



## Violence Control at the Municipal Level<sup>1</sup>

Surveys conducted by LatinoBarómetro in 17 countries of the region during 1996 showed that people perceived violence as the number one social and economic problem in Latin America (Londoño and Guerrero, 1999). Crime prevention, public safety, and violence control have become high priority issues on the agenda of community activists and local government, not only in countries with high crime rates, such as Colombia or El Salvador, but also in countries with comparatively lower rates, such as Uruguay and Costa Rica.<sup>2</sup> Since violence and the lack of public safety are, for the most part, determined by factors that are common to a whole nation or an entire region, solutions to these problems require action to be taken on the national or regional level. Nevertheless, these phenomena take place and are felt on the local or municipal level; therefore, pressure for control measures is brought to bear on local government, i.e. on mayors or other municipal authorities. In many countries of the region, a widespread trend towards decentralization of government administration has led to the delegation of government

functions and the allocation of resources to local government. This trend has also given rise to greater pressure on mayors and other municipal authorities to address these issues on the local level.

It is not surprising that several cities of the region have set up crime prevention programs on their own initiative. Colombia is a prime example of such initiatives: the cities of Cali, Medellin, and Bogota, applied and obtained a loan to finance public safety and violence prevention programs. Although the loans to these municipalities is guaranteed by the national government, the loan was obtained and will be repaid by the three cities. Another successful example of these initiatives is a program run by the city of Boston (see Table 8).

This technical note builds upon and complements the other notes in the series. This note presents violence prevention programs from a local perspective and provides some examples of actions that have been taken by municipal authorities in different parts of the Americas.

### Comparative Advantages of Municipal Violence Prevention Programs

Municipal management of violence prevention and assistance program implementation provides a number of comparative advantages: Locally-managed programs:

- Make it possible to obtain the input and involvement of a broader range of people and institutions in examining the problem, achieve agreements and delineate responsibilities.
- Make it easier to coordinate the different agencies involved in prevention and assistance efforts, which has been one of the main stumbling blocks to the success of nationwide programs.
- Make it possible to gather reliable information and statistics on different aspects of the problem for specific geographical areas, which in turn helps to efficiently assign investment between control and prevention activities.
- Cost less than national programs.
- Facilitate follow up and evaluation of actions undertaken to address the problem.

<sup>1</sup> This Technical Note was prepared by Rodrigo Guerrero Velazco M.D., Ph.D., of the Carvajal Foundation in Colombia, ex Cali Mayor.

<sup>2</sup> Uruguay followed Colombia as the second country to request and obtain aid from the Inter-American Development Bank to design a Citizen Security program (Loan UR-118). A 1999 survey conducted for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Costa Rica showed that 51% of the people surveyed considered the lack of safety on the streets to be the main problem the country was facing.

## Conceptual Model

No single model is universally accepted for the classification and study of crime prevention and public safety intervention programs. Nonetheless, no matter how these programs are classified, whether it is using the system outlined in Technical Note 3 or the classification recently proposed by the World Bank (Moser, 1999), there is no denying that a risk factor identification-based model is a practical and simple approach which has been successfully utilized in several instances. References to this model will be made throughout this note.

It is important to stress that no single risk factor can account for violence in a particular place. Many times, a wide variety of factors can be in play at the same time in any given context; these factors can include, for example, an inefficient judicial system, lack of employment opportunities for youth, or alcohol use and firearm possession (see Technical Note 3). Violence is the result of the interaction of several factors.

It is also important to bear in mind that risk factors can vary widely from one country to another and even from one city to another within the same country and, therefore, must always be identified within the specific context of the place where action is to be taken. Even though many risk factors are common to many places and cities, a single solution cannot be applied to address all of these factors, nor can one solution be effective in each and every context.

