WHAT WORKS TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AMONG YOUTH?

Systematic review of the evidence on youth violence and crime prevention, with an applied analysis to the Mexican context

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Bulletin

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What works in preventing and reducing violence among youth? This bulletin draws on the global evidence base of rigorous evaluations of existing interventions designed to reduce or prevent violence and identifies those with the greatest evidence of effectiveness. The objective is to strengthen the understanding of the most effective and promising violence prevention approaches, and provide a framework for increasing the use of evidence-informed policy in youth violence prevention efforts across Mexico.[1]

Across both developed and developing countries, violence and crime concentrate disproportionately among young men in low-income settings, who tend to be both victims and perpetrators of that violence. In Mexico, high levels of exposure to various forms of violence at an early age have led many youth to normalize and even trivialize violence. This, coupled with rampant drug consumption, weak family and community ties, high youth unemployment, and high rates of school drop-out, results in many at-risk youth spending a majority of their free time on the streets where gangs often serve as role models and offer an attractive opportunity for economic stability. While youth are exposed to several forms of violence, the homicide rate provides a clear picture of the dire context. In 2017, murder rates reached a 20-year high, with just under 30,000 murders (a homicide rate of 20.5 per 100,000 inhabitants).

This bulletin focuses specifically on community violence, which is often unplanned and generally occurs in public, between individuals who do not necessarily know one another. Other categories of violence, most notably violence linked to organized crime, are a widespread source of insecurity in Mexico, but interventions to reduce them have been the subject of far less rigorous evaluation. While these other forms of violence present formidable challenges, they can only be addressed by very different strategies, often requiring longer-term institutional reform and more traditional law enforcement action.

Despite the high incidence of violence related to organized crime in Mexico, the share of homicides and crimes attributable to community violence remains high and, often, undercounted (estimates suggest that roughly one third to half of all homicides bear signs of organized crime-style violence). Efforts aimed at reducing community violence at the local level are thus of urgent importance and should be designed to complement other organized-crime reduction strategies at the national level. In recent years, innovative strategies have been introduced at both the federal and state level, but few of these interventions have been rigorously tested.

We draw on evidence produced by over 260 studies that met a high bar for methodological standards: using randomized experimental or quasi-experimental methods with appropriately designed comparison groups. Setting the evidence bar this high means that the range of interventions and programs that we are able to identify as having a strong evidence base is relatively narrow. To ensure that we can offer relevant and broad-ranging policy advice, we try to isolate the key elements of effective programming and the potential principles behind effective strategies of crime and violence prevention to guide in the refinement of new interventions and innovations that may provide a basis for future evaluations.

INTERVENTIONS

Our literature review identifies only six types of interventions for which there is strong evidence of effectiveness in deterring at-risk individuals and offenders from criminal and violent behaviors: cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), multidimensional juvenile therapy, drug courts and drug addiction treatment, focused deterrence, controls on the sale of alcohol, and hot spots policing. Although the evidence of effectiveness is strong for each of these interventions, there still remain relevant areas for future research, mainly related to how to generate longer-lasting impacts, how to improve program targeting of higher-risk populations, and how to combine effective interventions into a single program.

A second group of interventions identified by our literature review are those for which there is promising, but still incomplete, evidence of effectiveness. Evaluations of the four interventions in this category—vocational training and employment, restorative justice, alternatives to incarceration, and conditional cash transfers (CCTs)—suggest these may be effective strategies but they have nonetheless left open some questions for further research that should be seen as avenues for innovation. These questions include when to combine interventions (such as vocational training and employment with CBT-inspired programs) versus when to measure the stand-alone effects of a program on violence reduction (such as the case of conditional cash transfers).

A third and much broader category of interventions are backed by only inconclusive or contested evidence of effectiveness, such as crime prevention through environmental design, community-based prevention programs, and school-based programs, among others. Any decision to pursue these approaches at scale should be based on a careful assessment of whether, when, and how they might work. Where these interventions are currently being implemented in Mexico, implementers should take into account existing evidence in order to test and further refine the effectiveness of these programs. When re-assessing the potential of these approaches, an important consideration will be whether the opportunity cost of investing in these programs outweighs the cost of investing in approaches proven to be effective.

Finally, our literature review identifies a handful of interventions for which there is no evidence of effectiveness. Where these interventions are being implemented, they should be reviewed and perhaps replaced with programs that the evidence base suggests are more likely to succeed. This category includes hospital-based prevention programs, boot camps for youth offenders, "Scared Straight" programs, juvenile curfews, drug law enforcement, and gun buyback programs.

Table 1 (at the end of this bulletin) provides a theoretical description of each of the interventions reviewed and analyzes the underlying mechanisms that may explain their effectiveness (or lack thereof). The third column discusses whether and how the intervention is currently being implemented in Mexico and highlights relevant limitations or areas of opportunity. The last column presents a discussion of issues that should be considered before scaling up these programs (when applicable), as well as open questions that should be addressed in future research. The table is separated by colors (green, light green, orange, and red) into four groups according to how favorable their evidence is in terms of effectiveness for reducing community violence, with the more effective interventions appearing at the top. Where the existing evidence base is strong enough, we suggest that programs that have proven successful elsewhere should be adopted in Mexico.
We also identify a category of interventions that have been adopted widely but for which there is little clear evidence base (and in some cases, evidence that these interventions may be ineffective), and recommend that these be scaled down.

