

5. YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Deaths and injuries from youth violence constitute a major public health, social and economic problem across the Caribbean, including in the Dominican Republic. Youth are overrepresented in the ranks of both victims and perpetrators in the Dominican Republic, and this pattern has become more stark over time, as rates of crime and violence overall have increased. A wide variety of risk factors contribute to the prevalence of youth violence, including poverty, youth unemployment, urban migration, drug trafficking, a weak education system, ineffective policing, the widespread availability of weapons, drug and alcohol use, and the presence of organized gangs. Nonetheless, youth violence is preventable; a broad range of viable strategies for preventing and reducing youth violence exist. Most highly effective programs combine components that address both individual risks and environmental conditions, building individual skills and competencies, training parents for greater effectiveness, improving chances for poor youth to access and complete their secondary education, improving the social climate and safety of school, and providing “second chances” to those who have dropped out of the formal schooling system, including school equivalency programs, job and life skills training, and apprenticeships.

5.1 Youth violence is a high-priority, high-visibility concern across the Caribbean. Not only has violence grown in most of the region in recent decades, but youth are also disproportionately represented in the incidence and severity of this trend, both as victims and as perpetrators. Moreover, violent crimes are being committed at younger ages in many countries. Yet there is growing evidence that youth violence can be prevented and offenders can be rehabilitated when appropriate policies and interventions are adopted (WHO, 2002; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; World Bank, 2005c; IADB, 2002; Tolan and Guerra, 1994). This chapter addresses the pressing issue of youth violence and its implications for the Caribbean, with a particular focus on the Dominican Republic. The chapter also provides a set of policy and program recommendations which could prove useful to the region as a whole.

5.2 The overarching conclusion is that although youth violence is a legitimate concern for the region, it is neither intractable nor are youth “the problem.” Rather, as detailed by the World Bank’s *Caribbean Youth Development Report* (World Bank, 2003a), youth are a product of a complex set of factors in their environments. They also represent a unique window of opportunity to both prevent and reduce crime and violence in society at large. Evidence from evaluated youth violence prevention programs outside the Caribbean indicates that the earlier the investment in an individual, the greater the chance that violent behaviors can be prevented through adulthood, and the more cost-effective the investment (WHO, 2003; World Bank, 2005c; Schweinhart, 2005 and Levitt, 1998). There are a multitude of policies and programs currently underway across the Caribbean to address youth violence. Unfortunately, very few have been subjected to rigorous impact evaluations and, consequently, there is little region-specific knowledge about what works and what does not. However, there is increasing evidence globally on

the types of youth violence prevention efforts that work, and many of these programs are already being implemented in the sub-region.

SCOPE OF YOUTH CRIME AND VIOLENCE

5.3 This section provides a brief overview of youth crime and violence occurring in the Caribbean, with a special focus on the Dominican Republic. For the purposes of this report, *youth violence* is defined as homicide and non-fatal attacks perpetrated by or against a person aged 10-29 years of age.¹ This age range was selected for three reasons. First, the late adolescent/early adulthood period of 15-29 is generally considered to have the highest risk for all forms of violence globally, and is particularly so in the Caribbean. Second, the early adolescent period (10-14 years) is a growing concern in the region because both quantitative and qualitative evidence points to violent crimes being committed at younger and younger ages. While still considered to be one of the lowest risk groups across the entire lifespan for being a victim of homicide, young adolescents are observed to be increasingly involved in both homicide and other forms of crime and violence. More importantly, they are the age at which many prevention policies may have a greater chance of success. Finally, the age range 10-29 coincides with that used in the only globally comparable data available on youth violence: World Health Organization statistics.²

5.4 **Data Limitations.** As noted elsewhere in this report, general crime and violence data is often difficult to obtain and are often incomplete (see Chapter 1). This challenge becomes even greater when attempting to obtain information on youth in particular. The problem stems from a lack of common and comparable definitions of youth when it comes to crime and violence, as well as weak systems for surveillance and monitoring across what are considered minor (under 18) and adult (18 and older) age ranges. In particular, when attempting to compare data across countries, there are very few indicators beyond homicides that are disaggregated by comparable ages, and the Caribbean has particularly weak youth data compared with much of the rest of Latin America. This report has drawn from both available international quantitative sources (WHO, 2002/2003; PAHO; UNODC) as well as from primary quantitative and qualitative sources in the Dominican Republic (ALEPH, 2006).

5.5 Youth are disproportionately represented in Caribbean crime and violence, both as victims and as perpetrators, and in many of these countries violent crime is being committed at younger ages than in the past. Moreover, there is a growing concern that in a number of countries, the proportion of violent crimes committed by youth, and especially juveniles, has been increasing (UNODC, 2002). In 2005, young Dominicans aged 11-30 accounted for 46 percent of homicide victims, yet only represented 38 percent of the general population. In Jamaica, youth under the age of 25 were responsible for 51 percent of all murders and 56 percent of all major crimes in 2000 (World Bank, 2004). In the Dominican Republic, arrests for homicides by minors under the age of 18 rose over

¹ The 10-29 age range thus includes youth and young adults.

² Note that the age range will depend largely on available data. Much of the standardized WHO data on youth violence use the 10-29 age range, whereas the official UN MDG definition of youth is 15-24 years old.

the period 1995-2004 from 2 to 113, with over 95 percent male (UNODC, 2002). Similar trends occurred in St. Kitts and Nevis, where in 1990 only 1.2 percent of all crimes were committed by juveniles, yet by 1998, this had increased to 17 percent (UNODC, 2002). A worrisome consequence of these trends is that evidence points to the fact that violent behavior in youth has a strong tendency to continue into adulthood (WHO, 2003; Levitt, 1998).

5.6 ***Youth as victims.*** How do youth violence statistics in the Caribbean compare with other countries? Youth homicide rates globally have large variations: for males, the numbers range from 2.5 per 100,000 in Canada and 5.2 in Chile, to 94.8 in El Salvador and 156.3 in Colombia (WHO, 2002). The Latin America and the Caribbean region boasts the highest homicide rate of men between the ages of 15-29 (68.6 per 100,000) in the world, more than three times greater than the global average of 19.4 (Table 5.1).

