

only help they may receive from these agencies is pregnancy counseling. Many of these agencies have recognized that because recipients of their programs are frequently gang members or in a family with gang members, appropriate services for this population are necessary. Mandated services and funding resources help to drive these agencies to address the problem.

Intervention programs must begin with some general assumptions or basic principles to serve as both a practical and a theoretical guide. The Dryfoos overview is one such example of linking interventions with empirical data on the various risk factors associated with delinquency and related problems. Another example was provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention back in the early 1990s in its review of efforts to combat serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders (Wilson and Howell, 1994). Wilson and Howell note that the research on these types of offenders has concluded that there are several interrelated social and personal factors that serve as basic correlates. These include delinquent peer groups, poor school performance, living in high-crime neighborhoods, weak family attachments, lack of consistent discipline within the home, and physical or sexual abuse. Prevention programs should obviously address these factors. A nationwide comprehensive strategy must follow these five guidelines: 1) Strengthen the family; 2) support core institutions (schools, churches, and community organizations); 3) promote delinquency prevention in general (because it is the most cost-effective method of dealing with the problem); 4) intervene immediately and effectively when delinquent behavior occurs; and 5) identify and control the small group of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders.

Borrowing heavily from the social development model devised by Hawkins and Catalano, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention suggests that programs should focus on the key risk factors that strongly correlate with serious and chronic delinquency. Five major types of risk factors are identified: 1) individual characteristics, 2) family influences, 3) school experiences, 4) peer-group influences, and 5) neighborhood and community influences. Within each of these five key factors, several different types of programs are identified (Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller, 1992).

One of the major problems with many community-based interventions is the lack of any consistent theoretical rationale behind the programs implemented. Without a stated rationale, it is difficult to evaluate such programs. One promising theoretical rationale is the risk-focused approach discussed in the next section.

A RISK-FOCUSED APPROACH

Risk-focused prevention is based on the assumption that trying to prevent a problem from occurring in the first place is better than trying to deal with it after the fact (similar to the old saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”). More specifically, this approach suggests that the most effective way to prevent a problem is, first, to identify the factors that tend to increase the

probability or risk that the problem will emerge in the first place and, second, to find methods to reduce the risks, thereby increasing the protective or resiliency factors. One of the most noteworthy examples is the Seattle Social Development Project. This project is described as follows:

The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) was a multi-year, school-based intervention that used a risk-reduction and skill-development strategy to improve outcomes for participating children and youths. The program was guided theoretically by the social development model, which hypothesizes that youths who are provided with opportunities for greater involvement with their schools and families, who develop the competency or skills they need for fuller participation with their schools and families, and for whom skillful participation is constantly reinforced, ultimately develop strong bonds with their families and schools. Further, the model proposes that these strong bonds set children on a positive developmental trajectory, resulting in more positive outcomes and fewer health-risk behaviors later in life. (Seattle Social Development Project, 2011)

This project is connected to the work during the past three decades of several researchers at the University of Washington. The researchers have found that similar factors tend to be associated with a core of serious problem behaviors among youths—delinquency, substance abuse, school problems, teen pregnancy, and gangs. These factors, which they label as “risk factors,” are grouped into four major categories: 1) community, 2) family, 3) school, and 4) individual/peer (Hawkins and Weis, 1985; Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller, 1992).

The Seattle project began in 1981, and it “combined teacher, child, and parent components with the goal of enhancing children’s bonding with their families and schools” (Seattle Social Development Project, 2011). An important concept in this model is that of protective factors. These are those factors in young people’s lives that act as buffers against the risk factors found within their environments. These buffers protect the person by either reducing the impact the risk factor has on the person or altering how a person responds. The goal is to strengthen these protective factors for youths who are at risk. These protective factors are grouped into three major areas: 1) individual characteristics (e.g., gender, a resilient temperament, a positive social orientation, and intelligence), 2) bonding (to family, school, etc.), and 3) healthy beliefs and clear standards (e.g., parents having high expectations and showing good modeling and clear standards for good behavior).

The Social Development Strategy

Hawkins and his associates at the University of Washington describe the “social development strategy” as building strong bonding with the long-term goal of assisting children in developing into healthy adults. It is their contention that to build bonding, three main conditions are necessary: 1) opportunities, 2) skills, and 3) recognition (Developmental Research and Programs, 1993: 13).