agreement with the guerrillas.

Samper also proposed that the government enter negotiations with the guerrillas on political, social, and economic reform, without conditions. Meanwhile, Samper also expressed his willingness to involve international actors in a revived peace effort. These steps can serve as building blocks for the Pastrana administration, which took office on August 7, 1998.
The Influence of the Drug Trade

The drug trade has contributed to the violence and fundamentally altered the parameters of Colombia’s politics. It has funneled new resources, both financial and military, to old adversaries. It has created new social sectors, particularly the drug entrepreneurs who have invested heavily in the Colombian countryside and who have helped finance the spread of Colombia’s paramilitary infrastructure—the principal source of political violence and human rights violations in the 1990s.

The drug trade has also contributed to the transformation of the guerrillas. No longer receiving logistical, financial, or military support from the outside, the guerrillas have vastly increased their involvement in criminal and terrorist activities such as kidnapping, murder, and extortion of productive and commercial activity in agrarian sectors such as coca/cocaine, petroleum, and cattle. The FARC maintains extensive political control in coca-growing parts of the Amazonian region east of the Andes, and in the higher elevation zones where opium poppy is grown. The ELN has targeted the petroleum sector in the northern part of the Eastern Plains. With these changes, many have again argued, as President Gaviria did, that the guerrillas are now little more than organized criminal syndicates, or “barco-guerrillas.” Yet both the FARC and the ELN still maintain a political agenda, recruit and train followers, assert political control, organize and administer services to local populations, and use their power to influence local, regional, and national politics. As one peace commissioner declared, the guerrillas remain primarily political actors with whom the government can negotiate, even as they have increased their involvement in criminal activities.

The Possibility of Peace?

Recent history demonstrates convincingly that there is no military solution to the violence. There are too many actors, state authority is too weak, political and social demands are too great, historical resentments too high, and the violence is too rooted among political actors and communities. The solution must be found through some form of negotiated settlement. Today’s conflict has degenerated substantially beyond a polar conflict between hegemonic parties and excluded sectors. Who should sit at the negotiating table? What issues should be on the agenda? The Samper Administration pioneered new territory in proposing some form of talks with the paramilitary groups while refusing to recognize them as political actors. For the purposes of peace, the guerrillas should be recognized as political actors; the paramilitaries should be recognized as an intermediate category between political actor and delinquent.

What issues should be on the agenda? The agenda should address the core issues behind the growing violence: the historical claims of civil society, the guerrillas, and other political sectors. One of the principal lessons from the Central American peace processes, especially in Guatemala, is that negotiations can be used as a special forum to address longstanding conflicts and historical grievances. Addressing these issues is not a concession to the guerrillas. It is a recognition that other arenas of institutional and social reform may be inadequate or unable to confront long-festering national conflicts. In Colombia there are several basic issues that fall within these guidelines and should be part of any future negotiating agenda. These include:

- Revisiting agrarian reform—the historic raison d'etre of FARC
- Reorienting the strategic mission of the armed forces toward the goal of internal peace
- Dismantling the paramilitaries and ending the dirty war
- Incorporating the guerrillas into the local structures of state and elective politics.

The ELN would also add:
- Reasserting primary control over the nation's natural resources, particularly petroleum development.
The Need for Outside Mediation

If the past 15 years of peace negotiations are any indication, Colombia cannot reach a viable peace agreement without international mediation. The conflict is too widespread and encompasses too many actors and interests to be managed by the Colombian government, or the government and guerrillas alone.

Unlike in previous eras, there are now international precedents for peacemaking, from Central America to Southern Africa. The United Nations has already opened a permanent office to monitor human rights in Colombia. The European Union has become something of a counterweight to the United States’ anti-narcotics policies, keeping the issue of human rights violations high on the agenda. Colombian and international NGOs, the church, and some foreign donors are already actively working with grassroots initiatives for peace. Recently, electors voted overwhelmingly for a vaguely worded plebiscite endorsing peace. Other groups, such as the Education for Peace project supported by Catholic Relief Services and the Colombian Bishops Conference, are organizing mobile human rights training teams. The Intercongregational Commission of Justice and Peace has been serving as an unofficial truth commission, carefully constructing a record of the violence before the conflict is brought to an end.

Only a comprehensive peace process can unravel the complex maze of violence that is inundating the country. A peace process will not end all the violence. It will not stop the flow of drugs northward. But it will substantially reduce the human rights violations—situations in which men and women are murdered for their political beliefs or simply because they are suspected of supporting one side or another.

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COMMUNITY ASSETS AND VIOLENCE IN A HAITIAN URBAN SLUM

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Background

The weakness of the state, the lack of physical and human infrastructure, the lack of capacity for good governance, and continuing internal, external, sociocultural, and economic repression are all parts of the complex web of difficulties facing Haiti. Some 1,200 aid organizations, national and international, are caught up in a whirlwind of well-intentioned activity at all levels of intervention.

Slum communities (bidonvilles) house up to half of the population of Port-au-Prince—and are growing rapidly. These slums are mostly known for their violence and squalor. Although violence is commonplace, it is less often openly discussed by the poor than one might expect; obfuscation and hiding from the truth, including from this violence, form one of the most subtle and intractable problems faced by Haitians at all levels, as well as by external agencies.

The people of these bidonvilles are not understood on their own terms; they have no voice. Six months of weekly visits to one urban slum revealed a great deal about life in the slums, particularly how much is silent or hidden.