5.7 In the Dominican Republic in 2002, the adjusted homicide rate was 19.7 (per 100,000) for young Dominicans aged 15-29, compared with 10.2 for all Dominicans (Aleph, 2006).³ As Figure 5.1 illustrates, homicide deaths for youth have been growing consistently since 2000, particularly in the 18-29 age range. In 2005, homicides of those ages 11-30 accounted for approximately 46 percent of total homicide deaths.⁴ Young males are particularly affected, with a death rate of 35.3 (per 100,000 inhabitants) in 2002, which is over 80 percent higher than the global average of 19.4 for young men (WHO, 2002). They are also considerably more likely to be victims of homicide than the rest of the Dominican male population (18.3); moreover, they are fifteen times more likely to die from homicide than women as a whole (2.1 per 100,000 inhabitants) and nearly 8 times more than women of the same age group (3.2) (ALEPH, 2006; PAHO, 2006).

5.8 ***Violence against young women.*** Though often different in nature,⁵ violence against women is also disproportionately borne by youth in the Caribbean. The most widespread type of violence in the Caribbean is that which occurs within families and intimate relationships, where girls and young women are disproportionately affected, especially if the violence involves sex (PAHO, 2000). See chapter 1 for more on violence against young women.

³ Data obtained from the Procuraduría General Statistics Department.

⁴ Ibid. Results of self-report surveys around the world indicate that an overwhelming majority of those who participate in violence against young people are about the same age and gender as their victims; in most cases the offenders are males acting in groups (United Nations, 2003).

⁵ Violence against women was defined by a declaration of the General Assembly of the United Nations (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993) as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Table 5.1 Youth as Victims: Homicide Rates in Select Countries
(per 100,000 inhabitants)

Country	Year	Total	All Ages Males	All Ages Female	Male Age15-29	Female Age15-29
Bahamas	1995-1997	14.9	26.1	--	48.4	--
Brazil	1995a	16.7	23.0	4.1	81.2	6.5
Chile	1994	3.0	5.4	0.8	6.7	--
Cuba	1997	6.2	9.6	2.7	18.4	5.7
Colombia	1995	61.6	116.8	9.0	212.5	15.0
Dominican Republic	2002a	10.2	19.7	2.12	35.3	3.22
	2005b	26.41	49.9	4.4	--	--
El Salvador	1993	55.6	108.4	8.4	133.1	8.8
Guyana	1994-1996	6.6	11.8	--	--	--
Jamaica	2004a	55.7	102.1	10.5	188.0	14.8
Trinidad and Tobago	1994	12.1	17.1	6.6	21.6	--
LAC average		19.3	34.7	4.0	68.6	6.4
United States	1998	6.9	10.7	3.1	23.6	4.6
Canada	1997	1.4	1.9	1.0	3.2	1.1
World		8.8	13.6	4.0	19.4	4.4

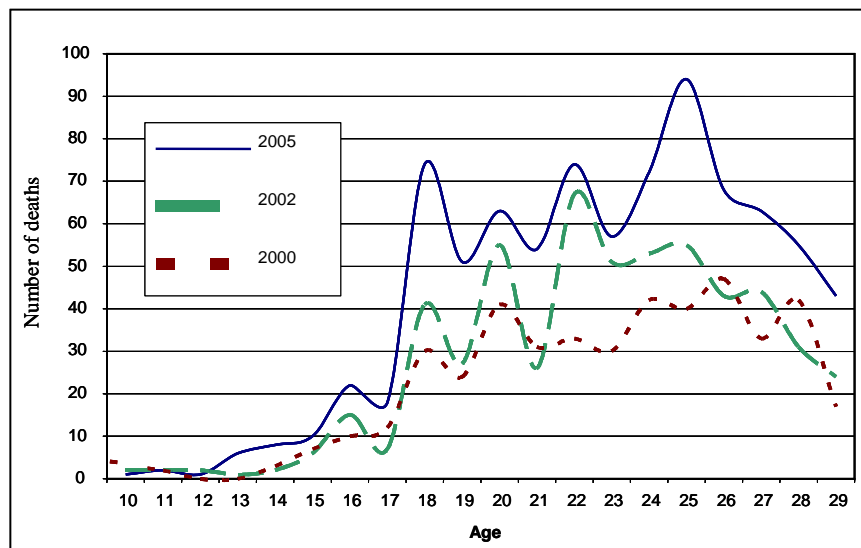
Source: World Health Organization. 2003. World Report on Health and Violence. Geneva.

a: Based on data obtained from World Health Organization (August 2006).

b: Estimates from National Police Statistics.

5.9 *Youth as perpetrators.* Just as they account for a disproportionate share of the victims of violence, young people are also disproportionately its perpetrators, especially young men. In most countries, this is a growing trend. Indeed, statistical data indicate that in virtually all parts of the world, with the exception of the United States, rates of youth crime rose in the 1990s, with many of the criminal offenses related to drug abuse and excessive alcohol use (UNDP, 2003). What little data exist indicate that this phenomenon may be particularly worrisome in the Caribbean.

Figure 5.1: Homicide Deaths by Age (10-29) in the Dominican Republic (2000-2005)



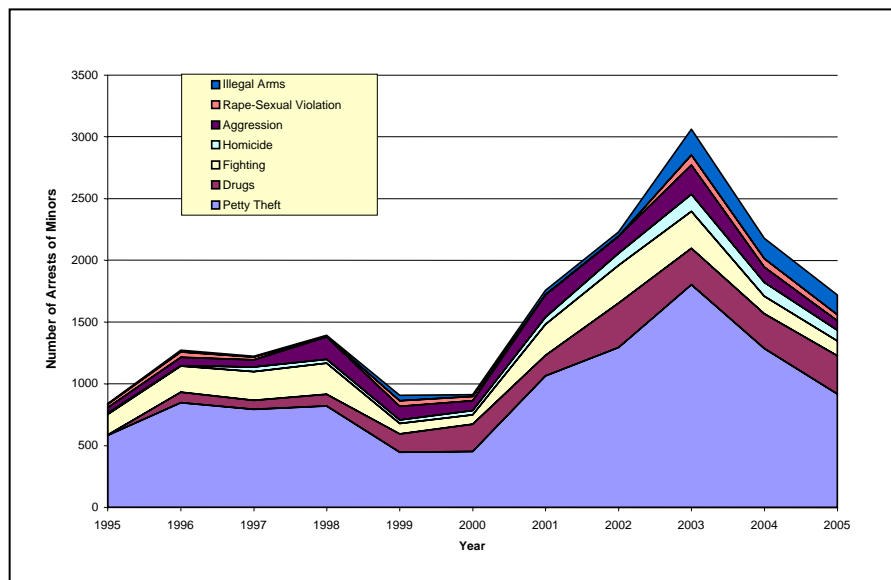
Source: Dominican Republic National Police, unpublished data.

