

**Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention
Approaches to Crime in Australia (Summary Volume)**

Author

Hemel, Ross, Cashmore, Judith

Published

1999

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Pathways to prevention

Developmental and early intervention
approaches to crime in Australia

SUMMARY VOLUME

National Anti-Crime Strategy
An initiative of the Australian States and Territories



National Crime Prevention is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government. National Crime Prevention finds and promotes ways of preventing violence, crime and fear of crime in Australian communities. This approach involves partnerships with a range of stakeholders whose activities may impact on crime, including, Commonwealth agencies, State and Territory governments, local governments, non-government organisations, academic institutions, community groups and the business sector. The National Crime Prevention Unit is part of the Attorney-General's Department and was formerly known as the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime.

R E L A T I O N S H I P

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments cooperate as equal partners, through National Crime Prevention and the National Anti-Crime Strategy. This partnership recognises the primary role of the States and Territories for law enforcement, crime prevention and community safety, and the key role of the Commonwealth in research, evaluation, training and social policy issues.

This collaboration will develop the right crime prevention and safety strategies for Australian communities by drawing on existing expertise at all levels of Australia's government and non-government agencies.

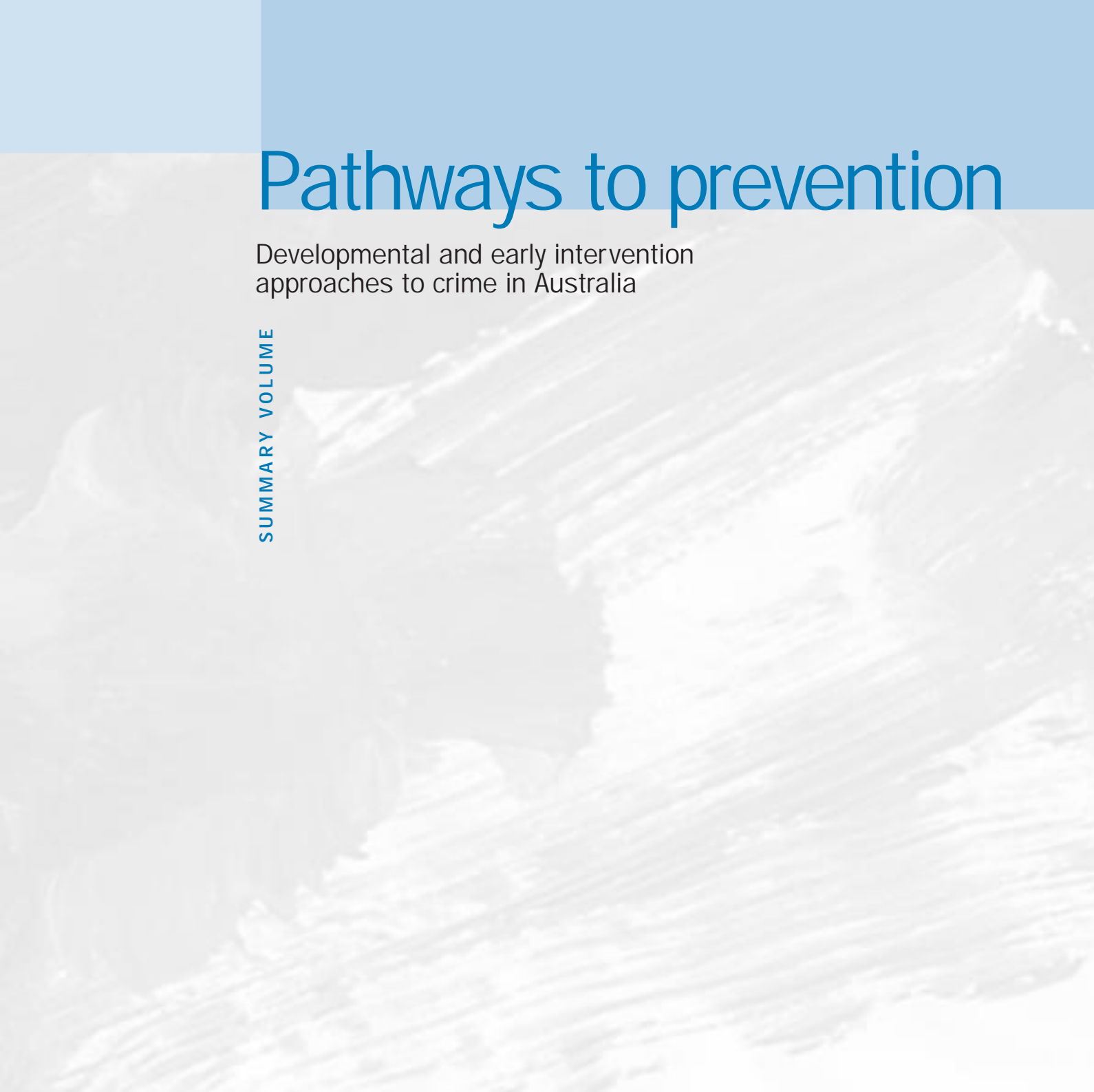
The National Anti-Crime Strategy is a shared initiative of State and Territory governments and is supported by the Commonwealth.

It is the task of the National Anti-Crime Strategy to harness Australia's crime prevention talent and ensure that all agencies and officials cooperate to develop and promote best practice in crime prevention.

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Developmental and early intervention
approaches to crime in Australia

SUMMARY VOLUME



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Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600
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Our new website is being developed. In the meantime,
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National Crime Prevention (1999)
*Pathways to prevention: Developmental and
early intervention approaches to crime in Australia.*
National Crime Prevention,
Attorney-General's Department: Canberra

© Commonwealth of Australia
January 1999
ISBN 0 642 28402 4 (Full Report)
ISBN 0 642 28403 2 (Appendices)
ISBN 0 642 28405 9 (Summary Volume)
ISBN 0 642 28406 7 (Set)

Series editor: Kerryn Simmons
Design: Rochfort Thomas Mackintosh, Canberra
Print: National Capital Printing, Canberra
Publisher: National Crime Prevention,
Attorney-General's Department

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Campaign Against Violence and Crime Unit (now known as National Crime Prevention) would like to thank the following groups and individuals for their involvement in and contributions to the project on early intervention and developmental approaches to crime prevention:

- The National Anti-Crime Strategy
- The Project Management Group comprising:
 - Jane Fisher, National Anti-Crime Strategy Coordinating Officer
 - Michelle Huntsman, NSW Attorney General’s Department
 - Scotty Mitchell, Northern Territory Police
 - Judy Putt, NCAVAC Unit
 - Ann Scott, Queensland Police Service

The Group has also benefited from the assistance of Bob Gee of the Queensland Police Service and Peter Homel of the NSW Attorney General’s Department.

- The writing/publishing team involved in preparing this summary volume —
 - Melanie Brown
 - Professor Ross Homel
 - Judy Putt
 - Kerryn Simmons
- The research team and authors of the full report — the Developmental Crime Prevention Consortium — comprising:

CRIMINOLOGY

Professor Ross Homel (Griffith University)

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Dr Judy Cashmore (NSW Child Protection Council)
Ms Linda Gilmore (University of Queensland)
Emeritus Professor Jacqueline Goodnow (Macquarie University)
Professor Alan Hayes (Macquarie University)
Associate Professor Jeanette Lawrence (University of Melbourne)

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

Dr Marie Leech (Uniya, Jesuit Social Justice Centre)
Professor Ian O'Connor (University of Queensland)
Emeritus Professor Tony Vinson (Uniya, Jesuit Social Justice Centre)

SOCIOLOGY

Professor Jakob Najman (University of Queensland)
Professor John Western (University of Queensland)

TEAM CONVENER

Professor Ross Homel

FULL TIME PROJECT OFFICERS

Ms Linda Gilmore (Developmental Literature)
Dr Marie Leech (Audit of Services)

Special thanks to all the individuals and agencies that helped the research team with their inquiries.

