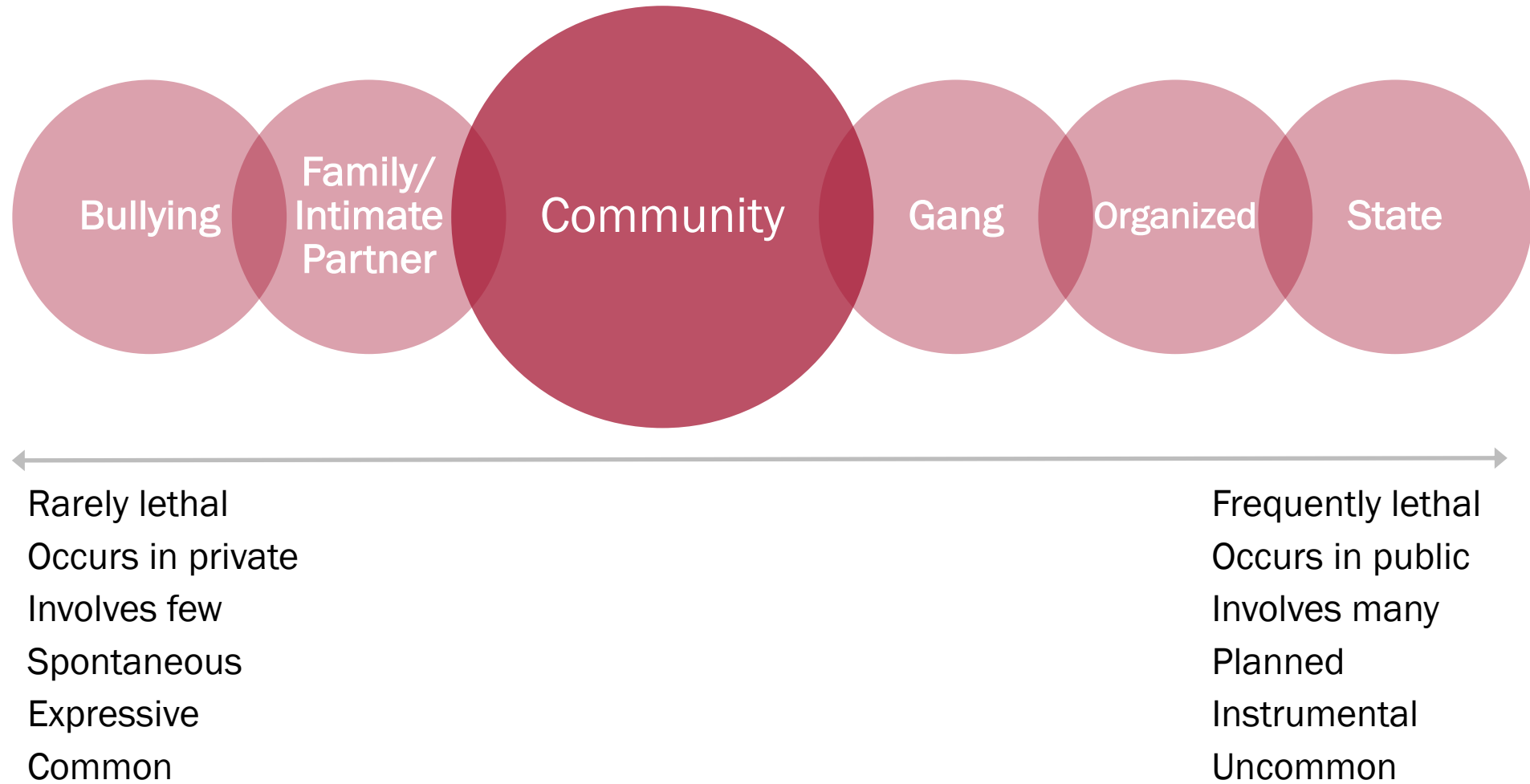# "What Works" in Reducing Community Violence: A Meta-Review and Field Study

Thomas Abt | Senior Fellow | Harvard Kennedy & Law Schools | April 11, 2018

Violence typology and continuum

Bullying · Family/Intimate Partner · Community · Gang · Organized · State

Rarely lethal — Frequently lethal

Occurs in private — Occurs in public

Involves few — Involves many

Spontaneous — Planned

Expressive — Instrumental

Common — Uncommon

"*To date, no meta-reviews have included the full range of programs that are intended to prevent youth violence; additionally, no meta-reviews have used both quantitative and qualitative approaches.*"

Matjasko et al., 2012

Meta-review methodology

- Searched leading databases, journals, grey literature in Americas, Caribbean and Europe