## The Key Role of Information

In order for a risk factor strategy to be properly and effectively applied, a timely and reliable statistical reporting system must be in place to make it possible to identify and quantify incidents of violence and the risk factors that contribute to such incidents. Nevertheless, statistical information on violence in the region is usually sketchy at best, and this greatly limits the success of risk factor strategies. The major obstacles to proper reporting are listed below:

- **Inconsistencies in definitions.** Even though homicide may seem to be a simple concept to define, in reality, it can entail great complexity. For example, in the United States, statistics on homicide rates show a 9% difference between Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) figures and the number of death certificates processed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The basic reason for the difference lies in the fact that the FBI does not count as homicides

any deaths resulting from application of the death penalty or confrontations with law enforcement authorities. The CDC, however, counts deaths resulting from either of these sources as homicides (Roberston, 1992).

- **Inconsistencies stemming from improper classification or poor data quality.** The following table shows changes in causes of violent deaths in Rio de Janeiro [over the course of a year], during which time the accuracy in the reporting of deaths improved as a result of a political-administrative decision.

**Table 2.**  
**Deaths by External Causes. Río de Janeiro, 1995**

|                      | January-March |            | October-December |            |
|----------------------|---------------|------------|------------------|------------|
|                      | Number        | Percentage | Number           | Percentage |
| <b>Homicides</b>     | 760           | 32.8       | 1021             | 50.2       |
| <b>Suicides</b>      | 4             | 0.2        | 39               | 1.9        |
| <b>Accidents</b>     | 333           | 14.4       | 787              | 38.7       |
| <b>Cause unknown</b> | 1219          | 52.6       | 188              | 9.2        |
|                      | 2316          | 100.0      | 2035             | 100.0      |

Source: Secretariat of Health, Rio de Janeiro 1996

A cursory look at this table would lead one to believe that the number of accidents, suicides and homicides increased during the second half of the year in Rio de Janeiro. However, what really happened was that the quality of the statistics improved and many deaths that would have been counted under the category of 'Cause unknown' during the first quarter were counted under one of the other categories during the four quarter. Consequently, the category of 'Cause Unknown' dropped from 53% of the total during the first quarter of the year to only 9% during the second half.

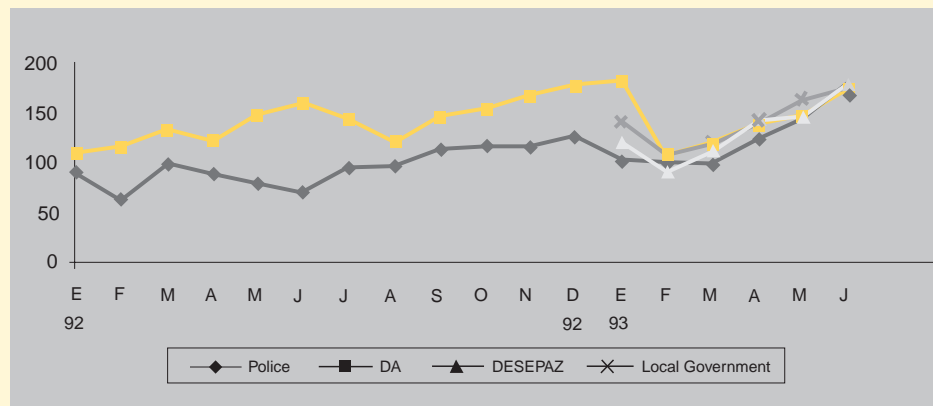


**Table 3.**  
**DESEPAZ Program's Information System in Cali, Colombia**

The Development, Safety and Peace Program (*Programa de Desarrollo, Seguridad y Paz*), known by its Spanish acronym as DESEPAZ, is an attempt to simultaneously address several risk factors which have been identified as specific to the city of Cali, the DESEPAZ program is based upon a reliable information reporting system.

Since the program was launched in 1992, significant variation in crime statistics in the city of Cali were identified. Consequently, the Mayor set up a permanent working group which was made up of representatives of the Metropolitan Police Force, the District Attorney's Office (*Fiscalía*), the Forensic Medicine Institute (*Instituto de Medicina Legal*), the Municipal Government Representative (*Personería Municipal*), and the Municipal Departments (Secretariats) of Traffic and Public Health. An epidemiologist served as coordinator, and the group began to meet on a weekly basis in order to conduct a thorough review of all violent incidents that had occurred during the previous week and prepare a report for the Municipal Council of Public Safety (*Consejo Municipal de Seguridad*). One of the first tasks the group undertook was to come to an agreement on what variables would be analyzed and how these variables would be defined from an operational standpoint. The result was almost total consistency in the numbers generated by all sources of crime statistics which, prior to that time, had produced widely divergent statistics.

