**Youth Violence and Safety**

**MAY 3, 2021**

**Focus:** The financial and social costs & benefits of prevention vs those of the formal justice system

**Goal:** Calculating and articulating these costs & benefits to advocate for investments in prevention

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**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Violence and aggression are not the same thing; latter is a learned behavior that can be altered by counter-messaging at a young age.

- Child exposure to violence leads to subconsciously copied behavior, exacerbated when the environment normalizes violence
  - Counter-messaging and opportunities for healthy processing counteract this

**Exposure to violence at young age is single most predictive—not deterministic—risk factor.**

- Exposure can occur directly or via media; latter has weaker effect
- Violence is ultimately a choice
  - Made less likely by offering attractive non-violent options

**Violence and sexual harassment prevention can be taught from early age by establishing common language and critical thinking around values.**

- Key values: respect, dignity, and equality
- Working with all children, not only highest risk, ensures values and language are embedded
- Impact continues well beyond school as children learn to advocate for themselves
- Teachers and parents begin using the language, treating children differently and reflecting on their own experiences

Parents may be positive or destructive forces in their children’s lives.

- Vary in their experiences, education, and personal trauma exposure
- Some cause initial exposure to violence or trauma, generating intergenerational cycle
- Others reflect, change mindset, and become engaged in countering violence

**Violence reduction interventions can be broken into three categories with different stakeholders, funding structures, and cost/benefit analyses:**

1. **Preemptive prevention:** intervention before an individual commits a violent act
2. **Discipline/adjudication:** occurs after violent act is committed, focused on accountability and deterrence of individual or society at large
3. **Reintegration:** post-adjudication, uses disciplinary time to facilitate re-entry and adoption of productive, violent-free habits

Modeling the cost of status quo is a powerful advocacy tool to fund preventative measures.

- Heckman et al. calculated that $1 in prevention can save several in treatment
- One US estimate is almost $200,000 per lifetime and c. $500B annually
- Lifetime cost approach risks labelling people
  - Consider racial and social factors carefully

**Having a model does not guarantee policy action.**

- Academic work is striking but impact limited
- Challenging to evaluate programs and track real savings to public budgets, especially long-term

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**KEY EXAMPLES**

- **Voice of Child Association** (Israel)
- Diversion of Public Safety funding to hospital-based intervention (New Jersey)
- “Handle with Care” program (New Jersey)
- Online mandatory human rights courses for teachers (Ukraine)

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**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

- “The Tragedy of Wasted Funds and Broken Dreams: An Economic Analysis of Childhood Exposure to Crime and Violence” by Michal Gilad and Abraham Gutman
- “What Can We Do As a Partnership to Prevent and Reduce Youth Offending and Serious Youth Violence?” JSNA
- “The Economic Cost of Gun Violence” by Everytown