A very special thank you to all the children who contributed their artwork to this publication.

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F O R E W O R D



The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the States and Territories, is supporting a range of projects to identify cost effective approaches to the prevention of crime and violence.

The research summarised in this report represents a significant contribution to our understanding of how we as a society can tackle crime. The researchers, an interdisciplinary team of criminologists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, and experts in social work and social policy, present a persuasive argument for a developmental approach to crime prevention. This perspective highlights the importance of the social context in which children grow up. Strengthening community networks and family support is vital. Durable interventions early in the lifecycle and at critical stages in an individual's development are also crucial.

To assist service providers and policy makers to incorporate a developmental approach to crime prevention into their activities, the research team has produced a series of steps and recommendations that can be applied to local initiatives.

The Commonwealth Government is strongly committed to early intervention and will provide significant funding for a new program focused on youth crime and supporting families.

I hope that the report helps you to consider ways that we can work together to create a child friendly environment that will ultimately reduce levels of crime and violence in our society.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Vanstone".

Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND CUSTOMS

P R E F A C E

REPORTS

The main aim of this summary volume is to convey key information and conclusions to practitioners and policy makers interested in early intervention and developmental approaches to crime prevention.

This summary is based on the full report *Pathways to prevention: Early intervention and developmental approaches to crime in Australia*, which is available in hard copy at no cost from the National Campaign Against Violence and Crime unit (NCAVAC) or can be accessed on the NCAVAC website (www.ncavac.gov.au).

Two appendices to the full report are available — a bibliography with selected abstracts, and detailed information on 46 programs. They are available with the full report and can also be accessed on the NCAVAC website.

BACKGROUND

The project on early intervention and developmental approaches to crime prevention is a joint initiative of NCAVAC and the National Anti-Crime Strategy (NACS). It is designed to take place in two stages. The research for Stage 1 has been completed and included a literature review, an assessment of existing services in Australia related to developmental crime prevention, and the development of recommendations for the second stage of the project.

The Developmental Crime Prevention Consortium was selected to undertake Stage 1. Headed by Professor Ross Homel, the Consortium completed the research between September 1997 and February 1998. This summary volume is an abridged version of their full report on Stage 1.

The summary outlines the rationale and method for the research, and sets out the basic concepts of developmental crime prevention. It presents an overview of the research literature and of the assessment of Australian services and programs. Drawing on the full report, significant themes are identified which inform the series of recommendations that make up a policy framework for developmental prevention.

The research has produced two practical outcomes — the policy framework and a recommendation for a demonstration project — both presented here in shortened form. The framework and the recommendation inform future directions for the project. In the final section of the summary there is an indication of how the Commonwealth will develop Stage 2 of the project, and explore avenues to promote the policy framework.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

RATIONALE

There is currently a great deal of concern about crime, especially juvenile crime, in Australia. In many respects this concern is justified, given the high economic cost and the often devastating psychological impact of criminal victimisation. The official statistics also point to some worrying trends. For example, there is increasing involvement of juveniles in offences against the person, and an increasing involvement of females in all forms of juvenile offending. There is evidence from overseas that the peak age of offending is increasing, and that the usual rate of desistance from offending in the late teenage years is declining.

This pattern may be consistent with the decreased labour market participation of adolescents and young adults, given the many prosocial associations of meaningful work. Uncertainty about employment and a generally insecure social environment may result in a continuing increase in the risk factors for problem behaviours and criminality among adolescents and young adults.

What then should be the societal response to the serious problem of juvenile crime?

The roots of criminal offending are complex and cumulative, and are embedded in social as well as personal histories. The risk of crime is exacerbated by not providing meaningful social pathways for a diverse range of young people, and by not promoting the attachment of individuals and communities to mainstream social supports and developmental institutions such as families and schools.

Only in very recent years has much of the scientifically persuasive evidence emerged that interventions early in life can have long term impacts on crime and other social problems such as substance abuse. However, these studies tell us mostly about the impact of specific programs directed at children or families, not about approaches that attempt to strengthen families in the context of improving

The roots of criminal offending are complex and cumulative; embedded in social as well as personal histories.

the ‘child friendliness’ of local communities. Certainly in Australia there is little tradition of long term scientific evaluation of early interventions designed to prevent crime.

This is not to claim that there are no services in this country that aim to improve the lives of young people and their families and neighbourhoods, nor that early intervention to prevent later problems is not a well established objective of many programs. However, few of these programs have crime prevention as an explicit objective, few are explicitly developmental in the sense that is explained in the full report, and few are adequately evaluated in terms of short or long term impacts on young people, their families, and their communities.

*Few early
childhood
programs
have crime
prevention as
an explicit
objective.*

OBJECTIVES

In broad terms, the aim of this research project was to address this vacuum in the provision of services and in the practice of crime prevention in Australia. At the same time, the research team wanted to make a contribution at the theoretical level by exploring in depth the concepts of ‘developmental prevention’ and ‘early intervention’, with particular attention to what recent research can tell us about the nature and causes of crime and its prevention.

In more specific terms, the research team was engaged to:

1. Review the literature on early intervention or developmental approaches to crime prevention, with a view to clarifying the nature of this approach and its applicability to Australian society.
2. Carry out an audit of existing social and health services in Australia, and also of innovative interventions that enhance or go beyond existing services, together with an evaluation of these services and interventions in the light of the literature review.



3. Formulate:
 - (a) a policy framework for the improvement and evaluation of existing services and interventions; and
 - (b) a framework for the development, implementation, management and evaluation of a pilot intervention that builds on or enhances existing services.

METHOD

The project was based on three kinds of activities that took place more or less simultaneously:

1. A review of the scientific literature on early intervention and developmental prevention.
2. Identification of early intervention programs or services currently operating in Australia, and the collection of detailed information about a sample of 46 of these programs.
3. Analysis of the programs and of the scientific literature with a view to:
 - (a) appraising the adequacy of existing programs from a developmental crime prevention perspective; and
 - (b) designing a policy framework for the development, implementation, management and evaluation of local-area or neighbourhood-based crime prevention programs.

The aim is to highlight the several forms risk and protective factors may take.

Literature review

The literature review begins with longitudinal studies: studies that help identify the ‘risk and protective factors’ that are related to the later emergence or non emergence of behaviours classed as ‘offences’ or as ‘antisocial’. The aim is not simply to identify and list risk and protective factors, but to highlight the several forms that these factors may take.

Highlighted also are the two main ways by which longitudinal analyses seek to bring out the interconnections among risk factors, protective factors, and outcomes: by the construction of models and by the development of ideas about underlying processes. The goal is an integrative picture.

The goal is an integrative picture.

Intervention studies provided the main focus for the literature review. These test the relevance of proposals about risk and protective factors that emerge from longitudinal studies. Intervention studies must be the primary base for further preventive action. In the full report, the opportunity is taken to bring out what these studies have yielded with regard to outcomes and to the possible processes that underlie the effects of intervention.

In the full report, the literature review concludes with a topic that has attracted both longitudinal and intervention studies, and that serves as a focus for considering in some depth the ways in which early events influence later events. This topic is child abuse and neglect.

Programs and services

The collection of data about early intervention programs operating in Australia was greatly hampered by the fact that there is no comprehensive information on the precise nature of family support services. Similarly, in the crucial area of provision of preschool and childcare services, no national data exist as to the number of preschool places available let alone the fine detail of programs offered to children.

There is no comprehensive information on the precise nature of family support services.

This gap in official data prompted two methodological strategies:

1. A reliance on directions for investigation suggested by service providers.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, a decision to visit services local to the researcher (ie near Sydney), on the assumption that these services would be similar in key characteristics to those further afield.

Interviews centred on issues such as client demographics, risk and protective factors targeted, and evaluation.

The degree of fragmentation within the field in relation to data and administration necessitated the use of a range of techniques to gather basic information about programs and services.