### Homicides in Cali According to Different Sources of Information



The information reporting system has been a fundamental tool for the success of DESEPAZ in dealing with crime in Cali. Subsequent administrations have kept the system in place. Thanks to the system, informed citizens, along with the Universidad del Valle and the news media, have become effective monitors of the evolution of crime in the city and judges of how the local government and police are handling the problem of crime.

Because of the types of problems cited above, official statistics often underestimate the true extent of the problem. According to an official report produced by the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization (WHO/PAHO) in 1997, El Salvador posted a homicide rate of 39.9 per hundred thousand inhabitants. But, after a careful study was conducted comparing the different sources of information, it was estimated that this rate was really 138.9 per hundred thousand persons, or more than three times higher than the official figure.

Some forms of violence are relatively easy to measure; others, however, such as domestic violence, are more complex and require special instruments and questionnaires that must be applied at the household level. If something cannot be measured, it cannot be dealt with or managed. Therefore, it is imperative to make an effort to measure even violence that is difficult to detect. «Measure whatever you are able to measure, and what you are unable to, you must make measurable», recommended Galileo.

## Public Perception versus Actual Violence

Even when statistics on violence are perfectly accurate, significant gaps may exist between public perception of violence and objective fact. Public perception, as expressed by public opinion surveys, is a different phenomenon from actual incidence of violence, although it can be correlated to objective statistics on the different forms of violence. It is not unusual for governments to take action to make streets safer as a result of pressure from the public's perception of a lack of public safety, even when statistics suggest relatively low levels of crime and violence.

Public perception may be at odds with objective levels of violence for several reasons.

- ▶ High frequency of certain forms of minor violence (such as shoplifting, theft or burglary) generate widespread feelings of insecurity, even when rates of more serious crime, such as homicide, are not high. This appears to be the case of Uruguay, where the government, under heavy social pressure, took the initiative to organize a public safety program that included interpersonal violence and crime prevention among its objectives. In reviewing crime statistics for this country, it is apparent that homicide rates in Uruguay are low in comparison to other countries, but the frequency of minor crimes such as burglary, although in relatively low terms, has been rising over the past few years.
- ▶ Excessive coverage of crime and violence in the media creates a disproportionate feeling of danger and lack of safety, which is known in English-language literature as the «mean world syndrome» (Prothrow-Stith, 1991). For example, in Santiago, Chile, a city with comparatively low crime rates, there is a widespread feeling that criminal violence has entered a critical period of skyrocketing growth; this perception is based on «a non-systematic view of the facts, on which the mass media, peer groups and personal experience -among other things- have an influence» (Oviedo, 1994).
- ▶ Public perception that the criminal justice system or police forces are ineffective creates a climate of impunity, which may result in a rise in crime over the long term. Even in the short-run, however, a climate of impunity generates an increased perception of insecurity. The community policing model recently implemented in Hatillo, Costa Rica, has reduced feelings of insecurity and improved the image of the policy, but it has had no significant

effect on actual victimization rates (Chinchilla, 1998).

Based on the foregoing observations, it would be reasonable to conclude that governments ought to not only be concerned about lowering homicide rates, but also ought to take actions to improve the climate of insecurity. These actions could include, for example:

- ▶ Effective campaigns against crimes that are most visible and most affect the public, such as muggings, burglary and auto theft.
- ▶ Increased police presence in neighborhoods and communities, especially through community policing programs.
- ▶ Wider use of criminal justice system and law enforcement operational methods that have proven to be successful.

## Examples of Local Government Intervention

The following section offers several examples of local government interventions that have proven to be effective in tackling one or several risk factors. The variety of actions taken makes it difficult to use a single classification system and, therefore, three broad categories have been used to classify the examples: sector (police, justice and education); risk factor (gun and alcohol control); and high risk group (women and youth).