Community Assets

There were many institutional, associational, and individual assets in this community. Churches, missions, and witch doctors thrived. Small schools and sports groups provided learning opportunities for a few children and youths. Sewing cooperatives (when there was electricity), cobblers, brick and furniture makers, stove-builders, and sellers of every kind of penny-merchandise endured through daily labor. Nascent and struggling popular organizations came together on the basis of propinquity, politics, age, gender, and good intentions. Community-managed water fountains eliminated hours that had been spent searching with empty buckets. The community center provided literacy classes and other learning opportunities. People found occasions to celebrate, dance, and sing together wholeheartedly. Nightly neighborhood vigilance groups afforded a modicum of security for people’s sleeping, though activities of the night also flourished.

The assortment of people and skills was as varied as the entrepreneurial activity. While many families were new or transient, just as many had developed roots here from their squatter origins. Social stratifications and divisions were rife. Community structures were not obvious, but hierarchical relationships and clans were strong. People living cheek-by-jowl said that they did not speak the same “language” as their neighbors.

Violence

Violence was an integral part of this environment. For those with few material goods, robbery seemed the greatest threat. Family violence was also common; as reported by the nurses in the community health center, violence directed against women and children seemed part of the inevitable frustration of survival.
Individuals, though, did not speak openly about acts of violence perpetrated against them, preferring silence or an uncomfortable laugh when directly questioned. One explanation for this was fear of retribution. Also, it was considered political to talk about violence, and people were afraid of this association.

**Policy Intervention**

Community workers experienced frustrations in understanding the relationships and power structures within the community. Well-intentioned external interventions often promised “scaffolding” to shore up and aid what structure existed, but all too often this assistance disregarded the “local” time and energy needed for realization and the realities of social communications. As projects collapsed under these constraints, frustration and cynicism with “development” abounded.

Policymakers must start by admitting they know little about the communities they endeavor to assist or about how to listen to the community voice. Such listening takes far more time than is usually available within the agendas of international organizations and even national partners. It is useful to help communities see and hear themselves through participatory social analysis and action research, and it is useful for social scientists to understand not only the nature of violence but also how it is understood (or hidden) locally. Moreover, unpacking local actions and perceptions is a learning process requiring a change in the approach and expectations of donors.

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YOUTH GANGS AND VIOLENCE IN URBAN NICARAGUA

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Introduction

In the 1990s Latin America has seen a crucial change in the nature of violence: the most visible manifestation of violence is no longer overt political conflict, but instead crime and delinquency. Nevertheless, violence remains chronic and prevalent in the region; indeed the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) deems it the “social pandemic” of the late twentieth century. Nicaragua, despite the end of its civil war in 1990, is no exception to this trend, and has seen steadily rising levels of violence and criminality during this decade, according to National Police statistics.

The most notable feature of the violence landscape in urban Nicaragua is the ubiquitous presence of the pandillas, or criminal youth gangs, which roam the streets of city barrios (neighborhoods)—robbing, beating, terrorizing, and occasionally killing people. There are over a hundred such gangs in Managua alone, each having between a dozen and one hundred (almost exclusively male) members—pandilleros—ranging from 7 to 24 years of age. Much of the pandilla violence can be categorized as petty delinquency, but it is also very frequent for neighborhood turf conflicts to transform parts of Managua into quasi-war zones, as pandilleros fight each other with AK-47s, fragmentation grenades, and mortars, in a semiritualized manner.

I spent one year doing fieldwork in Nicaragua between July 1996 and July 1997. For ten months of this I lived with a family in a low-income barrio of eastern Managua, during which time I formally integrated the local pandilla. My fieldwork led me to conclude that while pandillas and their violence certainly have a negative effect on the social networks that weave the fabric of society, they are also agents and manifestations of constructive social transformation. As such, they are perhaps resources which can be used as part of a solution to the shattered social reality of contemporary Nicaragua, rather than simply part of the problem. Thus it is important to understand their logic, structure, and practice.

Erosion of the Social Fabric in Nicaragua

A number of structural factors can explain the disintegration of social life in Nicaragua. The factors include high levels of unemployment and underemployment, rapidly declining standards of living, overcrowded urban housing conditions, low incomes, lack of opportunities, widespread poverty, and political polarization (particularly during the 1996 elections). However, endemic violence and resulting insecurity of life emerge most forcefully in people’s discourses and practices as a determining factor in the erosion of the social fabric. Citizen insecurity recurrently stands out in opinion polls as one of the major preoccupations of Nicaraguans. Police statistics, which show a crime level of approximately 1,500 crimes per 100,000 people for the year 1997, are certainly underestimations. A CID–Gallup survey conducted in April 1997 reported that one in six Nicaraguans claimed to have been attacked at least once in the past four months, a staggering one in four in Managua alone (La Tribuna, May 2, 1997, p. 5A). Foremost among the perpetrators of these crimes are the pandillas.
The fear generated by pandillas is also reflected in both the discourses and practices of people. The Gómez family and other inhabitants of barrio Luis Fanor Hernández constantly warned me of the potential dangers I faced whenever I left the house, and frequently despaired aloud of the violence of everyday life (pseudonyms are used in this paper). It seemed a significant feature of life that people generally left the barrio as little as possible, and if they did leave, they tended to restrict themselves to a few fixed routes and destinations. There was an almost tangible fear of leaving the perceived safe haven of the home; the most obvious manifestation of this fear has been the passing away of the Latin American habit of spending the evenings sitting on the curbside outside one's house. Generally, social life in contemporary Nicaragua can be said to have shrunk, or at least localized. The widespread mistrust and fear, which can partly be attributed to the pandillas, has certainly had a damaging effect on wider social life.