The first technique, a blanket cover of government and service related organisations, was instituted in the first week of the project. A letter was prepared outlining the nature of the project and areas of interest in relation to programs and services. Letters were sent to directors of Commonwealth, State and Territory departments of community services, education and health; to all State councils of social service; to State and Territory ethnic organisations, and to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. In addition, a flyer was prepared, and inserted in the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) Journal *Impact* (September 1997); this reached 1,050 subscribers nationwide.

The second information gathering technique was direct consultation with key actors in the field. Discussions varied in duration but typically lasted at least one hour and involved a brief presentation. Those interviewed included representatives of 13 leading organisations in the field, as well as individuals with a wealth of practice experience. Interviews centred on issues such as goals and focus, activities undertaken, funding, client demographics, risk and protective factors targeted, and evaluation.

Classification and selection of programs

Detailed information was recorded for 46 programs and these were classified under broad headings, based partly on the classification system favoured by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare for family support services.

It is important to emphasise that many programs not included in the sample of 46 were of very high quality. Impressive programs were omitted purely for pragmatic reasons, such as a shortage of time and resources for the analysis, or because other programs already included in the sample addressed the same

range of risk and protective factors. The sample is in no respects a statistically rigorous random sample of the population of early intervention programs in Australia. The sample may be representative of the categories employed to classify programs, but these features do not permit easy generalisations about the whole early intervention field.

The appendix containing the program information is available with the full report and can be accessed on the NCAVAC website (www.ncavac.gov.au).



BASIC CONCEPTS OF
DEVELOPMENTAL PREVENTION

Developmental prevention involves intervention early in developmental pathways that lead to crime and substance abuse. It emphasises investment in ‘child friendly’ institutions and communities, and the manipulation of multiple risk and protective factors at crucial transition points, such as around birth, the preschool years, the transition from primary to high school, and the transition from high school to higher education or the workforce.

Developmental approaches do not see life as marked by one steady march toward adulthood that is set early in life, or one steady line of change, either for better or for worse. Instead, what occurs is a series of *life phases*, a series of points of change, a series of transitions. These phases and *transition points* are where intervention can occur most effectively.

At each of these transition points, there is the possibility of more than one outcome. For some children, the transition from home to school is unproblematic, especially if they have had the advantage of a happy preschool experience. Others soon learn that school is a place to stay away from as much as possible, since all you learn is that you are a failure who doesn’t belong.

Essentially, developmental approaches are characterised by an emphasis on *pathways* and on aspects of time and timing.

Some children learn school is a place to stay away from since all you learn is that you are a failure who doesn’t belong.



One crucial consequence of a focus on pathways is that ‘early intervention’ means intervention early in the pathway. This may or may not mean early in life. The nature and timing of intervention depends, from the developmental perspective, not just on the individual’s age, but on the identified pathways to offending and the critical transition points that characterise those pathways.

What happens at any particular transition point, however, depends not only on current circumstances but also on how earlier transitions have been coped with and on the extent to which they have equipped the people involved with the skills, the energy, and the openness to advice or opportunity that are now called for. In effect, past transitions may have created a pattern of either cumulative risk factors or cumulative protection.

There are then good reasons for intervening early in life. Families with babies and preschoolers that are at risk of poverty, relationship breakdown, and abusive or inept parenting styles are more likely to produce teenagers at risk of criminality and substance abuse. Once it is accepted that some configurations of risk at an early age have multiple consequences later in life, it follows that successful intervention at an early age is a cost effective preventive strategy.

Risk factors have been identified mainly from longitudinal studies, and include genetic and biological characteristics of the child, family characteristics, stressful life events and community or cultural factors. Table 1 summarises the factors that have been linked to negative outcomes.

The significance of *protective factors* is underlined by the fact that predictions from risk factors are statements of probability. Although factors such as early troublesome behaviour are highly predictive of later offending, more than 50% of at risk individuals may not progress to such outcomes.

It is especially important then to identify protective factors and mechanisms that are likely to inhibit the development of antisocial behaviour and divert children to the pathways that lead towards positive outcomes. Preventive action cannot be solely directed toward the reduction of risk, especially when risk factors are

Successful intervention at an early age is a cost effective preventive strategy.



Neither the problems nor the solutions are seen as belonging solely to an individual.

difficult to modify. A wide range of protective factors has been proposed on the basis of longitudinal studies. These have been brought together in Table 1.

Social contexts make a difference not only to the skills, strategies, or identities that individuals develop, but also to the *support* that is available when transitions are made. For example, transitions are made more easily when there are personal social supports, such as a network of friends. Transitions are also made more easily when social structures provide the necessary information on what a transition involves, or are sufficiently flexible to allow for individual differences. In an ideal world, the support available from ‘developmentally friendly’ services and structures would be able to compensate for what may be lacking within individual families or their immediate social networks.

In effect, within developmental perspectives, neither the problems nor the solutions are seen as belonging solely to an individual.

TABLE 1:

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ANTISOCIAL AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

R I S K F A C T O R S				
CHILD FACTORS	FAMILY FACTORS	SCHOOL CONTEXT	LIFE EVENTS	COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL FACTORS
prematurity low birth weight disability prenatal brain damage birth injury low intelligence difficult temperament chronic illness insecure attachment poor problem solving beliefs about aggression attributions poor social skills low self esteem lack of empathy alienation hyperactivity/disruptive behaviour impulsivity	<i>Parental characteristics:</i> teenage mothers single parents psychiatric disorder, especially depression substance abuse criminality antisocial models <i>Family environment:</i> family violence and disharmony marital discord disorganised negative interaction/social isolation large family size father absence long term parental unemployment <i>Parenting style:</i> poor supervision and monitoring of child discipline style (harsh or inconsistent) rejection of child abuse lack of warmth and affection low involvement in child's activities neglect	school failure normative beliefs about aggression deviant peer group bullying peer rejection poor attachment to school inadequate behaviour management	divorce and family break up war or natural disasters death of a family member	socioeconomic disadvantage population density and housing conditions urban area neighbourhood violence and crime cultural norms concerning violence as acceptable response to frustration media portrayal of violence lack of support services social or cultural discrimination
P R O T E C T I V E F A C T O R S				
CHILD FACTORS	FAMILY FACTORS	SCHOOL CONTEXT	LIFE EVENTS	COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL FACTORS
social competence social skills above average intelligence attachment to family empathy problem solving optimism school achievement easy temperament internal locus of control moral beliefs values self related cognitions good coping style	supportive caring parents family harmony more than two years between siblings responsibility for chores or required helpfulness secure and stable family supportive relationship with other adult small family size strong family norms and morality	positive school climate prosocial peer group responsibility and required helpfulness sense of belonging/bonding opportunities for some success at school and recognition of achievement school norms concerning violence	meeting significant person moving to new area opportunities at critical turning points or major life transitions	access to support services community networking attachment to the community participation in church or other community group community/cultural norms against violence a strong cultural identity and ethnic pride

Note: these factors have a cumulative effect on behaviour



T H E R E S E A R C H L I T E R A T U R E

LONGITUDINAL STUDIES

Longitudinal studies have yielded a great deal of information about risk and protective factors. They have also sparked a number of interesting proposals about the *processes or mechanisms* that may account for how risk or protective factors encountered at one time influence what emerges at later times.

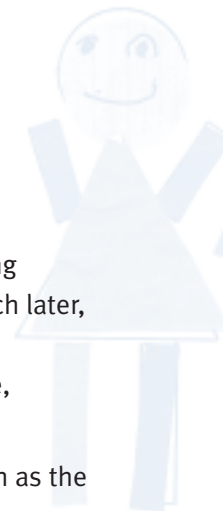
The need for some understanding of process is apparent when one considers the complex ways in which risk and protective factors can be related to one another and to outcomes. One source of complexity is the fact that *many risk factors tend to co occur* and be interrelated. For instance, family breakdown has been associated with juvenile delinquency, but family breakdown is also associated with other factors such as conflict, lowered income, and parent absence. Which of these associated factors carries the most weight?