MOVING FORWARD: IDEAS FOR INNOVATION

The material in this bulletin aims to act as guide to inform policy based on an understanding of evidence. To apply this knowledge, we present the following recommendations for designing future policy and advancing the research agenda on youth crime and violence prevention.

1) Implement programs supported by strong evidence

While the evidence offers clear insights into which approaches are widely proven to be effective, may offer promise, or appear not to work, any potential program should be carefully adapted and implemented according to local circumstances.

The fundamental challenge of drawing on a global evidence base that is heavily weighted towards studies from higher-income settings is the question of generalizability. Will the success of specific interventions implemented in one context carry over? Answering this question requires a sound understanding of both the local context and the mechanisms through which we understand interventions to have created change elsewhere—that is, why people responded the way they did.

To make this assessment, policymakers should follow these steps:
1. Understand the disaggregated theory behind the program (i.e. understand the mechanisms);
2. Consider whether local conditions hold for that theory to apply;
3. Assess how strong the evidence is for a required general behavior change (for which this white paper is a helpful start);
4. Gauge whether the implementation process can be carried out well.

2) Develop better diagnoses of local problems and design tailored solutions

In order to advance towards a better understanding of crime in Mexico, more research is needed on the different categories of crime and how they relate to one another. To respond to increasing levels of violence, Mexico will need to adopt two very different kinds of change:

1. Agile and adaptive innovation in the kinds of programming adopted
2. Strengthening of its law enforcement and justice system

Furthermore, investments in both should be made simultaneously. While here we present strategies for investing in the former, future policy efforts and research should focus on exploring how these two kinds of change may interact, and how innovative programs might also work to drive institution strengthening.

3) Foster local innovation following the key principles and elements of effectiveness identified in the literature

Three key principles emerge from our literature review for guiding innovation and program design, along with seven elements of effectiveness that underlie the success of crime and violence prevention programs (see Key Principles and Elements of Effectiveness). In general, the evidence suggests that interventions should be targeted towards risker people, places, and behaviors where violence is concentrated using data and risk assessments. Services should be proactive and focus on rehabilitation. To prevent crime from happening, programs should be focused on the underlying factors causing it. When crime cannot be prevented, rehabilitation programs are much better alternatives than purely correctional ones.

Key Principles

Concentration Principle: There are no silver bullets in crime prevention. Instead, there are a variety of modestly effective programs that, when combined in appropriate ways, can produce robust effects. A collective approach for crime and violence prevention should respond to the principle of concentration by focusing on the highest risk places, people, and behaviors, and "on the accumulation of individually modest but collectively robust programmatic effects" (Abt and Winship, 2016) to achieve maximum impact.

Coordination Principle: A crucial corollary of the concentration principle is the need for greater coordination between violence prevention actors (Abt and Winship, 2016). Rather than promoting interventions that aim to address as many causes of violence as possible, institutions should specialize and coordinate on specific services targeted at the highest risk places, individuals, and behaviors.

Proactivity and Rehabilitation Principles: Crime reduction activities should not only be reactive—i.e. responding to crimes that have already taken place—but should also be proactive—i.e. seeking to prevent violence before it takes place. Reacting to violent crime is necessary but not sufficient to achieve success. Being more proactive means identifying and anticipating crime and violence before they happen by understanding and addressing the underlying factors causing them. In this sense, focusing on the highest risk population is critical. Whenever violence cannot be prevented, evidence strongly suggests that well designed and implemented rehabilitation programs have the ability to greatly reduce recidivism among participants.

Developing implementation capacity is crucial to ensure program fidelity and adherence. Implementers should build expertise by recruiting new personnel and training existing staff with an emphasis on analysis and evaluation in criminal justice or a closely related field. Programs must be sufficiently funded in order to develop these necessary capacities.