5.10 In Jamaica, for example, the country’s homicide rate for 2005, considered the highest in the world, was at an all-time high and over 70 percent of homicides were committed by young men ages 16-30. Shares were similar for shootings (78 percent), robbery (74 percent), and rape (68 percent). In the Dominican Republic, of the current prison population, 62 percent of those arrested for homicide were 16-29 at the time of arrest compared to 71 percent of those arrested for robbery. In the first six months of 2006, 61 percent of new prisoners arrested for homicide were 16-29 and 70 percent for robbery (Procuraduría General de la República Dominicana, 2006).

5.11 Crimes perpetrated by minors (under age 18) in the Dominican Republic have also been on the rise over the past decade. Arrests of minors tripled between 2000 and 2003 and started to decline in 2004 and 2005 (Figure 5.2). However, those arrests related to illegal arms and drugs have shown no sign of decreasing (Dominican Republic National Police, 2006) In fact, whereas over the past decade the most common crimes committed by minors were petty theft (48 percent), drugs (11 percent) and assault (10 percent), those that experienced the most consistent growth were arrests for homicide and illegal arms, with average annual increases over the past decade of 195 percent and 107 percent, respectively. These were followed by average annual increases in aggressive assault (28 percent) and drug arrests (22 percent).⁶ As Box 5.1 illustrates, qualitative data supports the quantitative evidence that younger groups of youth are increasingly involved in violent crime.

⁶ Author’s calculations based on Dominican Nacional Police statistics (1995-2005).

Figure 5.2: Trends of Minor Arrest over Past Decade in the Dominican Republic



Source: Dominican Republic National Police Crime and Victim Data, 2006.

5.12 Youth focus groups reveal some common characteristics of youth perpetrators of crime. The overwhelming majority of youth currently residing in the *Dirección Nacional de Centros de Atención Integral* (juvenile corrections center) are young men (136, compared with 3 women). The primary motivation identified for committing a crime was a desire to escape poverty (ALEPH, 2006). Other common characteristics were: growing up in dysfunctional households, having been abused and mistreated, getting an early start in a life of crime (with a reported average age of first crime as 13), consuming illegal drugs, and having dropped out of school.

5.13 **Gang and drug related violence** has also increased in recent years, with youth as the most visible culprits of this type of crime and violence. Because the criminal justice system in the Dominican Republic does not allow arrest or incarceration of youth below the age of 13,⁷ gangs and drug lords are increasingly using younger members to carry out both petty and hard crimes (Box 5.1). This appears to be a trend throughout the sub-region (see discussion of gangsterism in next section). As reported in the World Development Report (WDR) 2007, younger gang members are responsible for a disproportionately large share of offenses. The WDR finds that the formal association with a gang is powerful: gang members wield more influence on the violent behavior of their peers than violent non-gang members. What is more, youth gang members tend to commit crimes that are more serious and violent while they are gang members than after they leave the gang (World Bank, 2006c).

⁷ The “Ley 136-03, Código para el Sistema de Protección y los Derechos de Niños, Niñas, y Adolescentes,” article 223 states that children under the age of 13 are in no case to be held criminally responsible, and as such, cannot be held for arrest, nor be given any sanction by official authorities. See Guerrero (2005).

Box 5.1: The Sophisticated Extortion of Santo Domingo Gangs and Drug Lords

There is emerging quantitative and qualitative evidence that younger adolescents are increasingly involved in violent crimes, particularly as they relate to the drug trade:

“Never in the past have we witnessed such sophisticated tactics used by drug lords and young gang members to attract children to carry out their crimes. Over the past three years, we have seen one particularly cruel method that has taken on a frightening momentum, and its impact on our society’s children is devastating.”

“Young men who we know to be involved in the drug trade (because we have lived in their neighborhood for years) invite young boys—usually 8-12 years old from broken families where the mother has to work—to join in sports activities and games in the neighborhood. These young men have nice clothes, shoes, cell phones, and they become buddies with the children.”

“Once they gain their trust, they ask them who they love most in the world. The children respond, and are then told, if you do not steal 3 cell phones a day for us, then we will kill your mother’ (or whomever else they have confided is their most beloved person). A 10 year-old child from the barrio has nothing else to hold on to. We have witnessed in the past 6 months hundreds of crimes committed this way ranging from petty theft to murder. *These children never see a way out...*”

- Interview with a group of Catholic nuns who have served in several of Santo Domingo’s most violent neighborhoods for over 15 years. May 20, 2006

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

5.14 Identification of the key *risk factors* that contribute to youth violence makes clear that the policy and programmatic responses need to extend across a wide range of professional disciplines, including those of public health, education, and skills training. This section summarizes the current literature discussing these factors with a view to informing policymakers on where to most effectively target interventions. As outlined in Chapter 3, risk factors can be identified at four interrelated levels: i) societal; ii) community; iii) relationships; and iv) individual. In addition to “risk” factors, protective factors are also present at each of the four levels, decreasing the likelihood that youth engage in crime or violence. It is worth emphasizing that the presence of a risk (or protective factor) does not ensure that criminal or violent behavior will (not) occur—it merely increases the likelihood that it will (not). While the analysis here focuses on factors for youth violence in the Dominican Republic, where possible the findings will be placed in a wider Caribbean context.

5.15 Recent empirical research conducted on risk and protective factors for youth in the Caribbean concluded that school attendance/connectedness are the most important factors in reducing violent youth behavior. In particular, the study found that boys (girls) who feel connected to school were 60 percent (55 percent) less likely to engage in violent activity.⁸ In addition, the study showed the significant effects that schools have in reducing drug use, smoking, and alcohol consumption. The study also found that family

⁸ Analyses were done on the results of a 1997-98 survey of over 15,500 young people 10-18 years of age in 9 Caribbean countries to identify risk and protective factors associated with health compromising behaviors, including violence. See Blum, R.W. et al. (2003).

connectedness, or the presence of a caring adult, served as the second most important protective factor. The analysis concluded that both risk and protective factors are cumulative; if protective influences are held constant and predominant risks are added one at a time, risk behavior rises significantly. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, when risk factors are held constant and protective factors are added, there is an even greater reduction in reported involvement with violence.⁹

5.16 **Societal Level:** Some examples of risk factors at this level are poverty, inequality, youth unemployment, an ineffective criminal justice system, and drug trafficking. At the societal level in general, the Caribbean has had a culture of aggression rooted in slavery since colonial times. Today, messages to youth from both regional and international (U.S.) media and music in particular, are often expressions of rage or alienation—anti-women, pro drugs, pro-violence, and materialistic—that influence the decisions that youth make (World Bank, 2003a). For the Dominican Republic, some of the identified trends at this level are as follows:

5.17 **Poverty and Inequality.** Being raised in poverty has been found to contribute to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence. It is also often related to youth aggression because of increased stress and feelings of hopelessness that may arise from chronic unemployment and other associated factors (IADB, 2002; Weaver and Maddelena, 1999). The inverse relationship between family income and juvenile crime is well documented globally (World Bank, 2006d). During the deep economic and financial crisis of 2003-2004, extreme poverty doubled from 7 percent to 14 percent (World Bank and IDB, 2006). Violent crimes also rose dramatically; from 2002 to 2005, the rate of violent death nearly doubled from 14.5 to 26.4 per 100,000 residents (Aleph, 2006).¹⁰ In addition to poverty, the income inequality demonstrated by drug dons, foreign tourists, and the media encourages engagement in easy money activities, including drugs and prostitution (World Bank, 2003a).