Also contributing to the complexity is the fact that *risk factors operate cumulatively*, with some factors contributing to chains of risk. Some variables influence outcomes through their impact on other factors. For instance, early behaviour problems may contribute to school failure and school failure then increases the risk of delinquency.

To add one more source of complexity, it may be the *interaction or combination of risk factors* that is critical. For instance, children with difficult temperaments may only be at risk for delinquency when they live in particular contexts, such as unsupportive and disorganised families.

One way to create order among the many possibilities is to package risk and protective factors in terms of their impact on a *smaller set of underlying processes or mediators*. An example is provided by possible explanations of ‘adolescent-limited offending’ (as opposed to ‘life course persistent criminality’) based on data from the Dunedin longitudinal study (for a recent summary see Silva and Stanton, 1996).





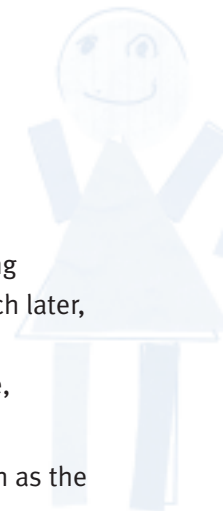
Possible processes include:

1. *Conflict between biological maturity and social immaturity.* Although teenagers are maturing earlier, their social maturity is increasingly being delayed. They generally do not experience independent living until much later, producing conflict that is expressed in offences that symbolise adult privileges or demonstrate autonomy from parental control (for instance, vandalism, car theft and substance abuse).
2. *Modelling.* Adolescents view and seek to emulate deviant models (such as the life course-persistent offenders who have already begun offending at an earlier age). These models exhibit the status, power, and reputations that most adolescents long for.
3. *Social reinforcement.* When adolescents engage in offending they receive social satisfaction from the adult roles they assume. For instance, offences such as under age drinking mimic adult privileges.

Age related processes may be linked to several risk and protective factors.

These age related processes may then be linked to several risk and protective factors. These in turn should be thought of as being linked to a specific life phase, rather than as static or constant, and as process linked rather than having some purely statistical connection to an outcome.

A second way to think of interconnections between risk and protective factors, and between these factors and outcomes, is in terms of *models for pathways*. Ideally any model would show how the interconnections vary from one life phase to another, but this dynamic aspect is as yet absent from published models. An example of a simple pathway model is provided by the ‘cycle of violence’ hypothesis that links a childhood history of abuse and neglect with later offending, particularly violent offending.



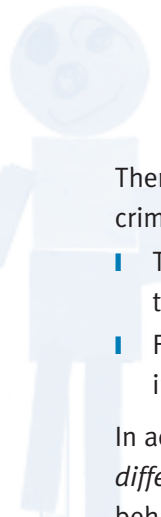
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There are several limitations to current longitudinal studies of delinquency or crime that need to be noted:

- I There are relatively few studies tracing development from early childhood to adulthood.
- I Few research projects have involved both longitudinal and intervention programs.

In addition, most longitudinal studies give little attention to *individual or group differences* in pathways and relevant factors. The developmental course of behaviours such as aggression and the differential effects of intervention programs suggest that there are different pathways to delinquency for girls and boys. Similarly, children from minority groups may be particularly exposed to some specific risk factors, such as racism.

INTERVENTION STUDIES

Programs are variously known as family support, early intervention, and home visiting programs, and provide a range of support services to families at the local level. Many of these programs are ‘early’ in two senses: they aim to identify and address problems and stresses before the problems fully develop, and they focus on the earliest stages of children’s lives (the pre- and post natal period). They may be universal (available to all parents or sometimes all first time parents), or more specifically targeted towards particular social or demographic groups (such as young single mothers, teenage mothers, or parents experiencing stress and isolation). Parenting education and advice is generally a key component, but such programs may also link families to an array of formal supports and other local services.

The major prevention programs summarised in Table 3.5 in the full report have been evaluated, and provide pointers to the impact of attempts to modify risk factors and augment protective factors, and the components that appear to be most effective. They also offer ways to test our understanding of the processes that influence developmental pathways. The strategies involved in these

Parenting education and advice is generally a key component of any program.

programs vary from short term single method approaches to intensive longer term programs comprising several different components. The programs are divided into those that commence prenatally or in infancy, those which target the preschool years, and those that are implemented in the early years of schooling. The specific desired outcomes of these prevention programs have ranged from antisocial and aggressive behaviour to child abuse and neglect, and school failure. Although a number did not specifically aim to prevent criminality, their findings have direct relevance to the prevention of criminality because they addressed common risk factors such as family isolation, teenage parenthood, inadequate parenting, and attachment difficulties. In some cases, therefore, the prevention programs had unexpected benefits by producing positive changes in areas of functioning beyond those areas that were specifically targeted. In the most notable instance of this effect, a program that aimed to improve cognitive functioning and reduce school failure (the Perry Preschool Program) showed a positive and unexpected impact on later offending and other problem behaviours.

The scope of many program evaluations is not broad enough.

Unfortunately, many intervention programs do not evaluate program success over a sufficiently wide range of outcomes or a sufficiently lengthy period for such effects to become apparent. Other methodological limitations of prevention programs include the absence of control groups or non-randomised allocation to control groups, small sample sizes, high attrition rates, and the lack of multiple treatment groups.

Programs beginning in infancy

These generally commence during the prenatal period or soon after childbirth. For most, the basic component is home visitation. Both short term and long term effects have been achieved, including cognitive gains, better school attendance and behaviour, less disruptive and impulsive behaviours, and lower rates of delinquency. These effects may have been achieved through providing families with an increased sense of control over their lives, or through increased parental

involvement in their children's development. The more successful programs include multiple components (family support and early education), last at least two years, and begin prenatally.

Preschool programs

These often target children displaying precursors of problems during the preschool years because they are at increased risk of abuse by their parents and also for delinquency and other negative outcomes (such as truancy, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, deviant peer relationships or peer rejection). Methods include parent training, quality preschool education, and child skills training. Outcomes have frequently extended beyond the initial intervention goals of improved school performance, and include reduced child behaviour problems, improved parental skills in monitoring and disciplining their children, as well as long term benefits like higher income and lower rates of serious offending.

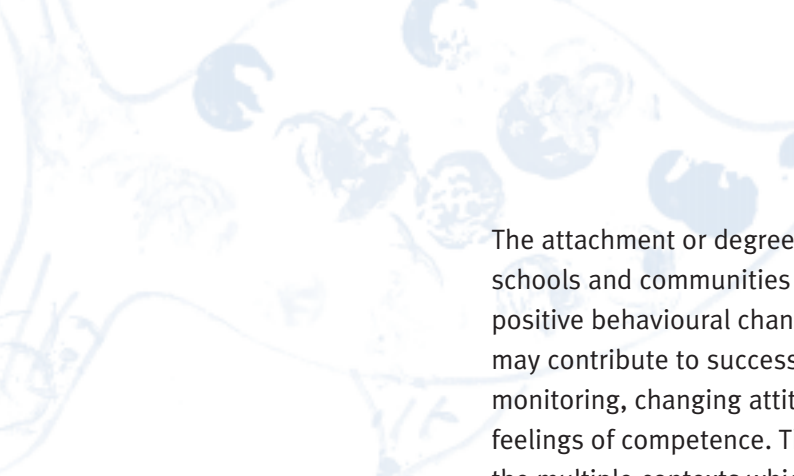
Underlying processes might include higher self esteem of children performing well at school, a greater sense of competence by parents, and reduced family stress. The key components of preschool programs appear to be cognitive enrichment that encourages child-initiated learning and responsibility, family involvement, and the combination of child training with parenting programs.

Programs in the early primary school years

These aim to modify problem behaviours, improve social skills, enhance school achievement, cognitive skills and problem solving ability, increase bonding to family, school and community, and decrease bullying. Success in all these areas has been documented. Methods include child skills training, and parent and teacher training in behaviour management.