Therefore, it is crucial to change priorities towards fewer and better programs and avoid a large number of low-capacity one-time interventions.
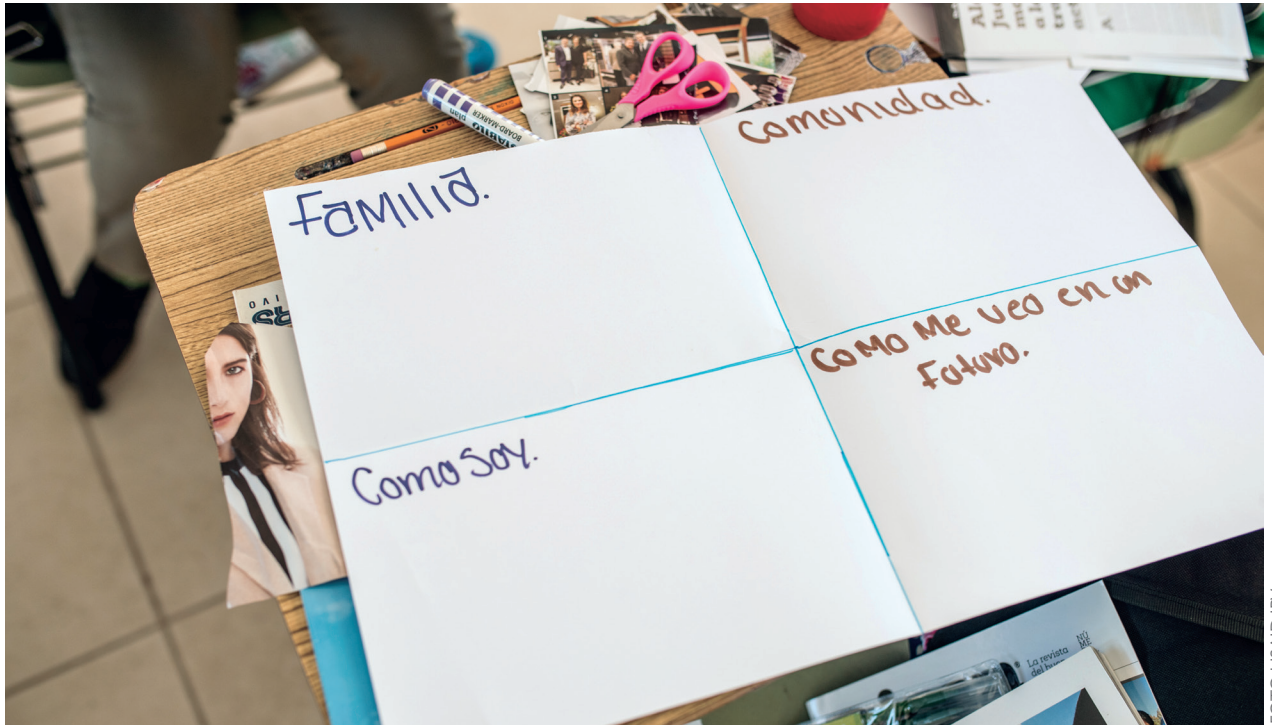
Elements of Effectiveness

Targeting: Prevention interventions must be informed by thorough and reliable data to identify and attend the highest-risk locations, individuals, and behaviors.

High intensity and dosage: Greater intensity and higher treatment dosage programs are generally more effective.

Strong program design: A well-defined intervention informed by theory and evidence is critical for effectiveness.

Fidelity/Adherence: Fidelity and adherence to implementation and program design produce stronger treatment effects.

Monitoring and evaluation: Strong M&E systems are crucial to continually assess the effectiveness of interventions.

Financial and technical capacity: Effective interventions must have sufficient and sustainable financial resources, as well as properly selected and trained facilitators.

Locally grounded: Interventions should be embedded within local communities. Having clear channels for communication and engagement between implementers, local stakeholders, and partners within the community is essential.

Finally, interventions should be continuously monitored and evaluated, using the best data available and most rigorous methodologies possible under the specific circumstances. Organizations should commit to developing M&E systems that enable the conditions for this to happen.

4) Create local networks of knowledge and capacity

Fostering local networks with increased capacity and channels to share lessons both horizontally and vertically is critical. Efforts to coordinate specific, high-quality services that target the highest risk places, individuals, and behaviors are essential.

Governments, funders, international organizations, multilateral funds, local trusts and NGOs should work together to achieve these ends. This should be understood as an incremental process in which organizations work towards building capacity, creating sustainable processes for knowledge sharing, fostering leaders, and strengthening promising institutions or models by providing technical assistance. The aim should be to enable the environment for those promising innovations to be able to thrive, to generate knowledge and to identify new effective solutions with potential for scale.

There is incredible opportunity to work towards strengthening and creating better partnership practices. The commitment should be to plan together for the cumulative development of knowledge in violence reduction.

Considerations for the Mexican Context

The Mexican context presents a number of unique challenges and limitations that should be taken into account when considering the evidence. For instance, widespread impunity, created by the judicial system, makes it difficult to generate a credible threat to implement law enforcement strategies, such as focused deterrence. Poor perceptions of police legitimacy and procedural fairness also impair the ability of law enforcement to credibly interact and communicate with offenders and the community.