Pandillas and Urban Violence

At first glance pandilla wars seem somewhat chaotic, with different gangs fighting each other for reasons ranging from seemingly meaningless slights to perceived territorial encroachment. In fact, however, these wars are semiritualized both in terms of the conflict patterns and the participating parties. The first battles of a pandilla war involve fighting with stones and bare hands, and each new conflict involves an escalation of weaponry—to sticks, knives, and broken bottles, and finally hand guns, AK-47s, fragmentation grenades, and mortars. Battles have specific objectives, such as injuring or capturing (then beating senseless) a particular member of an enemy gang, or else invading an enemy gang's territory.

If one were to believe the newspapers, injuries and deaths from pandilla activity would probably nullify Nicaragua's population growth rate. In reality, however, while many are injured—often seriously enough to warrant a hospital stay—the casualty rate of pandilla warfare is not as high as one might think. During the ten months that I lived in the barrio, three gang members died violently in the course of gang warfare—a three percent death rate, which does not seem especially high, all things considered. Similarly, casualties among the non-pandillero barrio inhabitants—generally as a result of getting caught in the crossfire of pandilla battles—while high are also lower than might be imagined. During my stay in barrio Luis Fanor Hernández, five people died in such circumstances, out of a population of some 3,000.

A distinction must be made between pandilla warfare and pandillero larceny. The latter is not a collective enterprise, but mainly carried out individually, or in small groups of two or three. Ranging from hit-and-run raids on market stalls to armed robbery of shops, pandillero larceny represents a radically different facet of pandillerismo, one which may be associated much more with the endemic criminality which characterizes Nicaragua today. However, in both cases, these activities also obey certain rules, most notably that a pandillero does not attack inhabitants of his home barrio.

Who Are the Pandilleros?

Not all the barrio male youth join the pandilla. Out of a population of approximately 600 male youths between the ages of 7 and 24, about one-sixth were pandilleros. I found little in the way of explanation for which youths became members; though the barrio displayed significant economic differentiation, there was no correlation between poverty and pandilla membership at the micro-level. Even while a pandillero's revenue from petty larceny and theft is not inconsiderable, averaging $40-$60 a month (about equivalent to the average barrio family's monthly income), monetary needs did not seem to be a primary consideration in explaining pandilla membership.
Other stereotypical factors such as single parent family structure, spatial dislocation (as a result of international migration, which is extremely high in Nicaragua today), and domestic violence also did not seem to be significant in explaining pandilla membership in barrio Luis Fanor Hernández. The only consideration which systematically affected membership was whether a youth’s family was Evangelical (Protestant) or not; Evangelical youth never joined the pandilla.

The pandilleros say that a youth becomes a gang member if he has la onda. In this context, la onda means something akin to a “spirit” or “ethos,” or a “way of being.” It combines aspects of an individual’s way of dressing (wearing his t-shirts inside-out, sporting an earring and tattoo), speaking (talking the pandillero slang, which often inverts the syllables of words), and acting (confronting danger, taking drugs). However, having la onda is about more than just robbing, taking drugs or being a juvenile delinquent. It is also about associating and identifying with the barrio and being ready to defend it and its inhabitants. It is about the pandilleros helping each other, showing solidarity with each other, and trusting each other, all of which are rare in the context of socially atomized contemporary Nicaragua.

The pandilleros say that their attitude is derived from Sandinismo. Indeed, they consider themselves the inheritors of Sandinismo and its associated values of solidarity and collective action. But while the barrio Luis Fanor Hernández pandilleros were all staunchly Sandinista, and actively volunteered for Daniel Ortega’s 1996 presidential campaign, putting up banners and distributing flyers in the barrio, few of them had clear and precise memories of the Sandinista era. Most of their enthusiasm was quite obviously for things they had heard about rather than experienced, such as the literacy or primary health care crusades of the early 1980s.

Individuals who had been pandilleros in the barrio gang during the early 1990s all mentioned the same general reasons for becoming pandilleros. The change of regime in 1990 led to a devaluation of their social status, which, as conscripts defending la Patria (the Nation), had been high; forming a pandilla had seemed a means of reaffirming themselves. Furthermore, the pandilla seemed to offer them a way of recapturing some of the dramatic, almost addictive, adrenalin-charged experiences with war, danger, and death, and also the comradeship and solidarity that they had enjoyed as conscripts in the 1980s.

Today’s youth did not serve in the Sandinista Popular Army, and there has manifestly been a process of transmission of knowledge, including specialized military knowledge, from the first wave of 1990s pandilleros to the present pandilleros. The mode of this transmission is apparent in the way a pandilla subdivides along age structure. Barrio Luis Fanor Hernández’s pandilla was divided into three age groups: 7–12 year olds, 13–17 year olds, and those 18 and over. Each group represents a stage in the process of the socialization of the different forms of pandilla violence. Broadly speaking, the lowest age group—sometimes called the pandillita—learns how to street-fight at the most basic level, with bare hands, stones, sticks, and sometimes knives, the middle group members expand their repertoire of activities to include theft, hustling, and fencing, and the elders specialize in armed robbery and assaults—reducing their involvement in gang warfare.