- Focused on community violence and rigorous evidence

- Identified 43 eligible reviews aggregating 1,435 individual studies

- All reviews and most studies generated in high-income countries

Violence is "sticky"

Violence is highly concentrated among small number of places, people, and behaviors

- In Boston, 1% of youth aged 15-24 responsible for over 50% of city-wide shootings; 5% of city responsible for 70% of total shootings (Braga & Winship, 2015)

- In Minneapolis, 50% of 323,000 calls for police service from 3% of addresses (Sherman, Gartin & Buerger, 1989)

- In most cities, 0.5% of the population responsible for 75% of homicides (Muggah, 2015)

People

Violence
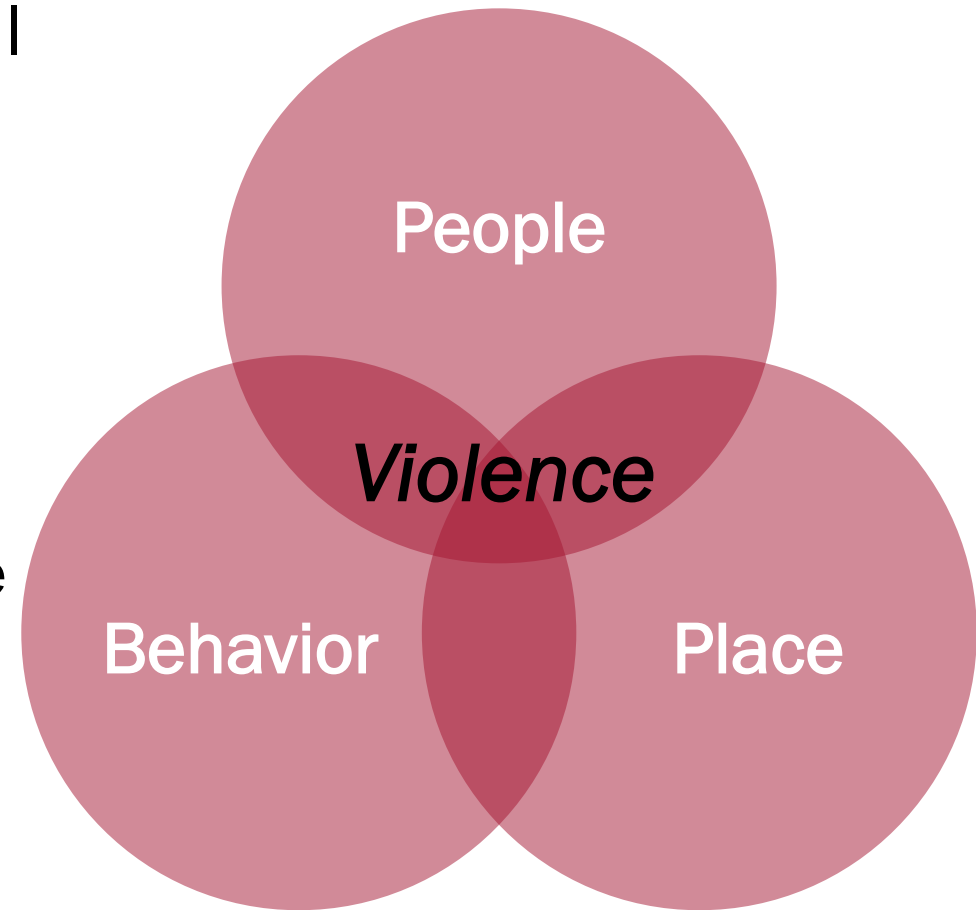
Behavior

Place

"Sticky" strategies work best

- In criminal justice, interventions focusing on highest risk places and people, and behaviors generate strongest effects
  - Policing (Braga, 2015)
  - Gang reduction (Gravel et al., 2012; Petrosino et al., 2015)
  - Recidivism reduction (Hollin, 1999; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007)

- In public health, targeted interventions outperform universal ones
  - Of 15 RCTs of anti-violence interventions – 2 of 2 (100%) tertiary, 3 of 7 (43%) secondary, 2 of 6 (33%) primary interventions reduced violent behavior (Limbos et al., 2007)

- If violence moves around corner, sticky strategies fail, but "over 30 years of research evidence… suggests that crime relocates in only a minority of instances" (Johnson et al., 2014)
  - That said, a new evaluation of hot spots policing in Bogota raises questions

Meta-review highlights

Place-based strategies

- Hot spots, problem-oriented, and broken windows policing all moderately effective