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TABLE I

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Focused Deterrence *(Behavior-based / Tertiary Prevention and Suppression)*	A strategy involving strong partnerships between police, prosecutors, communities, and service providers that directly communicates to chronic offenders a variety of both sanctions and rewards ("pulling levers") designed to provide clear incentives for refraining from engaging in further criminal activity.	Offering a clear list of sanctions can push offenders' perceived risk beyond a certain threshold ("tipping" effect), generating strong deterrent effects. By engaging in face-to-face meetings with repeat offenders and clearly presenting the possibilities for both sanctions and rewards, the police can greatly improve their procedural fairness and legitimacy in the eyes of the community.	Currently, no focused deterrence strategies are being implemented in Mexico, although there are ongoing exploratory conversations. Challenges to implementation include: 1) A lack of high-quality intelligence on high-risk offenders, as well as the data systems needed to identify them. 2) Widespread impunity, a product of Mexico's weak judicial system, makes it difficult to generate the credible threat required to shift incentives (or "pull levers"). Potential threats and sanctions would not be implemented as swiftly as the intervention demands, or at all. 3) Focused deterrence depends on complementary social services, but the lack of adequate health, mental health, housing, drug treatment, education, and employment services could significantly impair implementation of this intervention. 4) Lack of coordination between police forces, prosecutors, and social service providers makes a coherent strategy difficult to implement. 5) Poor perceptions of police legitimacy and procedural fairness impair the ability of law enforcement to credibly interact and communicate with offenders and the community.	The effectiveness of focused deterrence depends, in part, on institutional settings and capacities. No focused deterrence strategy has been experimentally evaluated to date, though the existing quasi-experimental evidence is quite positive. Recent systematic reviews have, nonetheless, underscored the need for more rigorous evaluations. As this intervention is highly localized and does not require in-depth reform of the whole police body, in places where there is already strong police leadership there is an opportunity to develop local models that could later be replicated elsewhere.
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy *(People and Behavior-based / Tertiary Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation)*	An approach in which trained specialists hold a limited number of sessions that help at-risk or offender youth evaluate and modify the way they think and make decisions, as well as adapt unhelpful thinking and self-destructive behaviors.	Recent evidence suggests that some of the causal mechanisms underlying the impact of these programs are changes in self-control, time preferences, values, social skills, and social identity, and that these skills are malleable even for adults. For this to happen, treatment providers must be adequately trained and able to connect to at-risk youth.	Existing programs in Mexico are piloting different approaches and preparing to rigorously test the impact of CBT-inspired interventions with both i) new populations (including out-of-school, high-risk youth and high-risk youth serving non-custodial sanctions), as well as ii) through new delivery mechanisms (such as working with schoolteachers to deliver components of CBT). Some challenges include: 1) Many implementers still have an incomplete understanding of the mechanisms at work. For instance, program curricula are not always adequately adapted to local culture, the age of beneficiaries, or criminogenic risks of offenders. 2) There is often a lack of training, monitoring, and supervision protocols for those delivering CBT programs, threatening the effectiveness of interventions. 3) In general, there is limited knowledge on how to work with higher-risk populations, such as those involved with organized crime or violent gangs.	Some evidence suggests that the effects generated by CBT-inspired interventions may only be temporary. An important area for additional research is how to extend these effects by extending the duration of therapy, offering booster sessions, or pairing with economic assistance programs. Adapting CBT-inspired programs for a more criminally engaged and very high-risk population is another area for innovation.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Multidimensional Juvenile Therapy (*People-based / Offender Rehabilitation*)	A people-based offender rehabilitation approach that seeks to prevent juvenile criminal activity by: monitoring adolescent offenders' activities; addressing violent behavior through pro-social skills development; training caregivers and parents on behavior management techniques; and offering substance abuse treatment.	Offering prosocial activities and establishing supportive adult relationships can help youth better regulate their emotions, mitigate negative peer effects and improve their educational, occupational, and developmental success.	Programs implemented thus far in Mexico cannot be classified as multidimensional—they generally fail to take the holistic, multi-actor approach that characterizes those programs evaluated elsewhere. Challenges to implementation so far identified include: 1) Mexico lacks foster care services or other support services for adolescents without family ties. Furthermore, the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF) does not provide services for minors in conflict with the law. 2) Inter-agency coordination with service providers outside of the judicial system is poor or non-existent. 3) State-provided services are limited. While the private sector and NGOs have stepped in to offer these services, they have restricted capacity to deliver effective programs.	Investing in and testing therapy models that can overcome weak family structures, either including other institutions (such as schools) or by developing new protection systems (such as peer groups), is of the highest relevance and should be a priority for the youth crime and violence prevention agenda. As the most robust programs in Mexico are coming out from the private or NGO sector, a priority should be finding ways to strengthen these programs and test them rigorously in order to then transfer capabilities to the State.
Drug Courts and Drug Treatment (*Behavior-based / Offender Rehabilitation*)	Specialized courts and programs that utilize a treatment-based model in which judicial prosecutors, law enforcement, mental health practitioners, social service providers, and treatment providers collaborate to facilitate the long-term recovery of offenders.	Drug courts and drug treatment programs are most effective when imposing consequences on participants for failing to meet treatment requirements and offering benefits upon program graduation (like avoiding conviction). Programs found to consistently reduce criminal behavior and recidivism include therapeutic communities and gender-responsive treatment interventions designed specifically to address the different patterns of recidivism and drug use experienced by female offenders.	In Mexico, the 2008 Criminal Reform and the 2016 National Juvenile Justice System Law established a legal framework for implementing drug courts programs. Implementation efforts have thus far been relatively limited at the local level, with only a few examples, such as the Therapeutic Justice Court in the State of Nuevo León. Substance abuse is still viewed primarily from a punitive perspective, rather than as a public health problem. As a result, the judicial system shoulders the primary responsibility for dealing with youth facing drug abuse problems. Other state agencies have limited capacity to offer specialized services. In particular, we found no examples of gender-responsive treatment designed to address specific patterns of recidivism and drug use associated with female offenders—a strategy which has shown promising results in other contexts.	While there is evidence of the effectiveness of drug courts in reducing recidivism, this appears to vary by court type. For instance, there is less accumulated evidence regarding the effectiveness of Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) drug courts and juvenile drug courts. It also remains unclear how offender risk-levels affect treatment.