5.18 **Youth Unemployment.** Between 2002 and 2004 youth unemployment jumped from 23 to 31 percent, or more than twice the LAC average (15.2 percent) and the global average (14.4 percent) (World Bank and IDB, 2006). Although data is not available, it is generally agreed that these figures for urban poor youth are significantly higher. The fact that young Dominicans in (or entering) the labor market are at a disadvantage is consistent with findings from the international literature on the effects of demand shocks (Jimeno, J. and Rodriguez-Palenzuela, D, 2002), as well as those observed throughout the Caribbean, where many countries have especially elevated youth unemployment. International comparisons indicate that Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago have high rates compared to the rest of Latin America (Table 5.2). Evidence from the United States has shown that falling wages and local youth unemployment were partly responsible for the rise in youth crime in the 1970s and 1980s (World Bank, 2006d).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Note that violent deaths in the Dominican Republic include homicides and deaths resulting from shootings between police and civilians. In 2005, 18 percent of violent deaths were a result of shootings between police and civilians; the remainder were homicides.

Table 5.2: Highlights of Youth in Numbers in Latin America and the Caribbean

Country	Youth Unemployment	Percentage of youth population (15-24)	Net Secondary School Enrolment	Youth Fertility (15-19)
Bahamas	15.8	18.0	79	49
Barbados	21.8	15.1	87	46
Dom Rep (2002)	23.1	19.1	41	94
Dom Rep (2004)a	31.0	19.1	38	N/A
Grenada	27.0	24.5	--	69
Jamaica	34.0	18.7	75	32
St. Lucia	44.0	20.3	70	46
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	36.0	20.8	--	22
Trinidad and Tobago	25.4	20.7	72	13
LAC Average	15.2	--	--	52
United States	10.6	14.2	85	57

Source: World Bank 2004 , World Bank 2005d, and Secretaría de Educación.

5.19 *Urban migration* is on the rise, with a high share of young migrants who are “unattached” to families, schools or employment. Although large youth cohorts in and of themselves are not always associated with increases in crime and violence, the correlation is stronger when taken in the context of increasing poverty and rapidly growing cities, such as in the urban areas of the Dominican Republic (World Bank and IDB, 2006). Migration flows in the Dominican Republic are very high, with more than 2 million people living in a region other than that of their birth in 2002 (World Bank and IDB, 2006). Whereas 56 percent of Dominicans were living in cities in 1997, that number had reached 64 percent by 2004 (Fares et al., 2006). Nearly 40 percent of Dominicans choosing to resettle are between the ages of 20 and 39 (Fares, et al., 2006).

5.20 *Drug trafficking.* The Dominican Republic’s role as a transit country for the drug trade puts many young Dominicans at risk. This macro level trend disproportionately affects youth in two ways. First, given the immunity of minors from prosecution in adult courts, the relative cost of their involvement in the drug trade is lower than that of their adult counterparts, giving them a perverse comparative advantage. Second, remuneration in the narcotics business tends to be in-kind, and this trend is

growing in the Dominican Republic, particularly with younger members.¹¹ This creates a long-term involvement with the industry of illicit drugs, expanding the client base for the drugs and creating a dependency/addiction among participating youth.

5.21 **Community level:** Some common risk factors at this level relate to schools, neighborhoods, and police. Examples are lack of school access, school policies, availability of guns, prevalence of drugs, unsafe neighborhoods, police abuse and criminal justice responses at the local level. The presence of these factors in the lives of young Dominicans is as follows:

5.22 ***Schools.*** The education sector in the Dominican Republic is characterized by low enrollment rates, high dropout rates, poor quality, and weak funding, the combination of which contributes greatly to the generation of idle and unskilled youth with few opportunities. Only 53 percent of Dominicans complete primary school and the net secondary school enrolment rate is just 38 percent. What is more, the average score on the grade eight national exam in 2004 was 52 percent (Secretaría de Estado de Educación, 2005). As a result, even the lucky few that stay in the system long enough to graduate tend to leave school with a dearth of relevant skills for a successful school-to-work transition. When compared to other Caribbean countries for which UNESCO data is available, the Dominican Republic's 1.1 percent of GDP in education spending in 2004 was by far the lowest among the Latin American and Caribbean countries with available data.¹² The number of youth who can be considered at risk—poor, out of school, and jobless—is therefore large and growing. This increase is believed to be “a key factor in the rise in crime, violence, gangs and other forms of risky behavior, particularly among the poorest segments of this age group, which see fewer prospects for the future” (World Bank, 2005d).

5.23 ***Violence in Schools.*** A disquieting number of students in the Caribbean have witnessed physically violent acts in their schools. As a result many students no longer feel safe in their schools and some drop out (Garner et al., 2003). A 2003 representative sample survey of school children in nine Caribbean countries found that one-fifth of the males carried weapons to school in the previous 30 days and one-tenth had been knocked unconscious in a fight. Over 40 percent reported that sometimes or most of the time they think about hurting or killing someone else (Halcon, 2003). Evidence suggests that abuse by teachers of students is common (World Bank, 2003a). In the Dominican Republic, most youth (54 percent) in a recent survey reported that there was violence in the schools, and 42 percent indicated that they knew of violent acts committed on school grounds (ALEPH, 2006).

5.24 ***Role of Police.*** The potential role of the police in crime prevention is weakened by problems within the police force. The majority of respondents in youth focus groups in

¹¹ Interviews with Dominican National Drug Control Agency 2005.