**The Pandilla and the Wider Barrio Community**

Even if pandilleros occasionally break windows or create a public nuisance at night, they also act very much as an informal vigilante group in their home barrio. They invariably protect the barrio inhabitants from criminal predators, sometimes even accompanying individuals on “missions” outside the barrio. This partly stems from the territorial logic of the pandilla—the barrio is theirs, and must be guarded and
protected from intruders (who are invariably quickly rebuffed, often violently). But at the same time, much of this protective logic comes from the strong association the pandilleros have with the barrio and the imagined community it constitutes.

Barrio residents recognize this, and in fact their anti-pandilla discourses are ambiguous. While very critical of pandillas in a general way, they are thankful for the local manifestation of the phenomenon, even if there are often drawbacks, such as being caught in pandilla warfare crossfire. Perhaps the most significant example of this symbiotic relationship is that neighborhood residents tend not to call the police when pandillas fight, unless the barrio pandilla is doing badly and has retreated.

**Pandillas as Order Rather than Chaos**

While it is unquestionable that pandillas in urban Nicaragua, and their associated brutality, have come to epitomize the ambient chronic violence in popular Nicaraguan consciousness, the reality is not quite as clear-cut. For local barrio inhabitants, the threat of pandilla-related violence emanates primarily from outside pandillas; the local pandilla more often than not protects the local barrio inhabitants. This ambiguity points to a fundamental fact concerning pandillas, that may differentiate them from other sources of violence in the region: while the pandilla are undoubtedly both socially and symbolically important contributing factors to the violent causes of social disintegration in contemporary Nicaragua, they can also be seen as a complex spontaneous recreation of a social fabric.

In a contemporary Nicaragua marked by uncertainty and confusion, pandillas and their violence can be conceptualized as structuring institutions, both for wider local barrio communities, and for their members. The pandilla is a collective group which operates on modes of action guided by definite referential frameworks linked to considerations of territoriality, identity, and values. Some of these are derived from, and structured by, fundamental aspects of wider Nicaraguan culture and society such as militarism, machismo, or the general wider state of societal confusion. Even pandilla warfare must be viewed as a means of fostering a notion of collective identity, as conflicts unite individuals into groups, and sometimes unite small groups into larger groups. In the ambiguous and volatile context of contemporary Nicaragua, pandillas can be considered a reaction of disaffected youth to the atomization and drifting of wider Nicaraguan society.

**Harnessing the Potential of the Pandillas**

One effect of pandilla violence, at the local level, seems to be the only successful imposition of some sort of order and recreation of a social fabric in contemporary Nicaragua. It seems logical, therefore, to try to draw upon what seems already to work, and attempt to harness the potential that pandillas represent for halting the endemic social erosion. Such an undertaking should take the following into consideration:

- Any work with pandillas must be at a local barrio level, as it is at this level of social organization that they operate. (Furthermore, the localization of social life makes any larger level project doubly difficult.)
- The specific nature of each pandilla and barrio has to be taken into account, since pandillas are as much about identity as social structuration.
- A project dealing with a pandilla must engage it as a group, rather than as individuals, because the pandilla responds to a certain extent to young people’s need for collective socialization.
I am not advocating the acceptance of violence as a tool of development. However, pandilla violence is not "violence for the sake of violence"; it is ritualized violence, as much determined by the wider anarchic and violent historic and present Nicaraguan context as it is by internal pandilla dynamics. Blindly trying to repress the violence, as Alemán's government did when it took power in January 1997, proved to provide a very temporary respite, and in the end, only accentuated the climate of fear which affects most of Managua's inhabitants. Other police initiatives, such as teaching Gandhian precepts of nonviolence to pandilleros are simply laughable in the Nicaraguan context of normative violence.

Not understanding the logic and workings of pandillas and their violence is also at the root of the failure of the various formal "peace treaty" initiatives which evangelical churches, Christian Base Communities, and the Boy Scouts of Nicaragua have all tried to organize at various points in time recently. They demonstrate clearly the need for information—and its widespread dissemination—which goes beyond the stereotypes about pandillas which tend to recur in the few studies which exist at present. However, while this is certainly the first place to start, it is also possibly the most difficult, given the subject matter.

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Section 3

Innovative Interventions Designed to Enhance or Strengthen Social Capital and Reduce Violence

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MOBILIZING COMMUNITY ASSETS

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Introduction

Community-based planning and development is more critical now than it has ever been. The pervasive poverty in many inner city neighborhoods is compounded by aging urban infrastructure, the lack of incentives for investment by corporations and individuals; and a suburban political majority that continuously steers policies and programs away from declining urban areas. Articulating a comprehensive revitalization agenda for a community relies on mobilizing both physical and social resources. Those who are involved with neighborhood planning processes must learn to combine the upgrading of a neighborhood’s physical conditions with community empowerment through the mobilization of community assets.

Asset-building is the development of policies, practices, and tools that promote the creation, growth, and control of assets by disadvantaged households and communities. Asset-building as an approach to development brings together the three disciplines of neighborhood planning, community organizing, and economic development, and attempts to mold them into a single methodology for community revitalization. Capacity-focused development bases policies and initiatives on the capacities, skills, and assets of lower-income households and their neighborhoods. The approach does not imply that communities do not need outside resources, rather it suggests that the likelihood of attracting resources increases dramatically when local communities are mobilized to invest in the revitalization process.

The primary goal of an asset-building approach is to create an economy where resources are circulated within the local community, magnifying their impact and making economic growth possible. A healthy local economy is characterized by the recirculation of money, high rate of employment among residents, ownership of local businesses by residents, patronization of local businesses by residents, households, and an active, connected community.