► **Improved Policing.** The police force and the criminal justice system comprise the fundamental pillars of law and order and public safety. Nevertheless, certain difficulties in improving police management and administration have become apparent. Many police departments are managed and financed by the national or federal government, which limits the control that a mayor or any other local authority has over law enforcement activities. Furthermore, many times a municipal police force and a national police force may have overlapping or concurrent jurisdiction within a single city, and the two forces may have an adversarial relationship. In some countries, the division between the scope of action of the army and the police has not been clearly defined.

Many countries and cities have implemented police reform programs. A particularly common type of reform has been the adoption of community policing (see Technical Note 9). Even though no precise definition of community policing has been put forth, the approach usually involves several common characteristics, such as:

- Emphasis on solving community problems and not only serious crimes.
- Interest not only in the commission of crimes but also in antisocial behavior that precedes the crimes.
- A proactive rather than purely reactive approach.
- Closer involvement and greater interest of police in everyday affairs of the neighborhood.
- Higher visibility in neighborhoods, foot and bicycle patrols, and less time working in police stations.
- Participatory style with delegated responsibilities and individual discretion.

In light of the community-focused nature of this model, it is clear that local governments are in the best position to successfully apply and effectively monitor on this approach to policing.

Another approach to policing that has been used in different communities is based on the «broken window» theory. This approach focuses police efforts on events that occur before crime is committed so that policing takes on a preemptive function, which stands in stark contrast to the traditional concept of rapid response to crime as it is committed (Kelling and Coles, 1996). The New York City Police, for example, used this method to try to reduce crime on the public subway system. The measures taken to

**Table 4:**

**The New York City Example<sup>1</sup>**

It is widely known that homicide rates fell by around 68% and general violations of the law by 50% in New York City over the five-year period beginning in 1993. This success was achieved as a result of a far-reaching reorganization of the police department, which consisted of three major components:

- Decentralization and delegating of functions to the precinct level, which gave rise to creativity and transferred responsibilities to districts and precinct chiefs.
- A computerized, crime statistics system, called Compstat, which provided instant access to real-time mapping of the location of criminal events throughout the city, thus enabling officers to find out about anything from domestic violence complaints to traffic accidents. The system also made it possible to evaluate and monitor the performance of district commanders.
- Focusing police efforts on specific problems and breaking with the traditional «sweeps» or «raids».

Police Commissioner Bratton applied Kelling’s principles and the «broken window» theory, which he was familiar with from his previous position in Boston. The officers focused successively on various problems that had been identified, such as car radio theft, conducting an in-depth study of each problem until a solution was found. The police targeted their efforts toward control of prostitution, sale of alcohol to minors, drug trafficking and noise pollution. An offensive was mounted against violators of weapons possession laws who, after being placed under arrest, were interrogated to find out from where the guns had been obtained. People arrested for other offenses were also interrogated as to the source of weapons found in their possession. The problem of drug distribution was tackled by rehabilitating specific neighborhoods, which involved breaking up gangs on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Bratton WJ, Andrews W, 1999. What we’ve learned about policing. *City Journal*. Summer 1999 pp. 14-27 New York, NY

<sup>2</sup> Harnett PJ, Andrews W, How is New York winning the war on drugs. *City Journal*. Summer 1999 pp 29-37. New York NY

achieve this goal were to control illegal access to the subway system by teenagers, prevent alcohol use on the subway, and eliminate graffiti on train cars.

Despite New York City's success in reducing crime, the model employed by the police force has been called into question because the stricter control measures have led to a substantial increase in citizen complaints against the police department (See Note 9).

At the same time the broken window theory was applied in New York, other communities in the United States enjoyed similar success in crime-reduction by using less drastic models. The most well known example of this is the city of San Francisco, where measures such as alternative sentencing and promotion of community involvement in crime reduction efforts were adopted. Despite claims that the city was too soft on crime, San Francisco experienced a 47% drop in reported crime, which was comparable to New York's 46% decrease. Moreover, for some periods of time, the reduction in violent crime in San Francisco was the largest among the ten largest cities in the United States.