¹² Domestic per pupil public expenditure at the secondary level as a share of GDP per capita was just 3.6 percent in 2003, less than a quarter of the LAC average of 17.8 percent. Moreover, it is the only country with available data in the LAC region where public funds for secondary education decreased by more than 20 percent as a share of GDP during the period 1998-2003; over that period the Dominican Republic's funding decreased by 39 percent. World Bank (2006d)

the Dominican Republic noted that even if they were caught committing a crime, the possibility of buying one's way out through bribes to police was always a feasible option, as well as that of using *padrinos* (Godfathers) who could intervene on their behalf and have court decisions suspended, or even have prison inmates freed (ALEPH, 2006). The national police itself reports an average of 36 shooting deaths per month by the members of its force (ALEPH, 2006). In 2005, 18 percent of all violent deaths/homicides were a result of police shootings. Though the ages of the victims are not known, anecdotal evidence suggests that a large number of these are youth: one study cited 23 unprovoked killings of street children by *los cirujanos* ("the surgeons", a police unit that conducts night sweeps) in three neighborhoods of Santo Domingo over an eight-month period (Commins, 2006).

5.25 Availability of guns and other weapons. The proportion of Caribbean adolescent males who carry firearms is extremely high. The survey in nine Caribbean countries mentioned above revealed that 20 percent of male students had carried a weapon to school in the previous 30 days, nearly as many had been in a fight using weapons (World Bank, 2003a). Evidence suggests that these figures are much higher for those who are not students. In the United States, the equivalent figure for high school students (grades 9-12) was 9 percent, less than half (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). In the Dominican Republic, between September 2003 and June 2005 alone, the National Police issued more than 178,000 licenses for owning and carrying firearms, the majority of which were handguns (71 percent), shotguns (14 percent) and pistols (14 percent). According to the National Police, at least 75 percent of homicides are committed using these types of weapons (ALEPH, 2006).¹³ For more detailed discussion of community-level risk factors and program responses see Annex 5.1.

5.26 Interpersonal level: The most important actors at this level are the family, peer groups, and teachers, each of which can act as protective and risk factors. For the Dominican Republic, available data points to the following concerns at this level.

5.27 Domestic violence, child abuse and corporal punishment. High levels of domestic abuse and corporal punishment throughout the Caribbean are severe risk factors likely to promote future violent behavior. A recent survey revealed that 22 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49 had been victims of physical violence at the hands of a male partner, and 67 percent had suffered emotional abuse (Caceres, 2004). International evidence suggests that children who witness domestic violence are more likely in the future to engage in delinquent and violent behavior (Smith and Thornberry, 1995; Margolin, 1998). Child abuse is also associated with an increased probability that children engage in delinquent and violent behavior, as well as increased risk of children abandoning the home. More than 40 percent of street kids surveyed by Niños del Camino cited abuse in the home as the leading cause of abandoning their families. Corporal punishment continues to be widespread in the Dominican Republic and elsewhere in the Caribbean, in both schools and homes, and particularly against boys (World Bank, 2003a). Much international evidence links use of corporal punishment to later use of

¹³ Data obtained from the National Police Statistics office.

violence by children and adolescents; a study in Jamaica has confirmed this link (Meeks, 2001).

5.28 ***Peers and role models.*** Most youth in the Caribbean identify parents, entertainers or teachers as role models (Luther, 2002). However, the historical absence of male adult figures in the household for role modeling and mentoring compounds the influence of "negative" role models, particularly for boys. Drug dons are an important source of admiration due to their wealth and power. The drug don and his approachability and interest in recruiting children make him a particularly dangerous role model as youth easily become engaged in his business (World Bank, 2003a).

5.29 Gangsterism and related activities are a large—and growing—problem in the region. According to survey data from the Caribbean Youth Development report, 20 percent of male students and 12 percent of female students surveyed reported having belonged at one point to a gang (World Bank, 2003a). This echoes the marked increase in the number and influence of gangs cited in youth surveys in the Dominican Republic, including one conducted with youth ages 14-17 currently participating in remedial programs where half admitted to belonging to *las naciones* (ALEPH, 2006). Gangs are highly organized, satisfying the needs of young Dominicans at various levels: at the individual level (through respect, power, authority, recognition, and financial gain), the relationship level (support, caring, friendship, and health services/medical attention), and the community level (rules, training, protection, financial benefits). Gangs are located in all the major cities, though they seem to be expanding into some rural communities.

5.30 ***Drug trafficking influence.*** The defining characteristic of Dominican gangsterism is involvement in drug trafficking. The scarcity and low pay of legal jobs; the attraction of the "easy money"; the existence of laws protecting those under 18 from prison (Luther, 2002), and the marketing of drug dons (Barker, 1995) makes involvement in drug trafficking very attractive to youth (World Bank, 2003a). A recent study showed that gang members were 20 times more likely to sell drugs than non-members, and 35 times more likely to collaborate with drug dealers. Even when compared to other vulnerable groups (out of school youth, sex workers, "sankis"¹⁴), gang members were still at least three times more likely to be involved in the drug trade. Worldwide, those youth most likely to participate in delinquent or violent activities are usually part of a group, though this association tends to be higher for theft, robbery and rape, and lower for premeditated murder and assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm (United Nations, 2003).¹⁵ For a more detailed discussion of interpersonal-level risk factors and program responses, see Annex 5.1.

5.31 **Individual level:** At the individual level, some of the most influential risk factors for youth violence are biological (being male; delivery complications at birth); psychological/behavioral (degree of self regulation and self esteem; low intelligence and low educational achievement, early sexual initiation); and environmental (exposure to

¹⁴ "Sankis" are generally male prostitutes that offer services to tourists in exchange for having their entertainment costs covered, usually food and alcohol.

¹⁵ Available cross country statistical data show that 60-75 percent of all juvenile offenses are committed by members of various groups.

violence and conflict in the family; involvement with drugs, alcohol, and tobacco). In the Dominican Republic, some of the key risk factors are the following.

5.32 ***Drug and alcohol use.*** Although data on drug and alcohol use are scanty, available evidence suggests a widespread social acceptance of alcohol in nearly all Caribbean countries, and of marijuana in some, among both in-school and out-of-school youth (Barker, 1995). In Jamaica, over three-quarters of students report that alcohol and cigarettes are easily obtainable and 60 percent believe the same about marijuana, while almost half have close friends that smoke “ganja” (National Centre for Youth Development, 2003). In the Dominican Republic, alcohol is very accessible and by far the drug most widely consumed by youth. According to a recent survey conducted among secondary school students, 81 percent had consumed alcohol at some point in their lives, while 85 percent had had the opportunity to consume (Aleph, 2006).¹⁶ A separate survey finds the mean age at first consumption of alcohol to be 13 years (Luther, et al., 2002). Two characteristics unique to the Dominican Republic are the high rate of non-marijuana drug consumption (63 percent of drugs reported used were drugs other than marijuana), and the high prevalence of tranquilizers and stimulants consumed, at 12.8 percent (females) and 6.5 percent (males), and 6.2 percent (females) and 4.4 percent (males) respectively. These figures were the highest in a recent OAS report on drug consumption among seven countries in the LAC region (Organization of American States, 2004).