An asset-building approach has an internal focus; the strategy concentrates first on the agenda-building capacity of local participants. It is also relationship-driven, as one of its central challenges is to build and rebuild the relationships among residents and institutions.

Asset Mapping

The first principle of an asset-building strategy is to identify the skills, associations, and institutions already in a community (not those that are absent or problematic). There are three levels of community assets:

- **Primary assets.** The most easily accessible assets, typically located within the community and owned by neighborhood residents. Examples include individual businesses and neighborhood organizations.
- **Secondary assets.** Assets that are located inside the neighborhood but controlled elsewhere. Examples are hospitals and universities.
Outside assets. Assets that are outside the community; the least accessible assets both in terms of location and ownership. Examples include capital improvement expenditures, federal allocations, and national corporations.

The process of building assets starts with mapping the capacities and skills of households and making an inventory of businesses and institutions at different levels in order to provide the community with an understanding of its potential for revitalization. Four key aspects of capacities are:

- Skills and experience of residents
- Personal income and expenditure patterns
- Local neighborhood businesses
- Home-based enterprises.

Resident-controlled associations and organizations may include neighborhood organizations, business associations, neighborhood communications outlets, and religious institutions. Institutions largely controlled from outside the community still represent appreciable assets that can be recaptured and channeled towards community revitalization. Such institutions include universities and community colleges, hospitals, social service agencies, public schools, libraries, and police and fire departments.

There are also a number of "physical" assets that can be mapped and made available for neighborhood revitalization efforts. These may include vacant lots, neighborhood parks, and other spaces which are not currently used to their full potential.

Asset Building

After identifying local capacities, economic development strategies can be formulated to build on these assets. Strategies may take many forms, including:

- Encouraging the development of small business by local residents
- Inviting employers to hire from within households whose skills and capacities have been mapped
- Developing a service that matches individuals with jobs appropriate to their mapped skills
- Linking employers, educational institutions, and community residents in a training effort designed to translate existing skills and capacities into jobs
- Organizing residents with a particular skill into a company to sell their services
- Encouraging tenant groups to gain control of public housing projects and employ residents to carry out maintenance jobs
- Mobilizing community youth to renovate a small neighborhood park.

Different communities will develop different asset-building strategies. However, three key issues must be addressed in any location:

- What organization will lead the asset-building process in the neighborhood? Should different neighborhood organizations and institutions be brought together under an "umbrella" association, or is it appropriate to use an already existing community development corporations (CDCs)?
- What is an appropriate design for a participatory neighborhoodwide process revolving around asset-building? How can the asset-building process be designed to incorporate as many "partners" as possible?
- How can the neighborhood community develop asset-building to leverage and attract outside resources?
Tools for asset-building

There are a number of tools which can help build assets by increasing low-income communities' access to capital. One method is to identify the capital that flows through even the poorest communities and retain it in community-based institutions such as community development credit unions, community loan funds, and individual development accounts (IDAs).

IDAs are saving accounts for low-income individuals in which earned income is matched by public and/or private sources. IDAs can only be used for certain expenses, typically tuition, down payments for homes, or start-up capital for small businesses. Most IDA programs include mandatory economic literacy courses, teaching skills in money management, budgeting, and credit. IDAs are a vital supplement to federal policy that currently extends multiple incentives for affluent households to save or accumulate assets.

Role of nonprofit organizations

A number of nonprofit organizations, such as the Enterprise Foundation, assist local communities with various aspects of the process of mobilizing community assets, including:

- Design of the mapping process
- Recruitment of partners
- Design of survey instruments, and the interpretation of results
- Program design and implementation
- Development of IDAs and other financial tools.

Summary

Capacity-focused development bases policies and initiatives on the capacities, skills, and assets of lower-income households and their neighborhood. Evidence from the past suggests that development, in its larger sense, only takes place when residents are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. The prospect of outside help is increasingly bleak, and the only realistic choice is to begin the development process from within. One of the ways to do this is to adopt an asset-building approach through which communities map their existing assets and build on these.

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BUILDING COMMUNITY NETWORKS TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE: PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION’S TEN COUNTRY PROGRAM

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Background

In 1995 the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) became the first United Nations organization to mobilize significant financial and political resources to address violence against women in the family. PAHO, the World Health Organization’s regional office in the Americas, began a multidisciplinary project to create coordinated intersectoral responses to domestic violence in 10 Latin American countries. Working closely with grassroots, national, and international women’s organizations, the PAHO project seeks to create local “success” stories by developing models of intervention and prevention of violence in 15 pilot communities.

The project was developed partly in response to the need for interinstitutional coordination among private and public sector social service agencies that serve battered women and their children. Throughout Latin America, women who decide to seek assistance for physical, psychological, sexual, or economic victimization are often buffeted between a variety of institutions from the health, judicial, police, education, and NGO sectors. Stereotypes and ignorance about battered women negatively affect the availability and quality of services, yet agencies rarely provide specialized training for their personnel in the handling of domestic violence cases. Furthermore, these agencies do not have in place the mechanisms for appropriate identification, referral and follow-up of battered women. Each institution responds to individual cases in an isolated way, rarely cross-referencing with other institutions and providing scant, often conflicting information to battered women regarding their available options.

Methodology and Design

The focus of the PAHO project is on improving service providers’ responses to battered women by strengthening institutional surveillance capacity, creating multisectoral community networks, providing training to service providers, and increasing public awareness of the issues surrounding violence against women. From these pilot initiatives PAHO hopes to extract lessons that can be used to guide broader-based reforms at the national and regional level.