Alcohol Control (*Behavior-based / Primary Prevention*)	Legislative regulations on alcohol sales and distribution aimed at limiting heavy drinking through measures such as restricting trading hours and days, limiting alcohol sales to specific outlets, etc.	The clearest mechanism driving the effectiveness of alcohol prevention strategies is reducing the availability of alcoholic beverages to specific times or locations.	In Mexico, current alcohol control regulations include: restricting the trading hours of off-premise locations, regulating the opening hours of bars and clubs, and setting up sobriety checkpoints. Some limitations include: 1) Enforcement of trade restrictions relies on the involvement of municipal inspectors who, in many municipalities, are limited in number. 2) Restrictions on alcohol sales are set by the municipality while restrictions on opening hours for bars and clubs are set by the state. Without coordination, the effectiveness of these measures is thus limited. 3) Where alcohol regulations have been implemented, they generally do not apply on national or local holidays, which are generally times of widespread alcohol consumption.	Implementation of alcohol restrictions might be most effective when applied to relevant hot spots at times of the day when crime and violence victimization are more related to alcohol consumption.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Hot Spots Policing *(Place-based / Suppression)*	A policing strategy that focuses additional law enforcement resources on small geographical areas with disproportionally high crime rates. While strategies to reduce crime in problem areas can vary widely, hot spots policing relies primarily on either highly focused traditional law enforcement strategies, some form of problem-oriented policing, or a combination of both.	Increasing foot patrols and officers assigned to an area raises the likelihood of disruption, apprehension, and arrest, creating a deterrence effect. When hot spots interventions involve a problem-oriented approach, which shifts the primarily reactive role of the police towards a proactive model in which they aim to identify underlying problems that could be targeted to alleviate crime and violence at their roots, they can change the relationships and dynamics between offenders, targets, and guardians at treatment locations, which in turn can reduce crime rates.	In Mexico, some municipal police are increasingly incorporating a geographical focus into their patrolling operations, but the strategies or activities police perform in those places remain largely undefined. Some challenges identified in Mexico include: 1) Hot spots policing is less likely to be effective when violence is highly motivated and organized, as with cartel-related competition and violence. 2) The strategy relies on effective crime-mapping as well as a sound understanding of what is driving violence at specific hot spots. However, the majority of police in Mexico may lack the capacity to collect and analyze crime data, perform mapping, and gather and assess intelligence.	Recent studies have raised concerns regarding the nature of displacement of crime to neighboring areas. Most studies to date have drawn on relatively small samples and clusters, and may have lacked the statistical power to detect small displacement effects. Questions also remain over how exactly to make use of the additional resources that hot spots policing deploys to specific areas. It is important to experiment with different forms of hot spots policing (e.g. routine patrol versus problem-oriented policing). Furthermore, it may also be useful to combine hot spots policing with other interventions, specifically offender-based strategies.
Vocational Training and Employment *(People-based / Secondary, Tertiary Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation)*	By offering marketable career skills this intervention provides youth with the means to attain a secure, legal income and occupies time they may otherwise devote to criminal activities.	Providing at-risk youth with a clearer path to employment opportunities, including through job-skills training and connections, gives them a legal alternative to criminal involvement. Alongside skills development, offering conditional or unconditional cash grants to people with unstable jobs and little access to credit may lead to reductions in criminal activity.	The quality of vocational programing for high-risk youth in Mexico is quite broad and, unfortunately, few interventions have been rigorously evaluated. Some challenges identified in Mexico include: 1) Even the most promising programs report that changing employers' prejudice and stigma towards at-risk youth is difficult. 2) Employers are often more willing to offer unpaid internships and practice periods than paid jobs. 3) The lack of a clear beneficiary profile and related recruitment strategy prevents organizations from reaching the target population.	Criminal behavior and recidivism do not always respond to income or employment opportunities, especially for offenders and high-risk individuals. Further research is needed to study the potential complementarity between other interventions (for instance, CBT-inspired programs) and vocational training and employment. One promising strategy may be to work with the private sector to develop targeted training programs that provide certifications to participants. Another would be to draw on the expertise of technical schools who are capable of providing high-quality training on skills needed in local markets.
Restorative Justice *(Direct Mediation)* *(People-based / Offender and Victim Rehabilitation)*	A broad concept that encompasses any program that brings together the parties affected by a criminal incident (e.g. offenders, victims, and their respective families and communities) in a non-adversarial mediation process guided by a trained facilitator.	There is preliminary evidence that restorative justice programs are likely to moderately reduce subsequent convictions or arrests. While the mechanisms behind its effectiveness are still unclear, focus on family counseling and reintegration appear to be important components to the program, as these processes provide higher levels of satisfaction. Impacts appear to vary depending on the nature of offenders' previous records—the greatest reductions in recidivism appear among first- and second-time offenders.	Following the 2008 Criminal Reform and the 2016 National Juvenile Justice System Law, restorative justice programs have been implemented as part of the judicial system. Local prosecutors are primarily responsible for implementing these strategies and may choose to carry out restorative justice programs as alternative paths to prosecution, in cases where there is a clear identification of the offender and victim. Some innovative local police reforms have also looked for ways to train police officers to provide mediation services to resolve conflicts between citizens in the neighborhoods they serve. In spite of these advances, there are a number of factors that may limit the effectiveness of the strategy in Mexico: 1) The number of trained and certified mediators is currently insufficient to meet the demand for these types of restorative justice programs. 2) As police and judicial agencies have strong incentives to show increased numbers of arrests, this can inhibit resolution of cases through alternatives to prosecution.	Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms driving the impact of mediation programs. Important questions to explore include: (1) the role of the reintegrative focus versus the role of sentencing, (2) differentiating the effects of the program by the type of offender, and (3) better understand what is driving the positive impact of programs that include family counseling.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Non-custodial Sanctions *(Alternatives to Incarceration)* *(People-based / Offender Rehabilitation)*	Programs in which offenders are directed to engage in intensive community work, diversion, or wraparound services as an alternative to imprisonment.	Under special circumstances, these programs have at least the same effect, if not better, than imprisonment. By reducing the social stigma of conviction (especially for young, first-time offenders), alternative sanctions remove barriers to social interactions and employment opportunities, diminishing the risk of recidivism. By contributing services to the community youth are also more willing to confront the consequences of their actions and make social connections.	In 2016, legislators reformed the National Juvenile Justice System Law to increase attention on prevention and rehabilitation of young offenders. While the new law created a framework that guarantees juvenile offenders' rights, avoids labeling young offenders as criminals, and privileges reparation and rehabilitation, it was not accompanied by efforts to improve the judicial system's human capital, technology, and infrastructure, or to develop a clearer definition and delineation of different agencies' roles, resulting in a lack of potential services to which youth can be sent. Consequently, the institutional context in which this law came to life has fostered a "revolving doors" phenomenon that has left hundreds of minors without the attention they need.	Offenders' characteristics (especially age, criminal history, and risk profile) play a key role in the success or failure of these programs, and their interaction with sanctions should be further studied to better inform policy decisions. It also remains unclear how much of the measured impacts can be attributed to the negative effects of imprisonment (e.g. criminogenic effect, isolation from society, negative labeling) affecting the control groups rather than to the positive effects of non-custodial programs.
Conditional Cash Transfers *(People-based / Secondary Prevention)*	Programs in which poor households receive government payments (cash transfers) conditional on the fulfillment of a specific obligation (e.g. schooling, health clinic attendance, etc.)	The availability of cash likely has an important role in deterring criminal activities, especially economically-motivated crimes, for at-risk individuals.	PROSPERA is the biggest social program in Mexico with approximately six million families with benefits. However, it is not specifically designed to reduce violence and, thus, the design of the program does not consider its potential effects on violence outcomes.	Few current studies of CCT programs look specifically at their effects on violent outcomes, in spite of existing theories that the availability of cash could play an important role in deterring criminal activities. The theory is further supported by the results of studies on programs that include cash transfers alongside other crime prevention strategies. Future research could provide further evidence on the stand-alone effects of CCT programs on crime and violence. Additionally, given the solid foundation of the CCT program in Mexico and its capacity to identify at-risk individuals (the PROSPERA program has arguably the best database of beneficiaries in the country), there is an important opportunity to pilot complementary approaches to CCT, such as vocational trainings, employment programs, entrepreneur support, and CBT interventions, and to further study their effects on crime prevention.
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design *(Place-based / Primary prevention)*	Programs that seek to prevent situational crime by changing the physical design of the urbanized built environment (e.g. through improved street lighting or expansion of public transport systems).	The evidence is inconclusive—even successful interventions produce only weak effects, mostly on property crime. Improvements to physical spaces can build community pride and foster collective action, strengthening informal social control over crime. Creating stronger communities may foster more collective action and improve relationships between citizens and the community. When environmental design is disconnected from the neighborhoods and communities in which it is embedded, as is often the case, focusing on direct crime prevention might, at best, displace crime to surrounding areas.	Despite inconlusive evidence of effectiveness, CPTED interventions focused on creating or rehabilitating public spaces and on improving public services—from street lighting to garbage collection—have been widely adopted in Mexico. Furthermore, local governments have installed security cameras in the busiest and most dangerous areas and have incorporated privately owned cameras into their surveillance strategies. Given the presence of these interventions in the Mexican context, there is ample opportunity to introduce and rigorously evaluate innovations based on the existing evidence.	Those interventions that leverage CPTED elements to build stronger communities through the development and empowerment of social leadership show more promising results. To improve existing programs, more processes should be put in place that allow communities to communicate their needs to local authorities and law enforcement.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Disorder Policing *(Place-based / Suppression)*	A policing strategy focussed on reducing the signs of physical and social disorder (e.g. broken windows and graffiti) in at-risk, high crime areas.	Results vary strongly depending on the type of disorder strategy implemented. Aggressive 'zero tolerance' strategies can further undermine police-citizen relations in low-income urban communities, but more focused approaches that are problem- and community-oriented appear to generate moderate crime reduction benefits.	In recent years, there has been widespread discussion in Mexico of expanding police actions to include prevention strategies, rather than simply reactive approaches. However, in general, these discussions have not yet been reflected in everyday operations. Some municipal police departments are taking important steps towards this objective. These local police reforms vary in terms of depth, scope, and implementation.	Future research should test the impacts of different disorder policing strategies on crime using high-quality research designs to better understand the effects of the mechanisms at stake under each of these broad categories (community problem solving and aggressive order maintenance).
Community Policing *(Place-based / Suppression)*	A policing approach that emphasizes community involvement in crime prevention through principles of accountability, collaboration, decentralization, and problem solving.	There are few rigorous studies and results are inconsistent, though lack of fidelity to a single model has been identified as one obstacle to the successful implementation of the strategy.	Current reforms mainly aim to achieve the following objectives: (1) professionalize human resources and improve motivation; (2) improve the use of data and information; and (3) change the role of the police. While moving in the right direction, Mexico's reformed police departments do not yet have the necessary capacity to fully adopt many of the innovative police strategies found in the literature, and thus it is difficult to differentiate between these approaches. These strategies rely on sophisticated analysis of the criminal context, which requires careful and coordinated intelligence work. In Mexico, the capacity and proclivity of police departments to use data for intelligence work remains inadequate—staff are too young and inexperienced. Furthermore, some interventions require high inter-agency coordination and institutional capacity to generate positive effects on crime reduction.	While some studies suggest that community policing may have the capacity to impact serious-crime rates, it is possible that the success of the program may be difficult to replicate in other contexts or at scale. More research is needed to test it effectiveness in police departments with varying levels of institutional capacity and performance.
