



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Reducing Youth Crime

The Effectiveness of Universal School-Based Programs for the Prevention of Violent and Aggressive Behavior: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

[Matthew Reynolds] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds.

The United States justice system is overloaded with juveniles who have committed violent crimes. While there are many programs designed to rehabilitate teenagers, other programs are trying to prevent youth crimes from happening in the first place.

Robert Hahn, from CDC's Guide to Community Preventive Services, was part of a team that studied many violence prevention programs used in schools throughout the U.S. He's here to tell us about that investigation and what the CDC recommends regarding these programs. Welcome to the show, Dr. Hahn.

[Dr. Hahn] Thank you. Good to be here.

[Matthew Reynolds] Your report sheds some light on some troubling statistics. For every hundred teenagers, four crimes are committed. And so we're clear, you're defining these ages as between 12 and 20 years. What types of crimes are you seeing and who are the victims?

[Dr. Hahn] About two-thirds of these crimes are what are called *simple assaults*. They require two or fewer days of hospitalization for the victim. One-third are more serious crimes. They are referred to as *aggravated assaults* and they include also rape and robbery. The victims can be of any age but many of the victims are juveniles themselves.

[Matthew Reynolds] So, how do those numbers compare to teenage crimes in other countries?

[Dr. Hahn] Well, if you look at the more severe crimes, take the case of homicide, the World Health Organization has compared a number of high income nations. The U.S. has the highest rate of homicides among these nations for young people between the ages of 10 and 29. The U.S. rate is 6 times that of the rate of the next highest nation which is New Zealand.

[Matthew Reynolds] Some schools have rolled out violence prevention programs as a way of curbing the youth crime you just described. Before you weigh in with whether they're effective, describe these programs. What's involved?

[Dr. Hahn] The programs that we looked at are universal programs. So they are given to all kids in the classroom and/or school. They look at different kinds of things. They focus on different kinds of aspects of violence. Some of them just teach about the problem of violence and alternative solutions. Some of them work with skills development. For example, teaching kids how to resolve conflicts and difficulties among kids. Other programs change the school environment and many of these programs combine different levels of interventions.

[Matthew Reynolds] Based on your investigation, are these campaigns effective?

[Dr. Hahn] Fortunately, we found that these programs are effective for all grade levels. We looked at children from pre-K educational programs through high school. And on average, these programs reduce violent and aggressive behavior by about 15 percent. In addition, there were other benefits. For example, they improve the school environment, they improve learning, they reduce truancy, and they reduce drug abuse and delinquency.

[Matthew Reynolds] These programs may be effective, but are they cost effective as well?

[Dr. Hahn] The costs of the programs vary substantially from about \$15 per child per year to about \$200 per child per year. But, while they sound expensive, the one case in which they were evaluated in a program called Social Development Project in Seattle found that, for each dollar spent, more than \$3 were saved, so that they are highly cost beneficial.

[Matthew Reynolds] Can you talk about the money that's saved and how they made that determination?

[Dr. Hahn] They looked at obviously the cost of the programs, in terms of what was spent per child, and then they also looked at long term outcomes. For example, the crime that was avoided and the cost of incarceration and the cost, I believe, to the children as well, in terms of lost opportunities. So there were substantial savings through these programs by the investment initially made in the program.

[Matthew Reynolds] For people that are interested in more information about this topic Dr. Hahn, where would you send them?

[Dr. Hahn] We will shortly be posting on our website a summary of the programs. Our website is www.thecommunityguide.org. We will also be posting there copies of articles which describe our research and our findings.

[Matthew Reynolds] Dr. Hahn, thank you for joining us today.

[Dr. Hahn] A pleasure.

[Matthew Reynolds] That's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

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