The first step of the PAHO project was a participatory, community-based needs assessment to document what happens when a woman affected by family violence decides to break the silence and seek assistance in ending the abuse. The Spanish phrase used to describe this process is la ruta crítica, referring to the sequence of decisions made and actions taken by a woman in order to confront the violent situations she faces (or has faced) and the responses she encounters in her search for help. It is an iterative process in which internal and external motivating factors influence the actions undertaken by the woman. These actions provoke responses from various social actors, including service providers and community members; in turn these responses, whether positive or negative, intended or unanticipated, affect the motivating factors of the woman.
The challenges of conducting a multisite qualitative research project were considerable. A unified protocol was created that emphasized the importance of training and field supervision to assure process rigor in data collection and analysis. Three one-week workshops, conducted over 10 months, trained participants in the application of the research protocol, techniques of qualitative data collection and analysis, design of dissemination strategies, and application of findings to ongoing project activities.

Qualitative methods, including community mapping, in-depth and semi-structured interviews, content analysis and focus groups were used to provide in-depth understanding of women's motivations and service providers' perceptions and attitudes (Table 1). A number of sources were used, to allow triangulation of information and maximize the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Overall, researchers conducted over 500 in-depth interviews with battered women, interviewed over 1,000 service providers, and completed approximately 50 focus group sessions.

A key component of the project was the convening in each community of a community advisory board consisting of local leaders from the health, education, legal, and NGO sectors. The advisory board proved a valuable resource in vetting the research design, piloting the instruments, gaining access to the community and its social service institutions, and strengthening the legitimacy and longevity of the project. For some communities this advisory board represented the first time that public sector, NGO, and community members had ever sat down together to discuss solutions for a problem which all acknowledged was a serious health and development issue.

### Preliminary Findings

The study found that a woman's decision to initiate the ruta crítica—that is, to take action to stop the violence—was often a long process. In some cases it took many years and several attempts to seek help from several sources. Rarely did a single event precipitate action; rather, a combination of internal and

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<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
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<th>Data Collection Technique</th>
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<td>Service providers in law enforcement, health, education, and community development</td>
<td>Social representations regarding family violence; professional experiences of providing services to abused women; identification of key informants for in-depth interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews; purposive sampling of service providers in research community (N=25-30)</td>
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<td>Institutional documents</td>
<td>The existence of procedures to record and refer cases of family violence</td>
<td>Content analysis and document review; criterion sampling of available institutional policies, training materials and registration forms</td>
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<td>Women affected by family violence who have initiated the critical process</td>
<td>Experiences of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence; decisions made and actions taken in seeking help; factors that inhibit, precipitate, or facilitate the critical process</td>
<td>In-depth interviews; genograms; snowball sampling of women in the community (N=27)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members of the community</td>
<td>Social representations regarding family violence and perceptions of services available for abused women</td>
<td>Focus groups (N=4) of men, women, and mixed; convenience sampling of 6 to 12 participants each group</td>
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external factors converged at a given time to catalyze decisionmaking and action. Catalysts for action included an increase in the severity or frequency of the violence triggering a recognition that the abuser was not going to change, a crisis event that made it clear to the woman that she could not modify the situation with her own internal resources, and the realization that her own life or the lives of her children were in danger. (Service providers were generally unaware of the factors that both facilitated and inhibited battered women’s ability to take actions to end violent relationships.)

Preliminary findings suggested that many battered women are resourceful in seeking help and finding ways of mitigating the violence. There are formidable obstacles to ending domestic abuse in the home, some of which can be addressed by the PAHO project through training service providers, setting up information and referral networks, and providing public education campaigns. Women who initiated the ruta critica rarely began with formal health or police services. Instead they initially relied on support from other women in the community. The preliminary findings thus indicate a need to strengthen the resources of communities and their capacity to respond to battered women, recognizing the key roles played by family members, women’s informal support networks, and health workers.

The ruta critica study not only provides a baseline measure of the supply, demand, and quality of services for battered women, but has also been an instrument around which solutions have been collectively designed and pursued. Undertaking this analysis has also provided the opportunity to interest those interviewed, especially key people and groups in communities, in the problems of violence. Although the project was initially considered a research protocol that would explore institutional responses to battered women, it has developed into a vehicle for raising awareness of the problem.

At the time of this presentation, Dr. Pamela Hartigan was Regional Coordinator of the Women’s Health and Development Program of the Pan American Health Organization. She is currently Program Manager and Manager of the Task Force on Gender Sensitive Interventions of the Special Program for Research and Training of the UNDP, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization in Geneva.
Violence is among the biggest health threats in the United States. Interpersonal violence has invaded homes, schools, and streets everywhere, reaching what health experts now conclude is epidemic proportions. Even though homicide rates in the United States have dropped over the past three years, these rates remain excessively high, especially when compared to the rates of most other industrialized nations. Everyone is affected, but the group most affected is youth, who have the highest victimization rates. Of all age groups, 12–15 year olds are at greatest risk of becoming victims of violent crime.

Background to the Program

The program described here took place in California in the late 1980s; at that time homicide was the state’s second leading cause of death for males age 15–24. The homicide rate for youths under 18 years of age in California increased 60.6 percent between 1985 and 1994 (EPIC California 1996). African-Americans were the group most deeply affected; between 1980 and 1994 the number of African-American juveniles killed rose 97 percent. Homicide was the leading cause of death for young African-American males and accounted for 57 percent of all deaths (CA Dept. of Health Services 1990). Rates have finally begun to fall, particularly in areas where prevention has been practiced.