Methods include parent training, quality preschool education, and child skills training.





The attachment or degree of involvement children experience in their homes, schools and communities may be an important mechanism contributing to positive behavioural changes in the early primary years. Other processes that may contribute to successful interventions at this phase include parental monitoring, changing attitudes (for instance, towards bullying) and parental feelings of competence. The key component appears to be the need to address the multiple contexts which influence children, including the key people in their lives — parents and teachers, and possibly other community members. Targeting only one of these is likely to have limited and short term success.

Insights from prevention studies

Just as there are no primary causes of criminal behaviour, there are also no single solutions. Different methods are appropriate for different groups and different developmental phases of the life course. The most effective interventions generally seem to be those which offer combinations of methods across different contexts. The strongest, most durable effects appear to result from programs that have been implemented early in developmental pathways and have lasted several years.

Role of child abuse and neglect

Child maltreatment is a risk factor that appears to be of particular importance for the emergence of later problems, including aggression, juvenile offending, and substance abuse. Evidence for the impact of maltreatment comes from:

- ecologic studies — which have shown increased rates of child abuse and neglect for communities in which there is a higher proportion of single parents, low income families, substance abuse, and other forms of economic and social stress — indicating the importance of the ‘social fabric’ which surrounds families;

*Child abuse
is a particularly
important
risk factor.*

- cross-sectional studies — which have shown that children with substantiated records of physical abuse and neglect were more likely than matched controls to have been arrested for non-traffic offences — either as a juvenile or as an adult — than controls matched on age, race, social class and gender; and
- studies of the juvenile welfare and justice systems — which show that children under wardship orders are much more likely to come into contact with the justice system (because of exposure to deviant peers in refuges, lack of access to appropriate advocates, visibility to the authorities, and instability in their out-of-home placements).

It is important to distinguish abuse from neglect.

It is important to distinguish abuse from neglect. Neglect in the literature is almost as strong a predictor of violent offending as physical abuse, and neglect, inadequate supervision and support, and verbal aggression have been found to be more significant than abuse in several studies. Poverty, and social and economic stress have also been found to be more closely related to neglect than to abuse, and some have suggested that the effects of these forms of stress are mediated via the effects of neglect and poor parental supervision and support, allowing children to have access to a deviant peer group and be influenced by them.

Other possible pathways linking maltreatment and offending include:

- the *modelling of aggression* — there is increasing evidence of the damaging effects of children being exposed to family violence without being directly subjected to it; and
- greater *exposure to the criminal justice and child welfare systems* through, for example, homelessness occasioned by abuse.

A U S T R A L I A N S E R V I C E S A N D P R O G R A M S

OVERVIEW

There are over ten thousand ‘early intervention’ programs operating in Australia. It is rare to find any reference to crime prevention in the objectives of services for families and children; and consequently conscious strategies of crime prevention are absent. However, it is clear from the scientific literature that many programs and services may in fact be having an impact on the incidence of social problems such as juvenile crime and substance abuse, even though that is not their stated intention.

Two striking characteristics of what might be termed ‘the early intervention field’ are diversity and fragmentation.

Diversity

Some 6,100 child care centres operate in Australia; over 5,500 preschools including mobile services cater for an unknown number of children. No records exist to indicate which centres operate special programs. A wide variety of parenting programs, home visiting programs and family support programs exist.

Over and above the generalist childcare and parenting/support services is a layer of specialist services, also indicated as having a role in crime prevention. These specialist programs include:

- services for families with children with disabilities
- services and programs for Aboriginal families and children
- services for families and children of migrant and refugee background
- support services for children of prisoners
- anti-violence and support services and strategies for the gay and lesbian communities
- services with child protection components

A variety of parenting, home visiting and family support programs exist.

Diversity within this field extends to the level of individual categories. For example, home visiting programs such as Home Start and Good Beginnings differ considerably in character. In general, family support services evolve to suit the needs in local neighbourhoods.

Fragmentation

The ‘early intervention field’ displays considerable fragmentation due to historical factors impinging on:

- lines of development
- differing administrative and funding bodies, varying degrees of involvement of the three levels of government (Commonwealth, State/Territory and Local)
- different philosophical and theoretical underpinnings
- lack of national and/or State databases regarding services

A byproduct of this fragmentation is a lack of cross fertilisation in the field. Another serious consequence is that services have difficulty providing for the special needs of some children, such as those from single parent families, those with a disability, or those from non-English speaking or Indigenous populations.

SPECIAL POPULATION MIX

Australia is an ethnically diverse society and services are required that respond to cultural differences.

There was strong support in Aboriginal communities for:

- Aboriginal control and administration of services
- detailed consultation with Aboriginal communities on issues relating to family and children’s services
- facilitating access to education
- Aboriginal workers for Aboriginal clients
- the introduction of innovative practices in mainstream services in order to increase provision



- extended family responsibility for care of children (with a tendency by Aboriginal women not to use childcare/preschools)
- the view that the stolen generation had wide ranging impacts on family life and on behaviour due to the loss of culturally appropriate parenting skills
- identifying and dealing with the special needs of children with a parent in prison

People from some non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) tend to be over represented in the justice system. There are significant differences within subgroups — for example, data from the Department of Juvenile Justice in NSW indicates difference in crime types for juvenile offenders of Pacific Island background (predominantly violent crimes) and those from Indo-Chinese background (predominantly break and enter). As with Aboriginal people, NESB subgroups are not homogeneous, resulting in different needs within different communities. Those NESB providers consulted emphasised building bridges of understanding, access and acceptance.

ISSUES RELATING TO IMPLEMENTATION

Partnerships

A feature of Australian implementation is the emergence of partnerships in major innovative programs in a number of states. As a model for such a strategy, the Interagency Schools as Community Centres Pilot Project in NSW emerged. This involves the development of schools as community centres by locating a facilitator in a local primary school. The facilitator develops a range of projects based on the identification of specific local needs through a process of community consultation.

Facilitators for the Interagency Pilot projects are located at primary schools. However, some service providers recommended that a better location for such child and family centred community development would be childcare/ preschool centres. Reasons include:

- the widespread use of such services
- the intimate linking of parent, staff and child at crucial developmental phases
- the wide distribution of services and their location in neighbourhoods
- the fact that mothers now often bypass Baby Health Centres, thus making childcare centres the first point of contact
- the already common use of centres as locations for parenting education

The missing parent

The missing parent was raised as a potential barrier to participation in programs. It appears that there is more 'space' for the development and strengthening of the crucial link between school and family in preschool years than in later schooling. Developing good parenting 'habits' in the earliest years and encouraging involvement sets the pattern for continued involvement in primary and secondary years.

Evaluation

Evaluation processes tended to be internal, somewhat *ad hoc*, short term in focus, and resulted in minor changes to programs. An underlying assumption may have been that 'family support', 'childcare', and 'parenting education' are essentially good in themselves, and therefore there is no need for evaluation. However, this lack of emphasis on evaluation tends to be associated more with long established programs and, perhaps prompted by this factor, recently established programs frequently include a strong evaluation component.

Evaluation processes tended to be internal and resulted in minor changes to programs.



Impact of wider interrelated policies

Service providers expressed concern about the impact of wider interrelated policies and processes, for example, changes in patterns of care for children; and school education policies which permitted high numbers of school expulsions. These examples illustrate that service providers are actively engaged in the process of analysing the roles and responsibilities for the prevention of child maltreatment and juvenile crime (described in Table 2.3 in the full report), although they have not in most cases made the explicit link to crime prevention.

Specific gaps in service provision

Service providers were asked to indicate specific gaps in provision. They drew attention to the needs of:

- mothers on methadone
- siblings of a child with disabilities or behavioural problems
- women with post natal depression
- gay and lesbian young people

APPRAISAL FROM A DEVELOPMENTAL PREVENTION PERSPECTIVE

In terms of risk and protective factors manifested among children, families and schools, a number of emphases and omissions are apparent.