For more information on Broken window and the San Francisco experience go to:

<http://atlantapd.org/cpdocs/bwindows.html>; and  
<http://www.cjcj.org/jpi/windows.html>

► **Improving the Criminal Justice System.** One of the main risk factors for violence is impunity resulting from an overburdened, slow, and inefficient judicial system, which many times is also corrupt and lacks credibility. As a consequence of the loss of public confidence in the ability of the courts to do justice, a tendency to take justice in one's own hands has become common in many countries. This means that disputes or conflicts are settled outside of the law, generally by means of violence (McAlister et al., 1999).

In response to this situation, many governments have: implemented programs to reform and improve the administration of justice; increased the supply of judicial services to bring the criminal justice system closer to citizens; promoted alternative methods for peaceful resolution of conflicts; and also increased the effectiveness of punishment by improving the prison system.

It is worthwhile to mention the “*Casas de Justicia*”, an experiment launched by the Colombian government to bring the justice system closer to the citizen and thus improve efficiency and public perception of the courts. This program is of particular relevance to this Note because execution at the municipal level is a key component. As yet, no formal evaluations of this experiment have been conducted; nevertheless, an increase in the number of cases handled by service providers has been reported.



**Table 5.**  
**“Casas de Justicia” in Colombia**

In 1994, as part of the Program for the Improvement of the Administration of Justice (*Programa para el Mejoramiento de la Administración de Justicia*), the Colombian Ministry of Justice conducted a pilot project in order to facilitate access to the criminal justice system for communities with high levels of conflict, which were generally located on the outskirts of cities. Under the program, two ‘Houses of Justice’ or *Casas de Justicia*, were established in Aguablanca, Cali and Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá.

These judicial service centers represent an attempt by national and local governments to decentralize the organization and administration of the criminal justice system. This has been achieved by locating the institutions that provide judicial services at single physical site. In Colombia these institutions are:

- ▶ District Attorney’s Office (*Fiscalía*): to deal on the community level with prosecutable crimes;
- ▶ Family Violence Intake Centers and Victim Assistance Offices (*Comisaría* and *Defensoría de Familia*): to deal with cases of intrafamily violence, child abuse and discrimination against women;
- ▶ Forensic Medicine: to provide technical support to institutions that need legal medical certification.
- ▶ Ministry of the Public Prosecutor (*Ministerio Público*): Attorney General’s Office (*Procuraduría General de la Nación*), which oversees performance and accountability of the judiciary and public officials; Office of the Ombudsman (*Defensoría del Pueblo*); and the Office of the Municipal Representative (*Personería Municipal*). The job of these three offices is to protect human rights and safeguard the interests of the community at large;
- ▶ Police Oversight Office (*Inspección de Policía*): civilian agencies which are part of municipal government offices (*secretarías*) in Colombia, where citizens file complaints; they also serve as outreach centers for community-based public safety and peaceful coexistence programs;
- ▶ Legal Aid Agencies (*Consultorios Jurídicos*) and Mediation and Arbitration Centers (*Centros de Conciliación y Arbitraje*): These agencies provide legal aid to citizens; they also have the legal authority to use alternative methods for conflict or dispute resolution (mediation or out-of-court settlements) or to bring a case to court.

The generic model of these houses of justice is flexible; not all services are provided at every one of the locations. The model requires some local adaptations to achieve best results, but results to date have been encouraging.

- ▶ **Education: A Culture of Non-Violence.** Violent response to conflict is a learned behavior (Slaby et al., 1995). In all societies, prevailing moral and ethical norms determine how people react to conflict, which makes these tacit rules of behavior very important factors in controlling violence.