Contra Costa County, one of the five counties in the San Francisco Bay area, had a recorded population of 803,732 in the 1990 census. The western region of the county includes a number of communities that can be characterized as densely populated urban centers, where unemployment is high, the education system is underfunded, and the population is ethnically diverse—with a high percentage of new immigrants. Greater Richmond is an urban center within Contra Costa County, that in the mid-1980s had one of the highest homicide rates in California. Although this rate is still high, it has been falling significantly. Many experienced practitioners and community members would agree that these improvements have resulted from the innovative work of a community partnership coordinated by Contra Costa County Prevention Program’s violence prevention initiative, which was developed in response to unacceptably high rates of violence and a dearth of community, social, and financial resources.

At the time of its inception, the County Health Department’s Prevention Program was one of only a handful of nationally funded violence prevention programs in the United States. At the core of the program’s violence prevention initiative was a strategic approach based on forming a collaboration between the health department and a range of community-based organizations. The coalition, called PACT (policy, action, collaboration, and training) Against Violence, began in 1983 and initially aimed at preventing assaultive and dating violence among adolescents. For more than 10 years the program sustained coalitions engaged in violence prevention activities which promoted community well-being, influenced key institutions, and gained the support of community members and elected representatives critical to forging broad solutions and policies.
The Three Elements of Preventive Solutions

From the practice of local work and the dialogue with other groundbreaking efforts across the United States, three key points were synthesized which are essential in forging preventive solutions:

- It is critical to understand both the underlying causes and risk factors for violence and the factors that make an individual and community resilient.
- Violence is complex, so its solution must be comprehensive.
- As violence is understood, this understanding must be encapsulated in an action plan aimed at community-wide results.

Causes of Violence

Macro factors

The program identified three macro factors leading to increased violence in the United States:

- **Economics.** Depressed economic conditions within a given community, growing income disparity, and individual cases of unemployment and underemployment, all lead to significantly higher levels of violence.
- **Oppression.** Sexism, racism, discrimination based on age, ethnicity, class, and cultural background, and the feelings of inequality and powerlessness which result from such oppression are an underlying component of many types of violence.
- **Mental health.** An unsupportive home life, including physical or psychological abuse, can produce low self-esteem in both the victim and the perpetrator. Violence begets violence. Moreover, a sense of isolation and fear for one's personal safety can adversely affect one's ability to resolve conflict peacefully.

Community risk factors

The program also identified six community risk factors which exacerbate the frequency and severity of violence. Although these risk factors are difficult to change, they are more amenable to modification than the three macro factors above.

- **Guns.** Guns are involved in the vast majority of homicides and suicides and thus their availability and lethality is a major concern that needs to be addressed. In 1991 firearms were involved in two-thirds of the murders committed in the United States and one-quarter of the aggravated assaults. Between 1986 and 1991, the number of firearms used to commit a crime increased faster than the number of violent crimes. Even if hostility cannot be reduced, reducing the availability of guns and ammunition will decrease the morbidity and mortality produced by such hostility.
- **Media.** The mass media (especially television companies) sensationalize violence and sexual objectification. By the age of 16, most North Americans have already witnessed 200,000 violent acts on television (Tofetis 1989). The relationship between actual violence and television and movie violence has been documented, but both free speech concerns and the work of powerful entertainment industry lobbies have impeded regulation of the industry.
- **Alcohol and other drugs.** Contrary to popular opinion, research does not generally support a causal link between violence and illicit drug use. With several drugs, however, there is a strong association with violence. The drug most frequently associated with violence is alcohol.
- **Incarceration.** The prison population is expanding dramatically in the United States. Instead of fulfilling its purported role as a deterrent, prison becomes a training ground and communication
center for criminals. Building and maintaining prisons uses resources that could be allocated to violence prevention efforts.

- **Witnessing or experiencing acts of violence.** Experiencing violence can produce post-traumatic stress disorder similar to that experienced by war veterans. Exposure to or direct involvement in violence is likely to create the belief that violence is a normal form of expression. Being immersed in a violent culture and especially growing up in a community where violence is prevalent is likely to produce further acts of violence. The absence of opportunities to express feelings or to revisit these experiences in a supportive environment will perpetuate violence.

- **Community deterioration.** Throughout the United States the funding for community services has decreased. Community services are channeled through schools, health and mental health services, libraries, recreational centers, and parks—critical institutions that provide a buffer against the likelihood of violence. At the same time, levels of social capital seem to be diminishing, with people’s attention focused more on the needs of their own families than on the health of their communities.

**The Program’s Approach: Systematic and Comprehensive**

Since violence emerges from multiple and complex personal, social, and economic causes, the program’s violence prevention work required multifaceted efforts. The health of a community is a composite of physical, psychological, social, and economic variables. Consequently, the responsibility for overall community health resides in a number of systems, including the family, education, health, employment, criminal justice, and social services. An effective response requires the marshalling of resources at both national and local levels.

The prevention program employed a systematic approach in its work. As a catalyst for bringing key people and organizations together, the program was able to galvanize support for broad-based and long-lasting change. Three tools were used to maximize collaboration: coalition building, the spectrum of prevention, and partnerships for institutional change.

