

RECOMMENDATIONS

from the World report on violence and health

Given the huge, and often hidden, complexity behind violence it will take a wide range of actors to successfully implement violence-prevention programmes. From health professionals to community workers, from law enforcement officials to school authorities, from urban planners to media campaigners – violence prevention has to form many alliances and take various forms. Most important of all, tackling violence prevention requires political and financial commitment. The engagement of governments and other stakeholders at all levels of decision-making – local, national and international is also crucial to the success of any programme to prevent violence. Recognising violence and its effects may require a great deal of courage and fortitude as the many faces of violence go deep into the roots of families, societies and cultures. The message of the *World report on violence and health* is that this political commitment must be made and that change is possible. The following recommendations for preventing violence reflect the need for multi-sectoral and collaborative approaches:

1. Create, implement and monitor a national action plan for violence prevention

National planning to prevent violence should be based on a consensus developed by a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental actors. It should include a timetable and evaluation mechanism, and enable collaboration between sectors that might contribute to preventing violence, such as the criminal justice, human rights, education, labour, health, and social welfare sectors. Many countries currently do not have a national plan nor a coordinating agency or department that deals with violence comprehensively. To date, for example, in many countries the response is mostly focused on law and order, with only limited strategic cooperation with other authorities to help reduce violence. Formulating and implementing a coherent and multi-disciplinary national plan is the first critical step towards violence prevention.

2. Enhance capacity for collecting data on violence

Most acts and consequences of violence remain hidden and unreported. Consequently, there is insufficient data on which to form coherent policy responses. Reliable data on violence are crucial not only for setting priorities, guiding programme design and monitoring progress, but also for advocacy to help raise awareness about the issue. Without information,

there is little pressure on anyone to acknowledge or respond to the problem. Data needs to be collected at various settings such as hospitals, police stations, community centres and other places where authorities come into contact with victims and perpetrators of violence. It is also equally important that this information be shared across agencies and that internationally accepted standards for data collection be adopted to enhance the comparability of data across these agencies and even between nations and cultures.

3. Define priorities for, and support research on, the causes, consequences, costs and prevention of violence

Although there has been great progress in the understanding of violence and violence prevention, questions still remain. At the national and local level, research can be advanced by government policy, by direct involvement of government institutions, and by funding to academic institutions and independent researchers. Among many research priorities, there is a pressing need to develop or adapt, test and evaluate many more prevention programmes in both developing and developed countries. At the global level, issues calling for cross-national research include the relationship between violence and various aspects of globalization; risk and protective factors common to different cultures and societies; and promising prevention approaches applicable in a variety of contexts. Resources for conducting and evaluating this research are needed.

4. Promote primary prevention responses

The importance of primary prevention – and the lack of such programming in many countries – is a theme echoed throughout the *World report on violence and health*. Some of the important primary prevention interventions for reducing violence include:

- prenatal and perinatal health care for mothers, as well as preschool enrichment and social development programmes for children and adolescents;
- training for good parenting practices and improved family functioning;
- improvements to urban infrastructure, both physical and socioeconomic;
- measures to reduce firearm injuries and improve firearm-related safety;
- media campaigns to change attitudes, behaviour and social norms.

The first two interventions are important for reducing child abuse and neglect as well as violence perpetrated during adolescence and adulthood. The latter three can have significant impacts on several types of violence such as youth and collective violence or suicide.



5. Strengthen responses for victims of violence

National health systems as a whole should aim to provide high-quality care to victims of all types of violence, as well as the rehabilitation and support services needed to prevent further complications.

Priorities include:

- improvements to emergency response systems and the ability of the health care sector to treat and rehabilitate victims;
- recognition of signs of violent incidents or ongoing violent situations, and referral of victims to appropriate agencies for follow-up and support;
- ensuring that health, judicial, policing and social services avoid a renewed victimization of earlier victims, and that these services effectively deter perpetrators from reoffending;
- social support, prevention programmes, and other services to protect families at risk of violence and reduce stress on caregivers;
- incorporation of modules on violence prevention into the curricula for medical and nursing students.

Each of these responses can help minimize the impact of violence on individuals and families and the cost to health and social systems.

6. Integrate violence prevention into social and educational policies, and thereby promote gender and social equality

Much of violence has links with gender and social inequalities that place large sections of the population at increased risk. In many parts of the world, social protection policies and programmes are under considerable strain. Many countries have seen real wages fall, basic infrastructure deteriorate, and steady reductions in the quality and quantity of health, education and social services. Since such conditions are linked with increased risks for violence, governments should do their utmost to maintain social protection services, if necessary reordering the priorities in their national budgets.

7. Increase collaboration and exchange of information on violence prevention

Better working relations between international agencies, governments, researchers, networks and non-governmental organizations engaged in violence prevention are needed to achieve better sharing of knowledge, agreement on prevention goals and coordination of action. The contributions of advocacy groups – such as those concerned with violence against women or children, human rights abuses,

abuse of the elderly and suicide – should also be recognized and encouraged through practical measures such as offering these groups official status at key international conferences and including them in official working groups.

8. Promote and monitor adherence to international treaties, laws and other mechanisms to protect human rights

Over the past half-century, national governments have signed a variety of international legal agreements that have direct relevance to violence and its prevention. They include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and many others. While many countries have made progress in harmonizing national legislation with their international obligations and commitments, others have not. Where the obstacle is the scarcity of resources or information, the international community should do more to assist.

9. Seek practical, internationally agreed responses to the global drug trade and the global arms trade

The global drug trade and the global arms trade are risk factors for different types of violence such as youth violence, suicide and collective violence, and are integral to violence in both developing and industrialized countries. A supply of gangs, guns and drugs in a locality is a potent mixture that strongly increases the likelihood of violence. Studies have shown particularly high rates of homicide and violence among youthful gang members involved in the trafficking of drugs and guns. Even modest progress on either front will contribute to reducing the amount and degree of violence suffered by millions of people.

Conclusion

Violence is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part of the human condition. We can do much to address and prevent it. The world has not yet fully measured the size of the task and does not yet have all the tools to carry it out. But the global knowledge base is growing and much useful experience has already been gained which needs to be implemented.