5.33 The age of onset of ***sexual activity*** in the Caribbean is the lowest in the world (Blum, 2002, as cited in World Bank, 2003a). Data from the Caribbean Health Survey showed that of the 35 percent of students who reported having had sex, initiation occurred before the age of 13 for nearly two-thirds (including 82 percent of males and 52 percent of females), surpassing all other regions for which data is available (Halcon, 2003). In a related study, early initiation of intercourse was found to be predictive of weapon-related violence and gang involvement (among boys and girls), and alcohol use and running away (among girls) (Ohene, 2005). Teenage pregnancy in particular is a pressing concern as it is an important contributor to delivery complications at birth: the Dominican Republic ranks fifth in the Latin America region in number of births among 15-19 year-olds, nearly double the average for the region (Table 5.2). For more detailed discussion of individual level risk factors and program responses see Annex 5.1.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE RESPONSE TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

5.34 The fundamental challenge in assessing the effectiveness of youth violence prevention strategies in the Caribbean—and in the Dominican Republic in particular—is that although a multitude of programs exist, there is virtually no evaluated evidence of such interventions to guide policymakers and practitioners in identifying the relative effectiveness (including cost-effectiveness) of strategies and approaches. The recommendations presented here therefore draw on international research and experiences that have been rigorously evaluated and proven effective in order to: i) identify current programs that merit expansion and highlight elements that could improve

¹⁶ These figures are for lifetime prevalence (not annual).

existing strategies; and ii) suggest complementary strategies to consider, including some which would require a reassessment of current approaches in light of their relative ineffectiveness.

5.35 Table 5.3 presents widely accepted examples of youth violence prevention strategies that have proven effective—and ineffective—in a range of contexts.¹⁷ The framework addresses two important considerations: i) the *developmental stages of an individual* (from early childhood to early adulthood); and ii) the *ecological systems* through which risks can be addressed (presented in Chapter 3). The strategies presented here are not exhaustive, but are meant to emphasize the spectrum of possible solutions. No single strategy on its own is likely to be sufficient to address youth violence; multiple, concurrent approaches are required. Since much of the current knowledge of effective approaches and programs is based on international evidence, care must be taken to ensure relevance for the particular country and community in which they are implemented.

5.36 In recent years, the Dominican Republic has placed increasing emphasis on finding solutions to the problems of crime and violence in general, and youth violence in particular. As in most countries, this strategy comprises policies that fall into two broad categories: i) those that are control/treatment oriented, using the police, courts and prison system to control the behavior of individuals who engage in violence; and ii) and those that are prevention oriented, either towards the general population or towards individuals considered at risk. Using the international evidence summarized in Table 5.3 and an inventory of over 50 of the most prominent public and non-government programs addressing youth violence in the Dominican Republic,¹⁸ this section highlights select strategies and programs that merit particular attention for further evaluation and potential expansion.¹⁹

5.37 **Provide holistic violence control/prevention approaches** targeted to high-violence communities, emphasizing a combination of community policing and improved public services. This type of approach tends to address risk factors at all levels, if appropriately implemented. It targets youth and their families with much needed basic services (early child care, education, health, security) as well as positive alternatives to crime and violence (through second chance programs, extracurricular activities, life skills and occupational training). Although international evidence of the impact of community policing on reducing crimes is mixed, it does improve the public's perception of safety as

¹⁷ Compiled from WHO (2002) ; WHO (2003) ; World Bank (2006); US Surgeon General (2001); Tolan and Guerra (1994), Sherman (1997) and Kellerman et al. (1997).

¹⁸ See Annexes 5.4 and 5.5, which are based on Aleph (2006). Programs were inventoried using the ecological framework, assessing both the level of intervention (individual, relationship, community, and society) as well as the level of prevention targeted (primary prevention or universal coverage; secondary prevention targeted to youth at risk; tertiary prevention geared to reducing violence among high-risk youths or preventing further violence from existing perpetrators).

¹⁹ Programs were selected based on a series of criteria: i) fall within internationally proven strategies for addressing youth violence or have demonstrated effectiveness in the Dominican Republic; ii) have a significant beneficiary population; iii) can be replicated with existing institutional capacity; and iv) where data is available, are shown to be cost-effective.

well as the image of the police (WHO, 2003)²⁰ (examples in the Dominican Republic which address part of these objectives include Barrios Seguros and Centros Educativos de Fe y Alegría).

5.38 Expand access/retention in schools for high-risk individuals and communities, with particular emphasis on incentives for early child development and for completing secondary education.²¹ International research underscores consistently the importance of the protective factor of providing disadvantaged children with a strong start in school through quality early child development programs (ages 0-5), as well as that of keeping children in school—and connected to their school—through their adolescence. Long term follow-up studies of prototypes in a range of countries have shown important effects on reducing violence and other delinquent behavior. Moreover, they have proven more cost-effective in the long run than many other options.²² Examples in the Dominican Republic include the Fund for Early Education (Fondo de Educación Inicial) and the SOLIDARIDAD program. Neither the Fondo de Educación Inicial (not surprisingly, given its target population) nor the Solidaridad program offers financial support to keep students in secondary school. Given the high rates of school leaving at the secondary level, expanding SOLIDARIDAD from basic to secondary education may be worth considering (see Annex 5.1).

5.39 Improve school quality, relevance and efforts to incorporate violence prevention into the curriculum, and increase the involvement of parents. Together with local NGOs, the Ministry of Education is actively reforming the curricula, enhancing teacher training to improve the quality of primary and secondary education and reduce abuse in schools, increasing the relevancy of education, as well as actively promoting non-violence in the curriculum.²³ Through its Decentralization Plan, it also intends to significantly increase parental involvement in school management (World Bank, 2003a).

5.40 Provide “second chances” for youth at risk to complete their formal education, obtain relevant job skills, and/or learn relevant life skills. Programs with flexible schedules designed to allow youth to obtain their primary and secondary education equivalency are a cost-effective way to invest in the human capital development of the large share of youth who have never completed their formal education. Programs offering job skills with job experience (internships) as well as life skills training have been shown to have an important impact on improving the quality of jobs obtained by youth, an important factor in reducing crime and violence (World Bank, 2006b). Examples in the Dominican Republic include Educación Básica Para Adultos

²⁰ See, for example, Buvinic and Morrison 2001. See also DESEPAZ Program in Colombia. WHO (2003b)

²¹ Note conditional cash transfer programs in Mexico (Oportunidades), Colombia (Familias en Accion), and Brazil (Bolsa Familia).