Among the child risk factors, low self esteem and disability received considerable attention, while birth defects and perinatal (during birth) complications received comparatively little attention.

At the level of parent behaviour, poor supervision and monitoring of children was easily the factor to receive most attention, with social isolation, conflict and disharmony, and disorganised families being prominent risk factors in the family environment.

Within the school context, the focus was clearly upon facilitating school attachment and preventing school failure.

In general, the protective factors emphasised were good self esteem, effective parenting, and a positive school experience.

As key risk factors are important predictors of later criminal (and other socially disruptive) behaviours, services targeting these key risk factors should be extended across the range of early intervention services in Australia. This would lead to programs focused on:

- Perinatal risk factors such as prematurity, low birth weight, prenatal brain damage and birth injury
- Parental risk factors such as substance abuse, psychiatric disorders, and lack of warmth and affection
- The problems associated with the transition from primary to secondary education. These should include reinforcing or booster interventions, given the multiplicity and diversity of challenges during the transition in question.

Discussion of possible new or extended programs should take place within a realistic context. A striking aspect of the audit was the number of innovative programs that were pilots, with no guarantees of continued funding. Service providers were acutely aware of the impact on their own activities of bureaucratic policy and resource decisions often made without reference to critical evidence from the field.

Perhaps one of the most important conclusions drawn from this research project is simply that the kinds of programs and services identified should be valued more, and should be more adequately supported. Moreover, they should have a much greater degree of funding continuity from one year to the next, subject to the requirement (made possible through the allocation of adequate funds) that rigorous evaluations be carried out.

The programs and services identified should be valued more.

KEY THEMES

Key themes emerging from the research are discussed under five broad headings:

1. Time and timing
2. Risk and protective factors
3. Community appraisal
4. Social context and the implementation of interventions
5. Evaluation

Some concepts and research findings summarised earlier are reiterated and expanded, with a view to building a framework for prevention planning.

TIME AND TIMING

If nothing else, a developmental approach draws attention to aspects of time and timing, with its emphasis on pathways and points of transition and change. Points of change can be times of increased stress, but they can also be points at which people are open to external influences. Positive outcomes are more likely to ensue if information and strategies are offered close to the point of their being needed, but we should not expect that ‘one off’ interventions will solve all future problems. We should therefore design prevention programs with an eye to key transition points, and build in ‘booster shots’ to be administered later in the life course.

It follows that it would not be wise to place all our eggs in the ‘early in life’ basket. For example, there is evidence that ‘adolescent-limited’ offending, involving behaviours such as substance abuse and shopstealing, may not emerge as issues in the lives of many children until the early high school years, and that many of the risk factors are situational and age specific rather than being ‘child-related’. Interventions in the preschool years may or may not have much impact on the overall incidence of these kinds of problems.

Points of change can be times of increased stress.

On the other hand, disruptive aggressive behaviour before the age of ten is known to be a common precursor of serious, violent offending in the adolescent years and beyond. Aggressive behaviour at an early age is a problem requiring immediate attention for its own sake, but intervention at an early age may also be the most cost effective way of heading off serious criminal problems ten years later. There is therefore a compelling case for early in life approaches, especially if they focus on factors which are established at an early age, are known to correlate with several forms of later offending, and are costly to deal with later. From this point of view it is never too early to intervene.

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Disruptive aggressive behaviour by preschool children is an important risk factor, but it is almost certainly linked to a number of others, such as violence in the home, economic stress, and poor parenting practices. It is a clear theme emerging from all the reviewed research that it makes little sense to target only one risk or one protective factor. One reason for this is that any particular offence arises from a combination of factors at several levels: the child, the family, the immediate social group, and the larger community. Indeed, the critical factors may be the total number and the spacing of cumulative risk factors.

One immediate implication of this conclusion is that crime prevention programs that target one, two or even three risk factors may not have a marked effect, at least in the medium to long term. Several programs operating at several levels (such as the individual, the family and the school) and at key transition points may be required to influence a sufficient number of factors to have an impact. Moreover, it may be important to identify individuals or groups who experience several adverse circumstances in such a short space of time that they do not have time to recover or to demonstrate their 'resilience'.

The critical factors may be the total number and spacing of cumulative risk factors.



Protective factors can be enhanced by maintaining a civil society rather than an oppositional culture.

Unfortunately the research literature is not sufficiently advanced to provide more than general guidance on risk and protective factors. We do know enough to recommend that child abuse and neglect should be a particular target for prevention programs, together with exposure to adult violence. There is also emerging evidence that family attachment is a protective factor that should be a specific target, since it cuts across age and ethnic groups and promotes law abiding behaviour. Nor should we neglect situational factors such as guns and alcohol, which both facilitate the occurrence of crime events and increase the chances of serious injury or death arising from such events.

At a broader level, protective factors can be enhanced by strengthening the capacity of a community to intervene positively in the lives of children, and by building facilities or social structures that support involvement and attachment, that help maintain a civil society rather than an oppositional culture.

A general message is that we need to keep exploring what links previous conditions to later behaviours. There are many possibilities, such as the presence or absence of social strategies or social competence, the presence or the lack of a sense of shame, or the presence or lack of forward thinking, but it would be wise not to emphasise one at the expense of others. A further caution for program designers is that some of these factors may operate in different ways depending on gender and ethnic group.

COMMUNITY APPRAISAL

How does the program designer get all this information? How does one even know which areas or groups to target? Assuming an initial selection of an area on the basis of its rates of crime and other problems, or on the basis of its socioeconomic status, a more extensive process of community appraisal is required. The measurement of a range of risk and protective factors in individuals and families using official records, surveys and key informants is recommended as a first step by many authors, but early data collection exercises should also focus on local resources and community structures.

Many questions can be asked. For example, does geographical isolation and a lack of public transport promote isolation, especially of families with young children? Are affordable child care facilities available? What other services are available, and how effective are these in terms of their relevance to the measured risk and protective factors?

Programs and services are not the only significant features of an area. It is important to know such things as whether neighbours are supportive, or are in conflict with each other. Who are the ‘promoters of crime or violence’ in a neighbourhood, those who tolerate, legitimise, or remain silent in the face of negative acts? Which individuals or groups tend to cut off alternative paths that limit the opportunities for recovery, or who aggravate the impact of risk factors? Is there an ‘oppositional culture’ in the area? Who are the ‘missing people’: fathers as parents or the working mothers of preschoolers?

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTEXT

Armed with all this information, we are in a position to move from appraisal to implementation. A key theme of the full report is that implementation is inextricably linked to social context, and that interventions should target not only the behaviours, attitudes and knowledge of people but also the nature of their circumstances. Individuals never exist in isolation; they are always involved in relationships with others. Strengthening relationships to break down social isolation is therefore one possible strategy. Other strategies at the community level might involve targeting an oppositional ‘us and them’ culture that might have developed (perhaps between young people and the police). Yet other strategies could target local institutions such as schools, with a view to strengthening the support provided to families, especially those with children experiencing difficulties.

*Implementation
is linked to
social context.*

Children should be consulted and involved in developing and implementing programs.

Partnerships should include volunteers, local residents and paid professionals.

Successful interventions will be sensitive to the particular needs of the local area, will keep people involved and in fact will encourage members of the community to act rather than feel helpless in the face of family problems or bureaucracy.

Key change agents will be local people who are acceptable to local groups (such as Aboriginal workers for the Aboriginal community), and who are willing to act as guides or path-smoothers for those facing transitions into unfamiliar territory (such as parents from ethnic minorities whose children are starting school).

Cultural sensitivity will be required in the use of authority figures, since (for example) Aboriginal children distinguish between the authority of parents and the authority of police. Indeed, children should be consulted and involved in the development and implementation of programs, as part of a general process of local community involvement and empowerment. This process of involvement should have, as an explicit objective, the devising of strategies to avoid stigmatising ‘problem’ or ‘at risk’ children or families.