- CPTED, urban renewal strategies only modestly effective

- Community policing <u>not</u> effective

People-based strategies

- Focused deterrence, cognitive behavioral therapy most effective

- Family-based strategies moderately effective

- Standalone education, employment strategies mixed, weak effectiveness

- RNR rehabilitation effective

- "Control" strategies for juveniles <u>not</u> effective

Behavior-based strategies

- Firearms enforcement moderately effective, guns buybacks <u>not</u> effective

- Drug treatment effective, drug enforcement <u>not</u> effective

- Targeted gang enforcement effective, gang prevention <u>not</u> effective

Field study methodology

- In the U.S., met with leadership, management, and staff from leading anti-violence interventions

- In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, met with broad range of stakeholders

- 51 semi-structured interviews and 22 individual site visits in total

U.S. highlights

"Go where the violence is"

"Meet them where they're at"

No "business as usual"

"Stay true to the model"

"Use the data"

"You win with people"

Elements of effectiveness
#1 Specificity

Elements of effectiveness
#2 Proactivity

Elements of effectiveness
#3 Legitimacy

Elements of effectiveness
#4 Capacity

Elements of effectiveness

#5 Theory

Elements of effectiveness
#6 Partnership

	Specificity	Proactivity	Legitimacy	Capacity	Theory	Partnership
Focused Deterrence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-

Northern Triangle field highlights

Tremendous commitment and passion, but a clear lack of capacity in three areas:

- Reliable statistics and data

- Pervasive fear, mistrust

- Traditional criminal justice responsibilities

Concentration Principle

- It makes sense to concentrate resources because:

  - Most strategies have modest or moderate impacts, so effects should be accumulated over multiple interventions

  - Interventions focusing on highest risk places, people, and behaviors generate strongest effects

  - Community violence displacement is generally minimal, so impact to surrounding areas more likely to be positive than negative

- Coordination corollary: concentrated effects must be aligned and coordinated with one another

  - The "comprehensive" conundrum

Implementation Imperative

- Sound implementation essential to intervention effectiveness

- Determining appropriate program dosage or intensity is critical

- In the Northern Triangle, adaptation of interventions developed in high-income, high capacity settings is critical

Evaluation Imperative

- 7% of security-related programs in LACs feature strong evaluation; 57% no evaluation whatsoever (Alvarado et al., 2015)

- Absolutely essential to improve both quantity and quality of evidence and data

- Cumulative knowledge-building is critical

- Improving local capacity is crucial
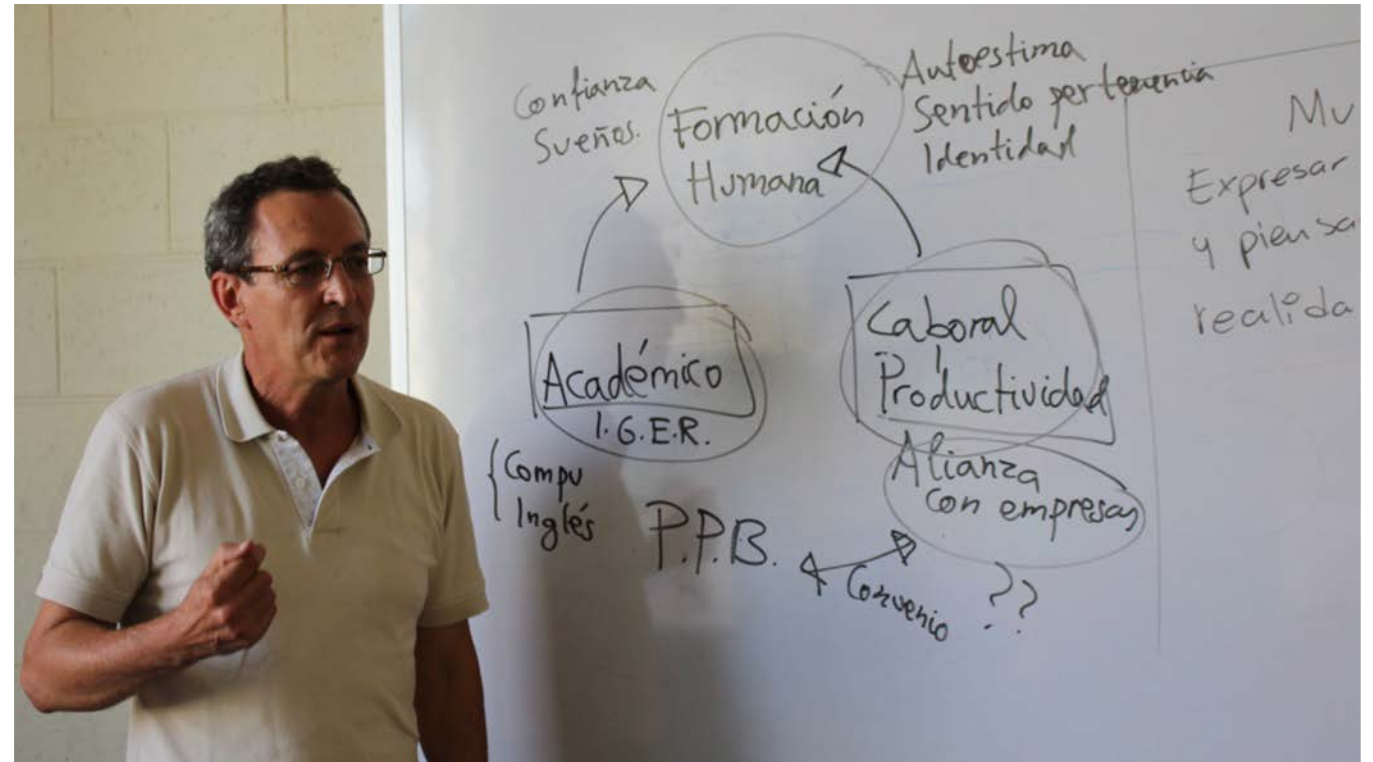
Recommendations for funders