²² US Surgeon General (2001); Kellerman, A. et al.; World Bank. (2006b); Schweinhart L. et al (2005).

²³ Secretaría de Educación programs include, among others the Education Strategic Development Plan (2003) Protección Contra la Violencia, Resolución de Conflictos, Plan de Descentralización, Proyecto de Apoyo para la Calidad Educativa, Uso Indebido de Drogas, Proyecto Multigrado Renovado (see Annex 5.4 for further details)

Table 5.3: Violence prevention strategies by developmental stage and ecological context

	Early Childhood (0-5 years)	Middle Childhood (6-11 years)	Adolescence (12-19 years)	Early adulthood (20-29 years)
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Early Child Development and Preschool enrichment programs for at risk children (a) * Preventing unintended pregnancies * Parenting training * Increasing access to prenatal and postnatal care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Parenting training (a) *Programs providing information about drug abuse (b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Providing incentives for youth at high risk for violence to complete secondary schooling (a) * Academic enrichment programs for those at risk of dropping out *Individual Counseling (b) *Probation or parole programs that include meetings with prison inmates describing the brutality of prison life (b) *Residential programs in psychiatric or correctional institutions (b) *Programs providing information about drug abuse (b) * Training in the safe use of guns (b) *Programs modeled on basic military training (b) *Trying young offenders in adult courts (b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Providing incentives to pursue courses in higher education * Parenting Training * Job Training combined with life skills and internships * Residential programs for offenders (b) * Psychotherapy for high-risk youth and offenders (b)
Relationship (e.g. family, peers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Home visitation (a) *Training in parenting (a) * Marital and family therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mentoring Programs (a) * Targeted incentives to mother to keep child in school (a) * Home-School partnership programs to promote parental involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mentoring programs (a) *Family therapy (a) *Temporary foster care programs for serious and chronic delinquents *Peer mediation or peer counseling (b) * Gang membership prevention/intervention programs (b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Programs to strengthen ties to family and jobs, and reduce involvement in violent behavior
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Monitoring lead levels and removing toxins from homes * Increasing the availability and quality of early child development and child-care facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Creating safe routes for children on their way to and from school or other community activities *Improving school settings, including teacher practices, school policies and security *Providing after-school programs to extend adult supervision * Extracurricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Creating safe routes for youths on their way to and from school or other community activities *Improving school settings, including teacher practices, school policies and security *Extracurricular activities/supervised after-school programs * Positive youth development programs * Supporting classroom management techniques * Behavior modification via “ thinking” skills * Providing “second chance” education programs (equivalency) * Life skills training *Training health care workers to identify and refer youths at high risk for violence *Community policing *Reducing the availability of alcohol *Improving emergency response, trauma care and access to health services * National Youth Service Programs *Buying back guns (b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Establishing adult recreational programs *Community policing * Proactive arrests * Directed patrols *Reducing availability of alcohol *Improving emergency response, trauma care and access to health services * High quality rehabilitation programs * Imprisonment of high-rate career criminals * Prison-based drug rehab programs * National Youth Service Programs * Corporal punishment in schools (b) * Citizen patrols (b) * Social casework: counseling, close supervision and social services (b) * Reactive arrests (b) * Random patrols (b) *Buying back guns (b) * Trying young offenders in adult courts (b)
Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Deconcentrating poverty * Reducing income inequality * Reducing media violence * Public information campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Deconcentrating poverty *Reducing inequality *Reducing media violence *Public information campaigns *Reforming educational systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Deconcentrating poverty *Reducing income inequality *Public information campaigns *Reducing media violence *Enforcing laws prohibiting illegal transfers of guns to youth *Strengthening and improving police and judicial systems *Reforming educational systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Deconcentrating poverty *Reducing income inequality *Job creation programs for the chronically unemployed *Public information campaigns *Promoting safe and secure storage of firearms *Strengthening and improving police and juvenile justice systems

Sources: Compiled from WHO (2002); WHO (2003); Blueprints (2003); World Bank (2006b); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2001); Tolan and Guerra (1994), Sherman (1997) and Kellerman et al. (1997).

(a) Demonstrated to be effective in reducing youth violence or risk factors for youth violence

(b) Least promising or shown to be ineffective in reducing youth violence or risk factors for youth violence

and PREPARA (SEE), Juventud y Empleo (SET) and the Aprendices con Don Bosco after-school program.

5.41 Promote strategies using existing youth serving organizations to increase capacity for home visitation and parental training to reduce levels of violence in the home. Home visitation is a proven approach to reducing youth violence and delinquency which exists in many parts of the world. It is targeted to low-income young mothers and families who are expecting or have recently had their first child, and those at increased risk of abusing their children with the objective of providing parenting training, support, counseling, child development monitoring and referrals to outside agencies. It has proven effectiveness in a range of countries with significant long term effects in reducing violence and delinquency, as well as other risk factors such as alcohol abuse (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; WHO, 2003; Olds DL et al, 1998; Farrington and Welsh, 1999; Blueprints, 2003.) Examples in the Dominican Republic include PROFAMILIA, IDDI, Don Bosco, Progresando (see Annex 5.5).

Complementary Strategies to Consider

5.42 Provide positive role models through nation-wide mentoring programs. Well-conducted mentoring programs, which tend to be relatively cost-effective, can reduce aggressive behavior, delay the onset of drug and alcohol usage among youth and boost school retention and performance. These programs also have significant impacts on reduced substance abuse, reduced skipping school, and improved relationships with their families (World Bank, 2003a; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Tierney et al, 2000).

5.43 Open schools after hours and on weekends for supervised extra-curricular activities, training and conflict resolution in high-crime communities. Peak times for juvenile crime are during the hours immediately after school, yet many youth are unsupervised after school because their parents work. After-school programs hold great potential value and deserve serious consideration in community prevention planning.²⁴ According to a UNESCO study, participating schools in a similar program in Brazil demonstrated as much as a 60 percent reduction in violence, as compared to other schools in the area. The program also reduced the rates of sexual aggression, suicide, substance abuse, theft, and armed robbery (World Bank, 2006b).

5.44 Pilot national youth service programs, or service-learning programs which give youth practical work experience and life skills while simultaneously helping to meet key development objectives at a national or community level. Jamaica has a National Youth Service program that targets youth 17-24 who are out of school and unemployed. It combines life skills training with 8 months of work exposure in jobs such as teaching aids, health facilitators, early childhood caregivers, environmental aides and information technology (IADB, 2002). Controlled longitudinal studies of the American Conservation and Youth Corps aimed primarily at disadvantaged youth 16-24 found that

²⁴ Several controlled studies have found that well-supervised after-school programs substantially reduce juvenile crime, drug use and vandalism. For more information see: Inter-American Development Bank (2002) and Sickmund et. al (1997).

program participants in a 15-month follow up were much more likely to have worked for pay and were less likely to be arrested vis-à-vis control groups (Jastrab. et al, 1996, 2004; World Bank, 2005c).

