
Toolkit Overview

This policy toolkit on youth at risk in middle-income countries contains five sections:

Section I: Introduction

- Background and Rationale
- Definitions and Conceptual Framework

Section II: Core Policies (6)

These six policies have an established track record in *preventing* disadvantaged children and young people from engaging in risky behavior and, thus, should form the basis of any country's youth portfolio. We recommend that governments of middle-income countries should adopt and implement these policies on a large scale. These core policies consist of (i) expanding integrated early child development for children from poor households; (ii) increasing the number of young people who complete secondary school, particularly those from poor families; (iii) using the fact that students are a captive audience while in school to provide them with key risk prevention messages and to identify at-risk youth who are in need of remedial support; (iv) developing youth-friendly pharmaceutical services; (v) using the media to describe the costs of risky behavior and present alternatives (combined with improved services); and (vi) promoting effective parenting of and by young people.

Section III: Promising Approaches (9)

These nine approaches focus on *helping* those affected by risky behavior to recover and return to a safe, productive path to adulthood. Young people in this category range from school dropouts to the incarcerated and are more difficult to reach than others in their age group. Although not as many of the interventions in this category have yet been evaluated, there is sufficient evidence to enable us to make some recommendations in the areas of (i) education equivalency, (ii) job training, (iii) financial incentives for completing secondary school, (iv) after-school programs, (v) formal youth service programs, (vi) mentoring, (vii) employment services, (viii) life skills training in all interventions aimed at youth at risk, and (ix) self-employment and entrepreneur programs.

Section IV: General Policies with a Disproportionately Positive Effect on Youth at Risk (7)

These seven policies address critical risk factors at the community and macro levels, but also have been shown to be particularly effective at reducing risky behavior by young people and should therefore form an essential part of an overall strategy to reduce the number of youth at risk. Examples of these types of policies include (i) safe neighborhood investments that support community policing and improved services for high-violence communities, (ii) reducing the availability of firearms, (iii) restricting the sale of alcohol, (iv) increasing access to contraception, (v) promoting anti-violence messages in all media, (vi) strengthening the justice system to focus on treating and rehabilitating rather than incarcerating young people, and (vii) registering the undocumented.

Section V: Moving from a Wish List to Action

This section presents strategies and tools for turning these policy recommendations into a well-designed and well-implemented youth portfolio. Included in this section are thoughts on how to assign and coordinate institutional responsibilities based on comparative advantage; how to reallocate resources away from ineffective programs toward recommended programs; how to improve the development, analysis, and use of data for program monitoring and impact evaluations; how to select programs based on cost-effectiveness and a cost-benefit analysis; and how to benchmark progress against international data sources.