**Coalition building**

Local violence prevention initiatives were developed in conjunction with community-based organizations that were already focused on specific aspects of violence reduction. (“Effective Coalition Building: An Eight Step Guide,” is a tool developed by the author in conjunction with Satterwhite and Baer. It was published by the Alberta Injury Prevention Journal and is currently available through the Prevention Institute at www.preventioninstitute.org.) The program brought together organizations that were either already concentrating on a particular form of violence, such as violence against women, or serving a particularly high-risk population. Employing what has been described as a “jigsaw puzzle model,” the program brought together these different groups to focus on the problem as a whole. Instead of creating new, stand-alone programs, existing community-based organizations joined with the program to form a single coalition that coordinated comprehensive prevention services. Coalitions included representatives of government agencies, nonprofit groups, outside funding sources, and businesses.

Coalitions can accomplish a broad range of goals that reach far beyond the capacity of any individual member organization. The work of an active coalition can range from information-sharing and coordination of services to advocacy for major environmental or regulatory changes.
Prevention program staff acted as the “glue” that kept the coalitions together and functioning. They coordinated meetings, collected data, conducted evaluations, searched for materials, and adopted programmatic approaches that had been implemented successfully in other locations. Moreover, the Health Department was a credible and neutral party, and these characteristics strengthened the program’s ability to foster cooperative solutions.

Coalition building was one of the prevention program’s primary strategies for reducing injury and preventing disease in Contra Costa County. Many of the lessons learned from initiating and sustaining dozens of coalitions are synthesized in the following steps:

- Analyze the program’s objectives and determine whether or not to form a coalition
- Recruit the right people
- Devise a set of preliminary objectives and activities
- Convene the coalition
- Anticipate what resources will be necessary
- Weigh the elements of a successful structure
- Maintain the vitality of the coalition
- Evaluate and make improvements.

The Spectrum of Prevention model

The benefits of diverse coalition membership are fully realized when the coalition identifies and implements a broad range of strategies. Given the complexity and extent of violence, such a range is needed to reduce violence. The Spectrum of Prevention model (developed by Larry Cohen and based on work of Dr. Marshall Swift of Hahnemann College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) describes six strategies that were central to the prevention program’s systematic approach to reducing injury and disease (see Figure 1). It delineates six levels of activity, all of which reflect the viewpoint that environmental factors are the most significant determinant of health status and that institutional policies and organizational practices are both essential ingredients for creating safe communities. Each of the six levels depends on the others to work well. By integrating the six levels of the spectrum, a preventive health program can effectively promote change.

**Figure 1. The Spectrum of Prevention Model**

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<th>Influencing policy and legislation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Changing organizational practices</td>
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<td>Fostering coalitions and networks</td>
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<td>Educating providers</td>
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<td>Promoting community education</td>
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<td>Strengthening individual knowledge &amp; skills</td>
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**Partnerships for institutional change**

The prevention program applied a “systems approach,” combining coalition-building with the Spectrum of Prevention for a number of years. Violence prevention efforts, however, have been conducted primarily at a grassroots level with small community agencies pioneering efforts around the country. These isolated projects show promise, but they alone cannot stop the rising tide of violence.
Many large institutions have either ignored violence as an issue or perpetuated criminal justice deterrence approaches that have had limited success. Recognizing that violence is an environmental problem means acknowledging that it is a large and complex problem which requires broad societal changes. Since institutions are so influential within societies—determining priorities, controlling many of the resources, and affecting the culture of a community—they must have a central role in manufacturing and implementing solutions. In many cases institutions must change their practices to be effective agents of violence prevention. Some institutions will do so willing and actively while others will likely resist.

Government is a good place to initiate partnerships for institutional change. Government departments constitute a significant part of the institutional environment and control important resources. Even among health departments, the implementation of broad violence prevention strategies has yet to be accomplished and only a few departments choose to commit significant resources to the problem. Yet the role of health departments is critical. Health care providers and administrators are in a unique position to play a lead role in community coalitions, to encourage training of health care practitioners, to support advocacy efforts, and to conduct data collection and dissemination. They are also able to deploy their mental health staff to sites where incidents of violence are frequent and to provide conflict resolution services and post-traumatic stress debriefings.

Concluding Remarks: An Action Plan

The prevention program developed a multifaceted action plan which was placed on the ballot and voted on across the entire county. This plan passed by nearly a 4-1 margin, confirming the community’s support for prevention.

When statistics confirmed a dramatic reduction in the rates of violence in Richmond, most practitioners and residents attributed this success to the synergistic effect of multiple activities and community mobilization, and the involvement of key organizations in the county. The notion that community involvement results in positive change is shared across the United States.

Reducing violence demands the concentrated attention of the major institutions that shape our social and physical world. Violence prevention depends on the collaboration of government, businesses (the entertainment industry in particular), and civic, religious, and cultural organizations. Comprehensive approaches are best able to address the multiple root causes and complex nature of violence. Coalitions, institutional partnerships, and multifaceted methodology like the Spectrum of Prevention increase the chance that practitioners and activists will engage in a range of activities that can strategically and systematically prevent violence. Stopping the momentum of violence requires a “critical mass” of people who are willing to speak out and to work together to change the structures and policies that frame the way we live. When this critical mass is achieved and communities begin to change, their momentum results in behavioral and policy changes, both locally and nationally, that may have seemed impossible just a few years earlier.

References


Larry Cohen, MSW, was the founder and director of the Contra Costa County Health Services Department's Prevention Program, established in California in 1982.

Further details on this paper can be found in Cohen and Swift 1993. Prevention Institute can be reached at 1181 Colusa Avenue, Berkley, CA 94707, tel. 510-528-4482; at larry@preventioninstitute.org or at www.preventioninstitute.org
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