5.45 *Several strategies have proven effective in reducing significantly the rates of rearrest and recidivism for youth with a history of chronic or violent criminal behavior* (Lipsey and Wilson, 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Two model programs for these youth use a family therapy approach, and place strong emphasis on skills training and behavioral change for youth and their parents. These include: i) **functional family therapy**; and ii) **multidimensional treatment foster care** using a clinical intervention targeting individual youth with severe criminal behavior and placing them in trained foster home care as an alternative to incarceration, group or residential treatment. Meta analyses have shown that community-based treatment is more successful than residential treatment and that both types of programs have significantly reduced the number of days of incarceration, overall arrest rates, drug use, and program dropouts versus control groups (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

5.46 *Reduce emphasis on “mano dura” programs that emphasize harsher penalties, increased arrests, and more police controls.* Criminalization, incarceration and suppression are inefficient responses to chronic youth offenders, gang members, and those committing violent crimes. Despite being a common official response by governments, these “mano dura” programs have proven to be the least effective among a range of policy options (World Bank, 2006b). One promising justice system approach with strong deterrent effects is an intensive protective supervision strategy which removes delinquent youths (status offenders) from criminal justice institutions and provides them with proactive and extensive community supervision with trained professionals (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

5.47 *Apply existing laws separating incarcerated youth and adults.* The imprisonment of child offenders with adults (due to the lack of facilities for young delinquents) is common in the Caribbean (Singh, 2001, as quoted in World Bank, 2003a). The principle of incarcerating young offenders separately from adults has been accepted in the Dominican Republic, but its application is minimal, with many youth ending up in state prisons. Prison conditions range from “poor” to “harsh”, with overcrowding being a pressing concern (U.S. State Department, 2006).²⁵ Improving prison conditions and separating young offenders are important remedial policies as both concerns are associated with higher recidivism.²⁶

5.48 *Enforce new legislation requiring the registration of guns.* Currently, it is enforced by occasional checkpoints where vehicles must produce the certificates of registration for any firearms in the car. Banning guns during periods known for high violence/homicide could also be considered, such as weekends and holidays. This

²⁵ In 2005, 145 people died in a fire in a cell block that was designed to hold 80.

²⁶ There are 4 prisons for minors separated by sex. Minors can be prosecuted in either corrective or criminal status. Corrective status is for minor crimes (simple robbery, delinquency, drug use) whereas criminal status is for larger crimes (murders, aggravated robbery). Corrective imprisonment ranges from a few months up until 3 years whereas criminal imprisonment ranges from 1-10 years.

approach was successfully implemented by the municipalities of Cali and Bogota, which witnessed lower homicide rates as high as 20 percent when the ban was in effect (Guerra, 2006; World Bank, 2003b).

5.49 ***Restrict the availability of alcohol.*** This has demonstrated positive effects on reducing violence (both criminal and domestic) as well as criminal offenses (both serious and minor related to property and traffic) (WHO, 2003). Given the widespread acceptance of alcohol consumption even at very early ages in the Dominican Republic, a concerted effort to treat alcohol as a drug in all anti-drug programs may have considerable impact on reducing violence. Policies such as higher taxation of alcohol combined with greater enforcement of minimum legal age have demonstrated success in reducing consumption among young people in some countries (WHO, 2003b). In Colombia, alcohol sales were restricted with closing times imposed on bars and nightclubs (Guerrero and Concha-Eastman, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

5.50 The most important conclusion of this chapter is that youth violence is a legitimate concern for the region, but it is not an intractable problem. *Youth violence is preventable.* Although deaths and injuries from youth violence constitute a major public health, social and economic problem across the Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic, a broad range of viable strategies for preventing and reducing youth violence exists. Moreover, it is important to remember that youth are not “the problem,” but rather a product of the individual, family, community and social environments in which they live.

5.51 In addition to the thematic conclusions presented above, several cross-cutting recommendations emerge. First, there is an urgent need to **develop and strengthen data systems which regularly compile and monitor trends in youth violence** (including injuries and deaths, both as victims and perpetrators) across key institutions. Current data is extremely weak and inconsistent, and there is little collaboration across entities. In the Dominican Republic, the Procuraduría General could establish a system by which routine information available from health services, emergency departments, the police, the criminal justice system, and other authorities relevant to youth violence can be compared on an annual basis. Strengthening these systems will provide valuable information for formulating policies *and* for evaluating them.²⁷

5.52 Second, there is a clear need to **generate scientific evidence** on the patterns and causes of youth violence in specific social settings, as well as the cost to society of such violence. Perhaps more important, however, is the need to generate knowledge on what works to reduce violence through rigorous evaluation of both impact and costs. Only with consistent standards of systematic evaluation of interventions can policy tradeoffs be

²⁷Uniform standards for defining and measuring youth violence should be incorporated in regular surveillance systems. Included in this should be methods to establish the ratio of fatal to non-fatal cases of violence-related injuries, classified by the method of attack, age and sex of the victim. Such data can then be used to estimate the magnitude of the youth violence problem where only one type of data – such as mortality or morbidity – is available. See WHO (2003).

legitimately addressed.²⁸ In particular, there is a need for: i) longitudinal studies evaluating long term impacts of interventions conducted in childhood; ii) evaluations of the impact of interventions in sectors sometimes considered unrelated (e.g., education, health, employment, etc.) on reducing youth violence and other risk factors; iii) studies on cost-effectiveness of prevention (and control) programs.

5.53 Finally, there is a need to **improve public awareness of the availability of ongoing interventions, with particular attention paid to high-risk communities and youth**. A public information campaign should not be limited to potential beneficiaries, but should also extend to public and civil society groups working in this area as there is considerable lack of knowledge of existing programs in other institutions. Indeed, in the Dominican Republic, as well as across the sub-region, there are a multitude of programs available to address many of the risk factors facing youth. Evaluating their effectiveness and sharing this knowledge across countries with similar issues to confront will contribute enormously to future success in reducing youth violence.

²⁸ Consistent standards include: i) the application of experimental design; ii) evidence of a statistically significant reduction in the incidence of violent behavior or violence-related injuries; iii) replication across different sites and different cultural contexts; and iv) evidence that the impact is sustained over time.