No one agency or program can be expected to deliver all the services required to influence the full range of risk and protective factors identified in the community appraisal process. Thus partnerships and coordination will be essential, involving service deliverers already involved in the area and perhaps also new kinds of services. The audit described in Section 4 in the full report is a resource that could be used both to identify appropriate kinds of new programs, and to appraise existing services in terms of their potential for crime prevention. These partnerships may or may not involve a formal interagency structure; despite evidence for the effectiveness of interagency arrangements, there is much that can be accomplished through simpler forms of coordination.

In line with the emphasis on community involvement, partnerships should be designed from the outset to include community volunteers and local residents (including young people) as well as paid professionals. If interventions early in life are a focus, then childcare centres or preschools should probably be where

resources are located. They provide a coherent environment for programs that are multicomponent and multicontext.

A community based intervention that is area sensitive and involves community members is less controllable than a program run by outside experts. Key elements of the intervention may change over time as the needs of the area are better understood and as methods are modified to meet community expectations. This creates potential problems for project management, and even bigger problems for evaluation.

EVALUATION

The first requirement of evaluation is that it be both scientifically rigorous and flexible. It is understood that this is a major methodological challenge, but the problems are not insurmountable. Critical elements of evaluation include a focus on process and on outcomes. Process analysis includes not only a qualitative study of implementation, but an appraisal of the 'generative capacities' of the neighbourhood. Outcomes include behavioural changes in individuals and in their circumstances over time, as well as measures of cost effectiveness.

It is recommended, when quick results are required, that an outcomes hierarchy and performance indicators be constructed, so that both long term and short term outcomes can be assessed. Moreover, in tracking individuals, it is recommended that the results of longitudinal studies be applied to 'short term chunks of a life course' to assess program impact.

Critical elements of evaluation include process and outcomes.

A P O L I C Y F R A M E W O R K F O R
D E V E L O P M E N T A L P R E V E N T I O N

The purpose of this section is to present an understanding of how one should think about the effectiveness of existing programs, or how one should think about planning a new prevention initiative. The policy framework consists of three components:

1. The identification of the guiding principles that should underpin any developmental prevention programs.
2. Principles for appraising existing services and for enhancing their crime prevention effects.
3. Principles for assisting in the development, implementation, management and evaluation of new kinds of interventions.

These components are presented in this section as a series of recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Consider the reasons for aiming at crime prevention.

Rationale

Any kind of preventive step calls for a rationale. That rationale may be in terms of social, economic or personal costs. Relevant also are data related to the likelihood of any decrease, and to the effectiveness and cost of alternatives. To these considerations, developmental perspectives add a concern with personal costs in the form of a loss of options in later life, and a concern with second generation effects.

Recommendation 2

Ask: What is the general view of crime? How are offences distinguished from one another?

Rationale

Any service or program concerned with ‘offences’ or ‘crime’ needs to give thought to the ways in which they are related to or different from one another. The available distinctions are often in terms of seriousness and the likelihood of co occurrence. To those distinctions, developmental perspectives add distinctions by timelines and ages of onset. They add also proposals about co occurrence and timecourses that relate to the changing functions or attractiveness of offences at different ages.

Recommendation 3

Set the overall plan as an area sensitive mix of preventive justice, situational, community and developmental approaches.

Rationale

The need for an area sensitive mix is based on the fact that communities vary, making an essential first step some assessment of a community’s needs and resources, and of the risk and protective factors that it presents. The general need for a mix is based on the argument — basic to developmental theory — that acts of crime stem from both the characteristics of people (eg their susceptibility or resistance to the attraction of acting in ways that break the law) and the nature of their circumstances (eg the ease of criminal acts, the availability of support for taking alternate paths). The goal of change is then to alter people, circumstances, or the combinations of both that make crime more or less likely to occur.

Combining approaches does not mean that any one program should contain all components or all approaches. The need for a multimethod approach may be better met by setting up ways to:

- coordinate across departments or agencies
- anticipate ripple effects from policy changes that are not officially concerned with crime but influence its occurrence, such as changes in policies with regard to schools, day care centres, housing, or transport.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen the support given to developmental approaches, approaches that break the pathways leading to crime, and note the rationale.

Rationale

The grounds lie in:

- evidence for the significance of childhood events for adult crime (child abuse and neglect carry particular weight)
- evidence for effectiveness (both in terms of altering behaviours and in terms of cost)
- the presence of a base in empirical studies
- the ways in which developmental perspectives give rise to specific recommendations about the implementation and evaluation of preventive programs

Recommendation 5

Prevention aims to alter both risk and protective factors. Ask: How are these and their links to outcomes specified?

Rationale

Developmental perspectives offer some particular ways of specifying risk factors and protective factors. They also offer some useful ways of considering how risk and protective factors are related to one another and to outcomes, primarily by way of cumulative effects and diverse pathways.

Recommendation 6

Choosing a point in the pathway: establish guidelines for when to act, with a preference for early in the pathway.

Rationale

The overall recommendation from developmental research is for deciding on the basis of what is known about:

- points of malleability or openness to change — these tend to be concentrated early in life and at points of transition or uncertainty
- points of changing attitudes and opportunity — early adolescence increases both a child’s interest in ‘stuff’ and the opportunity to steal
- the reoccurrence of problems at different points in life — issues of independence from parents are worked through more than once, making one time solutions unlikely
- the extent to which a characteristic or a way of acting has been established and is likely to stay in place once established

For some problems, these general considerations point to taking action early in the course of parenting or early in a child’s life. However, they also allow for action at times of transition (eg in the year or two before a child makes the transition to school), and at times when particular forms of crime (eg illegal substance use, shoplifting, vehicle theft) are likely to begin or to increase, and focused intervention steps may be particularly effective.

Recommendation 7

Setting a target: aim at changing several forms of crime.

Rationale

Shall we concentrate on some particular forms of crime or on several forms? In the main, the evidence points to the value of aiming at reducing several forms of deviance, at not narrowing the focus to specific crimes. This is partly because many offenders are ‘versatiles’, involved in more than one form of offence. It is also because some risk and protective factors are likely to influence several kinds of criminal action (eg family attachment and respect for the law are related to lower rates of several forms of juvenile delinquency). Cost effectiveness is a further consideration: intervention that lowers several forms of crime rather than only one is likely to be cost effective.

Some specific forms of crime, however, may still need to be singled out as particular targets. Acts of violent crime, for example, are of special concern to the

community. The evidence also points to acts of persistent or violent physical aggression as predicted by some particular prior conditions and as possibly requiring special forms of intervention. Some particular forms of crime may also need to be singled out when it comes to timing. Targeting substance abuse, vehicle theft, or vandalism, for example, makes little sense in the preschool years but considerable sense as a later ‘topping up’ of earlier preventive action aimed at changing general susceptibility.

Recommendation 8

Setting a target: aim at changing several risk and protective factors rather than an isolated few, but with a bias towards some.

Rationale

The four grounds for changing several conditions are:

1. People can arrive at the same end by a variety of routes, by multiple pathways. There may be some typical or common routes, but a great deal of variability is also to be expected.
2. The cumulative number of risk factors, rather than their specific type, is often critical (any one may then be the straw that breaks the camel’s back).
3. The combination of some particular factors, rather than any one alone, is often the stronger predictor of later outcomes.
4. Intervention studies aimed at changing only one risk factor, with the expectation of flow on — of a diffusion of benefits — run the risk of yielding specific effects, with no diffusion.