A variety of attempts have been made to modify behavior through community-based education programs that preach tolerance, such as the above-cited DESEPAZ program, or school-based programs such as the PALS program in Jamaica, which utilized the Foundation for Peace Education model. This model seeks to educate children, teens and adults about the dynamics of conflict resolution and methods that can be used to achieve peace, stressing the following components:

- Peaceful conflict resolution
- Mediation

- A Parent involvement
- Suspension/Detention from school (and taking advantage of the time that students are suspended from school or serving detention for violent acts they have committed)
- Bus Driver Involvement: training bus drivers to aid in the education process, since the driver is the first and last person that many children see every day before and after school.

More complete information on this model is available at <http://www.peace-ed.org/curricula/>

Bogotá Mayor Mockus’ 1995-1998 “*Cultura Ciudadana*” program proved to be an interesting experiment in behavioral modification through culture (Mockus, 1999). This program was an attempt at bolstering cultural -as opposed to traditional legal-regulation of citizen behavior in settings such as

public spaces, public transportation facilities, and public events. During this period, a voluntary disarmament program of the civilian population and restrictions on alcoholic beverage sales in stores were put into place. Over the course of these three years, the efforts of the Mayor's Office paid off, as the annual homicide rate dropped from 72 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 1994 to 51 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 1997. A decrease in the rate of violent deaths resulting from traffic accidents was also posted over the same period, falling from 25 deaths per 100,000 people to 20 per 100,000. Additionally, the number of children injured by fireworks related incidents fell by more than two thirds as a result of a ban on their manufacture, sale and use.

► **Sale of Alcoholic Beverages.** It is a well known fact that alcohol consumption causes significant metabolic changes in the human body, particularly in some neurotransmitters that are involved in violent behavior (Phil and Peterson, 1993). It is also a fact that excessive alcohol consumption is associated with almost every single form of violence, especially when consumption is episodic and takes place in certain cultural settings. The conclusions of selected studies on the subject are listed below (Parker, 1993).

- Londoño found a significant correlation between the incidence of alcoholism and homicide rates in several regions of the world (Londoño, 1996).
- Coleman and Straus found that incidence of violence against women was 15 times higher in homes where the husband suffers from alcoholism (Coleman and Straus, 1983).
- A compilation of five studies on homicide showed that between 47% and 68% of the victims had consumed alcoholic beverages (Pernanen, 1995) and other studies have shown high levels of alcohol consumption among assailants and victimizers (Murdoch et al., 1990).
- Statistics from the DESEPAZ program in Cali, Colombia show that 56% of all homicides take place on one of the three days of the weekend and that one fourth of these homicides occur on Sunday. Moreover, a disproportionate increase in homicides takes place on special celebrations or holidays such as Mother's Day, Christmas time, New Years Eve, celebrations for sports victories, etc. (Concha et al., 1994)

Based on the above-cited statistics, it is safe to say that restrictions on the sale of alcoholic beverages in public places is an effective measure in reducing crime and accidents. The «semi-dry» (ley semi-seca) laws of Cali or the so-called «carrot law» of Bogota (*ley zanahoria*), which established a “curfew” (between 1:00 and 2:00 AM) for the sale of alcohol, made a considerable difference in reducing violence in these cities (Instituto Médico Legal, 1997). The table below shows how violent death rates changed between 1995, when alcoholic beverage sale restrictions were not in effect, and 1996, when the measure came into effect.

**Table 7.**  
**Violent Deaths in Bogota**  
**Firts Half of 1995-1996**

|                          | 1995 | 1996 | % change |
|--------------------------|------|------|----------|
| <b>Homicides</b>         | 1778 | 1699 | -4.5     |
| <b>Traffic Accidents</b> | 681  | 648  | -4.9     |
| <b>Other Accidents</b>   | 362  | 328  | -9.4     |
| <b>Suicides</b>          | 138  | 126  | -8.7     |
| <b>Total</b>             | 2959 | 2801 | -5.4     |

Source: Instituto Médico Legal, 1997

► **Gun Control.** Several studies have made it possible to identify the proliferation of guns as a risk factor for violence, especially because these weapons make aggression more lethal. Consequently, placing restrictions on the sale and possession of guns is an effective measure for curbing violence (Sloan et al., 1988).