Community-based Prevention Programs *(People-based / Primary and Secondary Prevention)*	A broad concept centering on programs that incorporate members of the general population into local crime and violence prevention activities and engage them in a collective response.	Several studies suggest that the success of such programs likely depends on a thorough analysis of local risks and potential protective factors enabling appropriate, location-specific strategies. Because the models of these programs vary considerably, it is difficult to draw strong overarching conclusions.	In Mexico, very few of these interventions match the quality of those evaluated in the literature. Most local programs focus on workshop activities (e.g. cultural, artistic, musical, athletic) either in public spaces or in community centers. These interventions share several design and implementation limitations: (1) They almost always lack a diagnosis of local community needs, risks, and opportunities; (2) they do not follow a targeted strategy for identifying key beneficiaries; and (3) they do not use specialized facilitators.	It is recommended that policy should take a more strategic approach to funding disbursement that better targets proven interventions, decreasing resources allocated to community-based programs as currently implemented.
Gang Outreach *(Streetworker) Programs* *(People-based / Tertiary Prevention)*	Programs in which locally-based street, gang, or youth workers build relationships with gang-impacted youth and their families as a way to build alternative social support networks.	Evidence is scarce; a review of the limited literature suggests that context and implementation are critical. Where gangs are not already highly interconnected, street workers may increase cohesiveness and, therefore, violence. Individual engagement with youth offenders may yield more positive results.	The Cure Violence gang outreach model has been implemented in a few Mexican municipalities, but the program has been mainly transfered from US models without in-depth adaptation to the local context, which has further limited its effectiveness.	More research is needed to better understand the effectiveness of this approach, particularly on the systematization and professionalization of street workers, as well as their relations with formal institutions.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Mentoring *(People-based / Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation)*	Programs that assign adult, non-parental mentors to at-risk or offender youth with the aim of promoting healthy development and functioning by reducing risk factors (e.g. family problems, lack of commitment to school, antisocial behavior) and strengthening protective factors.	In cases where positive results have been reported, mentoring was not implemented as a standalone intervention, but rather embedded into a network of criminal justice, social service, and community-based organizations.	Mentoring interventions have not been widely adopted in Mexico. In the few cases where they have been implemented, mentoring programs have lacked the formalization of the models examined in the literature and have functioned, usually, as an additional one-time component to other existing programs.	More research is needed to isolate the effects of mentoring—for those studies that show positive impacts of these programs on crime reduction, the effects are most often associated with complementary activities and service provision outside the primary mentor relationship. It is also important to further understand the relevance of mentorship duration, which seems to play a major role in the effectiveness of this intervention—when shorter than a year, results are particularly limited.
School-based Programs *(People and Behavior-based / Primary and Secondary Prevention)*	Programs that aim to deter school-aged youth from engaging in crime and violence through classes or activities guided by school teachers or external facilitators (e.g. police officers, therapists, etc.). They generally seek to change the antisocial behavior of at-risk individuals.	Class-based, standalone approaches centered on information provision, show no effects. School-based programs aimed at preventing substance abuse and gang involvement show no effects. Programs that commonly involve police officers (like D.A.R.E) may strengthen the police's role in the community and improve perceptions of police, but these programs have not been shown to have significant positive effects on crime and violence prevention.	Few Mexican programs incorporate a multi-component approach, which include features like community service and parental involvement, and have shown moderate effects. An important challenge identified by NGOs working in Mexican schools is that, although they are able to identify at-risk students, they are unable to channel them towards more specialized interventions, given the lack of services offered by the state. The D.A.R.E program is perceived as highly effective and endorsed by several trusts and police forces. Despite strong evidence of the ineffectiveness of this program, there is a general belief amongst implementers in Mexico that D.A.R.E. can be improved.	Comprehensive, integrated approaches to prevention and interventions that pair school-based programs with other proven strategies, like CBT, offer more promise and should be further studied. Additional research is also necessary to assess the benefits of after-school programs.
Non-custodial Sanctions *(Supervision)* *(People-based / Offender Rehabilitation)*	Non-custodial supervision includes parole (conditional early release of a prisoner into the community under supervision), probation (a supervised period of time ordered by a court instead of incarceration), and electronic monitoring (a technological device that ensures offenders follow the terms of their sentences).	Selected studies show probation programs are only marginally more effective than incarceration in reducing recidivism; neither parole nor electronic monitoring produce any significant effect.	See reforms mentioned in the **Non-custodial Sanctions (Alternatives to Incarceration)** section.	It is unclear why this approach does not seem to be more effective than imprisonment, since it should provide offenders with opportunities to participate in rehabilitative services and to engage in pro-social experiences in the community instead of being confined in jail. Additional research is necessary to understand the limiting factors.
Hospital-based Prevention Programs *(People-based / Tertiary Prevention)*	A tertiary prevention strategy that targets repeat victims and perpetrators of violence at trauma centers and hospitals.	The brief nature of the intervention is not sufficient to generate behavior change among this target population.	Hospital-based prevention programs have not been widely implemented in Mexico.	While hospital-based prevention programs are among the best targeted interventions for violence prevention—as they select individuals clearly involved in violent behavior at crucial moments—they do not consistently yield positive results. Nonetheless, leveraging trauma centers to identify at-risk individuals offers a promising approach for channeling them towards appropriate programs and services.