Rec 1

- Recognize centrality of violence reduction to further development to the region and plan accordingly.

Rec 2

- Transition to evidence-informed approaches incrementally but purposefully.

Rec 3

- Build internal and external capacity for evidence-informed violence reduction.

Rec 4

- Invest in evidence and data, emphasizing cumulative knowledge development.

Towards a framework for preventing community violence among youth

Anti-violence framework

- Community violence is a pervasive, persistent, and complex social phenomenon.

- Understanding it requires a multi-disciplinary approach, addressing it demands a multi-sector response.

- In order to properly organize any collective response, frameworks are necessary to coordinate activities so components help rather than hinder each other.

Anti-violence framework

- A good framework:

  - Is theoretically sound, empirically grounded, and easily implemented.

  - Clearly articulates a reasonably accurate, complete, and useful description of both the problem and its solution.

- While many fields contributed to study and practice of violence prevention, public safety and public health outpace all others by significant margin.

Anti-violence framework – all strategies

	Primary Prevention	Secondary Prevention	Tertiary Prevention	Suppression	Rehabilitation
Place	*Urban renewal* *CPTED* *Neighborhood watch*			Hot spots policing Disorder policing Problem-oriented policing *Community policing*	
People	Family-based therapy *School-based programs* *Vocational training* *Mentoring*	CBT Family-based therapy	Focused deterrence *Streetworker programs*	Problem-oriented policing	Recidivism reduction Restorative justice *Boot camps* *Scared Straight*
Behavior	Family-based therapy *School-based programs* *Juvenile curfews* *Gun buybacks* Gang prevention	CBT Family-based therapy Alcohol regulation	Focused deterrence *Streetworker programs*	Problem-oriented policing Firearms enforcement *Drug enforcement*	Drug courts and treatment

Interventions with modest, mixed, null, or negative effects on community violence are indicated in *italics*.

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Anti-violence framework — best strategies

	Primary Prevention	Secondary Prevention	Tertiary Prevention	Suppression	Rehabilitation
Place			(Urban renewal) (CPTED)	Hot spots policing Disorder policing Problem-oriented policing	
People	Family-based therapy (School-based programs)	CBT Family-based therapy	Focused deterrence (Streetworker programs)	Problem-oriented policing	Recidivism reduction
Behavior	Family-based therapy (School-based programs)	CBT Family-based therapy Alcohol regulation	Focused deterrence (Streetworker programs)	Firearms enforcement Problem-oriented policing	

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Interventions that, if revised, could have significantly improved effects are indicated in (parentheses).

J-PAL, JPV, USAID project

- Joint effort to inform violence reduction policy in Mexico

- Updates and expands previous meta-reviews on crime and violence (Abt and Winship, 2016; Weisburd et. al, 2016)

- Contextualizes evidence specifically for Mexico

- 300 individual papers analyzed + 70 semi-structured interviews conducted in Mexico with local stakeholders

J-PAL, JPV, USAID project

	Primary prevention	Secondary prevention	Tertiary prevention	Suppression	Rehabilitation	
					Perpetrators	Victims
Programs						
Places						
People						
Behaviors						
Institutions						

For more info:

- USAID "what works" report: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/USAID-2016-What-Works-in-Reducing-Community-Violence-Final-Report.pdf

- Psychology, Health, & Medicine "frameworks" article: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13548506.2016.1257815

- Vox "how to" op-ed: http://www.vox.com/2016/9/30/13115224/crime-violent-reduce-ferguson-murder-fbi-ucr

Thank you!