- It has been shown that possession of a gun in a household increases the risk of death for family members by 2.7% (Kellerman et al., 1993).
- A study conducted by the Carter Center showed that 80% of all homicides committed by teens in the United States are perpetrated with guns.
- According to the Colombian Institute of Forensic Medicine, 80% of all homicides in that country in 1994 were committed with guns (Mora et al., 1994). In Rio de Janeiro, this figure was 82% for 1993 (Der Ghousgassian and Piguét-Carneiro, 1998).





that comprehensive assistance is provided. In some instances, local government acts as the direct program executing agent, while in other instances, municipal governments simply function as a coordinating entity.

### Violence against Women: Managing Domestic Violence on the Municipal Level

The “*Centro de Atención y Prevención en Violencia Doméstica*” or ‘Center for Domestic Violence Assistance and Prevention’ created by the Municipality of Santiago, Chile is an interesting example of municipal government intervention in the area domestic violence. From its start, in early 1990, the center has evolved from being called the *Centro de Atención a Mujeres Golpeadas* or ‘Center for the Assistance of Battered Women’ to its present title, which as the name implies, not only focuses on women but also deals with prevention. Prevention efforts target high-risk groups in Santiago. The Municipality has put together a manual that describes the municipal assistance model in detail (Municipalidad de Santiago, 1998).

- ▶ **Focusing on High-Risk Groups.** Local and city governments have targeted violence-reduction efforts towards these populations by setting up specialized assistance centers and facilitating coordination and involvement of existing groups in order to ensure

### Are Disarmament Programs Effective?

The results of studies on the effects of programs designed to achieve disarmament of the civilian population and disarmament in post conflict situations have not been conclusive. Therefore, a more in-depth analysis of the specifics of successful programs of this type, such as those that are listed below, need to be conducted:

- ▶ In Cali, under the Guerrero Administration (1992-94) and in Bogota, during the Mockus administration (1995-1998), possession of firearms was restricted for the civilian population. A recent evaluation of the two cities revealed a reduction of nearly 14% in the homicide rate in both cities, as a result of the measures (Villaveces and Cummings, 2000).
- ▶ In Kansas City, United States, a significant drop in the number of homicides was recorded in one sector of the city where authorities conducted a disarmament program targeting illegal gun owners. The results were compared to a similar sector of the city, where no disarmament program was carried out, and the experiment results bolstered the theory that gun control reduces violence (Sherman et al., 1995).

Other experiments yielded far less encouraging results:

- ▶ In Seattle, United States, an attempt was made to buy back guns that were in the hands of the civilian population. Although more than one thousand guns were collected under the program, no statistically significant reduction in crime and injuries was produced (Callahan et al., 1994).
- ▶ In El Salvador, it is estimated that only 10% of the 200,000 guns distributed during the civil war were collected and destroyed by the disarmament program that was implemented with the collaboration of the United Nations. The wide availability of guns in El Salvador continues to have an adverse effect on crime rates even though the internal conflict has come to an end (Pike, 1999).

The mayors of the communities of Guamayen and Maipu in Mendoza, Argentina, have successfully spearheaded the creation of assistance and prevention networks and coordination between the different agencies involved in domestic violence cases: police, health clinics, specialized assistance centers, prosecutors, etc. The weekly meeting of the Commission for the Prevention of Violence, which is chaired by the mayors, has made it possible to create a unified registry of statistics and conduct ongoing follow up of families in the community that have been affected by violence.

## Dealing with Youth Violence on the Local Level

Teen violence is a complex topic; therefore, a wide variety of risk factors must be addressed in order to properly deal with the phenomenon. Some programs in this field have been aimed at:

- developing self-esteem among teens; one such program is in the slums of Trinidad and Tobago (Moser, 1999);
- reducing school drop out rates, such as in the Bolsa-Escuela program in Brasilia (Veja, 1997);
- generating employment opportunities for youth through microenterprises and involving a caring adult who can develop a stable emotional relationship with teens, such as in the DESEPAZ program in Cali, Colombia;<sup>3</sup>
- establishing school-based conflict resolution programs, such as the PALS program in Jamaica.