Intervention	What does it involve?	How does it work?	What is being done in Mexico?[2]	What questions remain for future research and innovation?
Boot Camps *(People-based / Offender Rehabilitation)*	Short-term juvenile shock incarceration programs that resemble military basic training and target young offenders.	While boot camps place youth in militaristic settings that focus on providing offenders with structure and discipline, they fail to properly identify and treat risk factors. Systematic reviews show that they do not produce a reduction in offender recidivism.	Boot camps are not widely implemented in Mexico, and those that are carried out tend to use a less militaristic approach, while still providing guidance and training. Most of these programs are offered to youth already housed in correctional facilities.	Though generally focused on the United States context, there is a strong evidence base supporting the lack of effectiveness of this approach and convincing theories that this result will hold in different contexts. No additional research is recommended.
Scared Straight *(People-based / Offender Rehabilitation)*	A deterrence-oriented intervention that brings at-risk youth or juvenile offenders on organized visits to penitentiary facilities in order for them to interact with adult inmates and observe the harsh reality of prison life.	Scared Straight programs fail to reduce future criminal behavior—some studies even found that these programs increased crime and delinquency among participants. In general, it is believed that the brief nature of the intervention is not sufficient to generate behavior change among this target population. Questions remain as to why it may increase crime.	The Scared Straight programs that have been implemented in Mexico tend not to follow a formalized model and usually only involve a one-time visit to a penitentiary facility.	Though generally focused on the United States context, there is a strong evidence base supporting the lack of effectiveness of this approach and convincing theories that this result will hold in different contexts. No additional research is recommended.
Juvenile Curfews *(Behavior-based / Primary Prevention)*	Restrictions requiring youth to be home between certain nighttime hours, with the intent of limiting engagement in night-life activities in a specified geographic area.	Evidence shows that juvenile offenses concentrate around school and after-school hours, making the timing of curfews ineffective. Parents play an important role in enforcing curfews, but high-risk youth tend to have weaker family structures, presenting challenges to enforcement.	In Mexico, curfews have been imposed by the government in states that have experienced widespread violence, though the objective of these strategies is to protect the general population rather than limit the movement of at-risk youth.	Though generally focused on the United States context, there is a strong evidence base supporting the lack of effectiveness of this approach and convincing theories that this result will hold in different contexts. No additional research is recommended.
Drug Law Enforcement *(Behavior-based / Suppression)*	Policing strategies, that can be both traditional and problem-oriented policing perspectives, that aim to reduce or prevent illicit drug use, drug dealing, and associated problems at drug-dealing locations and drug markets.	Both traditional and problem-oriented interventions have limited impact, although problem-oriented strategies tend to be slighlty more effective. Traditional drug law enforcement is ineffective because (1) displacing dealers can lead to increased competition and territorial disputes between drug cartels; (2) other dealers may fill the vacuum after police raids; (3) concentrating police resources on drug crimes may promote other types of crime by reducing the relative risk of arrest for those activities.	Drug law enforcement strategies have been closely tied to the rise of organized crime in Mexico. Due to the complexity and severity of the problem the implementation of these strategies in most cases are carried out by federal and state, rather than municipal, authorities. This is especially true in smaller municipalities.	There is a strong evidence base supporting the lack of effectivness of traditional drug law enforcement. There is scarce evidence from problem-oriented drug law enfocrcement revealing that location-specific programs involving cooperative partnerhsips between police and third parties may reduce drug crime, although these programs had no effec on reducing other types of crimes. Understanding better the mechanisms at play for these results is needed, as well as to better understand how drug law enforcement strategies may disturb systemic factors.
Gun Buyback Programs *(Behavior-based / Primary Prevention)*	Gun buyback programs repurchase and destroy surrendered firearms and, in turn, reduce the number of firearm-related crimes and deaths by limiting the number of privately owned weapons.	Studies have attributed the failure of these programs to their inability to target and acquire illegal, stolen, and unregistered guns possessed by criminally active people.	In recent years, gun buyback programs have been implemented in many Mexican states, usually with the support of federal government authorities.	There is a strong evidence base supporting the lack of effectiveness of this approach and convincing theories that this result will hold in different contexts. No additional research is recommended.

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