The grounds for a ‘bias toward some’ are their consistent emergence as predictors of involvement in crime. Some of these are the dispositions, expectations, strategies or ‘working models’ that become established within the individual and are then carried forward from experience to behaviours, helping to account for how early experience influences later behaviour. Examples are the strategies used for dealing with conflict or provocation (eg quick aggression

rather than attempts at resolution or at cooling down a problem), and ways of thinking about others (eg on the negative side, a lack of concern, the ready anticipation of hostility, opposition, or disinterest). Others are aspects of experience that give rise to an individual's ways of looking at the world or of dealing with events (eg for a parent, the degree of social isolation and the absence of networks; for a child, the quality of parenting, encounters with unsupportive school structures or with the justice system).

Recommendation 9

Selecting people: anticipate variations by gender and ethnicity, and plan for these.

Rationale

Most of the concern with these variations has been in terms of the extent to which people from various groups commit various kinds of offences. Questions also need to be asked about differences in age of onset, the nature of risk and protective factors, the appropriateness and effectiveness of various prevention programs, and the reasons for variations in delivery and outcomes. As we begin to focus on these questions, in a proactive rather than reactive fashion, prevention can be more clearly planned.

Recommendation 10

Selecting people: establish guidelines for deciding who should be the focus of preventive steps.

Rationale

Developmental approaches emphasise the need to:

- choose between targeting people or neighbourhoods — the general preference is for the latter
- consider children as always linked to other people — the preference is for targeting children and their families

- keep in mind three sets of people:
 - those who commit crime
 - those who are the victims or potential victims
 - those who legitimise acts of prejudice and promote an oppositional culture (anti-bias action then reduces one set of risk factors)

Developmental approaches also draw particular attention to some gaps in the usual target populations: eg fathers as parents, children without parents (children in care, children of prisoners), females as offenders.

Recommendation 11

Selecting people: establish guidelines for choosing who will implement any preventive steps.

Rationale

All approaches to prevention point to the need to consider issues of skill, acceptability and accessibility to the people one hopes to reach as well as the cost (eg the cost of training or supervision). They also all emphasise the need to think in terms of partnerships among implementers. In addition developmental approaches emphasise the need to think in terms of the orientations toward authority figures or ‘welfare’ figures that people of various ages and in various groups hold, and to ask how unproductive orientations might be changed.

Recommendation 12

Moving toward ‘how’ to proceed: anticipate some ‘old myths’, some barriers to taking effective preventive action.

Rationale

Bright (1997) offers a first set of these: Nothing works; the police can do it all; the community can do it all; crime has a single cause, allowing a single-fix solution. Developmentalists would add several others: everything needs to be

done early in life and only early in life; there is one path from early to later events; all critical factors are to be found within the individual (only the person then needs changing); prevention can be thought of as like one time inoculation; what is true for ‘the mainstream’ is true for all.

Recommendation 13

How? Establish guidelines for implementation: general principles and specific components for any program or service.

Rationale

Steps should be taken to make a program accessible, to keep people involved, to avoid stigmatising those who participate, and to help people take an active role in working out what they do. Developmental perspectives add the need to think in terms of actions that both divert people from one pathway and to another, that break down lines of division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and that build on the specific interests of various age groups or social groups.

All approaches to intervention underline the need to decide on the specific components that are included in any program. Past developmental programs underline the need to specify exactly what form these components will take (eg ‘Home visiting’ could take many forms) and why they will take one shape rather than another. Past developmental programs also underline the need to locate where possible studies that have explicitly compared one form of preventive action over another.

Recommendation 14

Make existing programs more effective for prevention.

Rationale

Consideration of the general principles of prevention that should apply to any program must be tempered by a realistic assessment of the Australian context for the delivery of early intervention services. Many of the most innovative programs

are funded as pilots, and have no guarantee of renewal, and the whole field is characterised by fragmentation and diversity. Analysis of gaps, from a prevention perspective, is also hampered by the poor state of evaluation.

Despite these difficulties, we have found that it is possible to assess programs against a number of criteria, including the numbers and types of risk and protective factors targeted; the number of ‘life course transition points’ that come within the ambit of the program; the degree of fit with the needs of specific communities or groups; and the capacity to facilitate partnerships with other agencies. At least two gaps emerge from this analysis: perinatal risk factors, and factors related to the transition from primary to secondary education.

Recommendation 15

Evaluation: set it as a priority and establish guidelines for how and when it should proceed, with attention to changes in behaviours, cost effectiveness, mechanisms, and contexts.

Rationale

Evaluation is an often neglected and misunderstood aspect of intervention, but one that is essential for decisions about initial or continued support. Plans for evaluation should be part of proposals for any new program or for extensions of existing programs.

However, fierce controversy in the literature between advocates of traditional quasi-experimental approaches and the ‘scientific realist’ school makes the choice of evaluation methods difficult. The debate is not only about the use of quantitative and qualitative methods, it is about whether programs are sets of fixed attributes that can be converted into measurable variables, or are fluid and evolving, not predetermined; whether communities are simply the settings for the program or an active and critical part of the change process; and whether program elements are simply targeted at multiple factors on the basis of past research, or there is in addition an explicit theory of community change undergirding the whole program.

It is possible and desirable, however, to incorporate key insights from both sides of the debate. Evaluation should in general be informed by the scientific realist school, which emphasises mechanisms and contexts as well as outcomes; by the ‘theory of change’ approach that emphasises adjusting theory, resources and outcomes based on ongoing results; and by classical quasi-experimental methods. This requires an extensive set of quantitative and qualitative measures of outcomes, program characteristics, participants and their degree of involvement, and community dynamics and settings. It also means, for example, that the need for ‘control’ or comparison communities must be taken seriously, as must rigorous, quantitative cost effectiveness analysis.

Intensive evaluation is not recommended for all programs. This can be restricted to some core programs. Some forms of more readily available evaluation, however, should be part of all planning.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

STAGE 2

In the full report, the research team suggest how to progress the next stage of the project. The team advocates long term investment in several pilot initiatives in a range of neighbourhoods. These pilots would be closely monitored to ensure they would function as a demonstration project, thereby providing evidence of the efficacy of the developmental approach and an evaluation of the implementation process.

In brief, the research team suggests that a useful way forward in Australia is to explore a number of neighbourhood or small area interventions targeting multiple risk and protective factors at multiple life phases and transition points. The focus would not only be on individual children and families but, more generally, on the functioning of local community institutions and aspects of social organisation that affect the development of children. The overall aim would be to create a more supportive, friendly and inclusive environment for children, young people and families that promotes healthy, prosocial development.

The overall project would take at least a year to plan, perhaps three years to implement and carry out an initial evaluation, and at least 10 to 15 years for follow up and a long term evaluation.

Within the first phase the following steps could be undertaken:

- Further analysis of how existing community interventions are performing on the ground and of what is involved in community mobilisation.
- The selection of areas for intervention and the development of measures of risk and protective factors.
- The piloting of some simple but important interventions in disadvantaged areas where, traditionally, participation in community organisations and networks is very low.

WIDER POLICY AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Service providers and key figures in the field showed a keen interest in the research.

The Commonwealth Government aims to facilitate debate about developmental prevention, and to explore avenues for the promotion of the policy framework. This will include consultations with key Commonwealth and State departments, key national peak bodies for the non government service sector and professional groups.

Development of the Commonwealth Government's intended new program focused on youth crime and supporting families is currently underway.





CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

name	age	pages featured
Alex Flux	5	4-5, 16-17, 22-23, 46
Amber Fletcher	2	12-13, 27
Amy Flux	8	28-29
Anna Rochfort	4	44-45
Jordan Rochfort	7	30-31
Liam Holder	3	20
Liam Simmons	7	6-7, 14-15, 24-25
Robyn Harvey	5	10
Tabitha Fripp	10	9, 19, 33

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NOTES

C O N T A C T D E T A I L S

The National Crime Prevention Unit is interested in hearing your comments about any of the issues covered in this report. If you would like to provide comments or would like any further information, please contact:

Early Intervention Project Development Officer
National Crime Prevention
Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Ph: 02 6250 6666

Fax: 02 6273 0913

Our new website is being developed. In the meantime, take a look at www.ncvac.gov.au



National Anti-Crime Strategy
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