It is useful to look at efforts led by the Mayor of Boston, United States, as a successful example of deeply-rooted community-based, comprehensive program designed to reduce teen violence at the municipal level (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996). Even though the Mayor's leadership was key to the success of the program, it is also important to note that many different people and institutions were involved in the process (See box below). As a general rule of thumb, it can be stated the most successful programs tackle several risk factors at the same time.

<sup>3</sup> The DESEPAZ program included a program activity called PARCES, in which an adult would help make an emotional connection with teens and facilitate adaptation to the real world and job training for microenterprises.

### Chart 8.

#### The Model Adopted by the City of Boston

The model followed by the city of Boston included several law enforcement measures, such as gun control and gang control; at the same time, however, prevention measures were also put in place, which involved heavy community participation. For example, a group of police officers, religious leaders, parents, school officials, representatives of the district attorney's office, and social workers who work with teens, would meet on a weekly basis to study the particular cases of gang members (Mogul, 1999).

In 1990, a total of 152 homicides were committed in the city of Boston; in prior years, the average was below 100. In 1998, however, only 35 homicides were committed in the city. Gun-related injuries dropped by 65%, and injuries involving other weapons decreased by 40%. According to those who ran the program, several factors account for the success of the program:

- ▶ A comprehensive approach combining selective and swift punishment for violators and, at the same time, prevention measures for potential violators who have not broken the law yet.
- ▶ Close coordination between police and federal, state and local justice systems.
- ▶ Collaboration between the police departments, justice system and community organizations.
- ▶ Leadership of religious organizations, which is especially useful for the Latino and African-American communities.
- ▶ Support of the community in general, which helped to generate employment opportunities for these teens.
- ▶ Organized communities whose residents get involved and mobilize in response to the first signs of danger.
- ▶ Interaction of teens with adults who listen and act as role models.
- ▶ Firm mayoral leadership, which encouraged people and organizations to take the necessary steps to successfully implement the program, even when doing so was risky, and helped to bring about institutional coordination.

## Conclusion

The experiences mentioned above show that it is possible to accomplish something on the local level in solving the problems of violence and the lack of public safety. The political will of mayors and local government leaders and the mobilization of the entire community in support of proposed interventions is required in order to solve these problems. Some risk factors are relatively easy to address; whereas other risk factors, more structural in nature, are much more complex. Measures such as restricting the sale of alcoholic beverages at certain times and days or banning possession of firearms have a significant but limited impact because they only have a bearing upon a few risk factors. Nevertheless, these measures are important because they show that it is possible to do something on the local level, in addition, the bolster public support for other measures whose effects are slower in appearing.

No single formula or recipe is applicable to every place. Each particular city and country should begin by assessing their own situation and identifying the specific factors that precipitate violence in their particular area of the world in order to take effective action. The recent experiment of applying mandatory seat belt buckling laws in Colombia is a case in point, since the effect of this law on the death rate from traffic accidents has been negligible. Available statistics show that two thirds of all homicides caused by traffic accidents in Colombia are the result of pedestrians being hit by cars, unlike other countries of world where most accident victims are passengers in vehicles. In light of this fact, it was not surprising that this law did not make a major difference.

One particularly important problem is the lack of continuity of policies as government administrations come in and out of office. This is a problem that is difficult to solve, since it is common practice for newly elected government officials to establish new programs and reject the actions of prior administrations as inadequate. Perhaps the best way of ensuring continuity is by empowering the community with regard to the problem and policies adopted by governments. Reliable statistics on variations in crime rates must be accessible and available to all organized groups (universities, chambers of commerce and industry, unions, NGO's). These statistics can help turn these organizations into pressure groups, which is the best guarantee of continuity.

For more information:

A more comprehensive listing of Municipal Violence Prevention and Assistance Programs can be found at: [www.iadb.org/sds/violence](http://www.iadb.org/sds/violence)

A summary of successful practices compiled by the International Center for Crime Prevention can be found at: [-prevention-intl.org](http://-prevention-intl.org) [www.crime-prevention-intl.org](http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org)

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