



Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth
Working together to enhance the wellbeing and life chances of children and young people.

Preventing youth violence project

Snapshot

ARACY undertook a broad review of the evidence on how young people could best be supported to engage with society in healthy, constructive ways. As part of this review, youth violence and antisocial behaviour were identified as major, inter-related problems that were threatening the development and social prospects of increasing numbers of young people. To identify factors that increase or reduce the risk of young people engaging in violent and antisocial behaviour, ARACY commissioned the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute to analyse survey data from a large national study of 10-14 year old children. The analysis reinforced the opportunity available to implement strategies that reduce risk factors and strengthen protective factors in the early adolescent years. ARACY is now working with Australia's leading experts to progress evidenced-informed strategies and mobilise collaborative action that will more effectively prevent violent and antisocial behaviours among young people.

Key facts¹

- *Young people are at greater risk of being violent and of being a victim of violence.* One in ten young people aged 15-19 and one in twelve 20-24 year olds say they have recently been the victim of an assault – most assaults are not reported to the police.
- *Young males are especially at risk.* 29 percent of young males aged 18-19 years report having recently been physically assaulted by another male, reducing to 15 percent of males aged 20-24, and only four percent of older males aged 25 and over. Violence by and among young women is rising.
- *Young people are worried about the level of violence.* 22 percent of respondents to Mission Australia's 2008 Survey of Young Australians identified personal safety as a significant concern.
- *The level of youth violence is increasing.* From 1997 to 2007, the number of young people charged with assault rose by 48 percent.
- *Just under half of all assaults result in injury.* In 2005, more than 20 000 Australians required hospital treatment following an assault, two-thirds of them had a head injury.
- *There is a high financial cost.* The Australian Institute of Criminology (2009) estimates that assault costs the Australian community \$1.4 billion each year including medical costs, lost output and intangible costs such as fear, pain and suffering but not including the costs of insurance, compensation, security, policing etc.

Project rationale

Early adolescence (10 – 14 years) has been identified as a critical time for effective early intervention. This period is crucial for brain development, receives limited community or policy attention and spans primary and secondary school participation, which can impair systemic and seamless interventions.

¹ ARACY (2009) Preventing Youth Violence Project [available via this link](#)

Official reviews and public inquiries in Australia have reported on various dimensions of youth violence and related issues.² Most have noted that violent and antisocial behaviour among young people is the product of a complex array of factors in a young person's life. Because these factors cross boundaries of specialised knowledge and jurisdictional responsibility, prevention strategies will need to be multidimensional and collaborative if they are to be effective.

Project aim

To identify evidenced-based strategies and mobilise collaborative action to prevent violent and antisocial behaviours among young people.

Progress to date³

Topical Paper – 'Preventing youth disengagement and promoting engagement (2008)'

This paper reviewed evidence on what works best across five case studies including community violence and substance use as well as school disengagement, civic participation and youth mental health. The evidence provided the basis for refining the focus of the project to the prevention of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people.

Pathways analysis of risk and protective factors

To identify points in the developmental pathway that may provide opportunities for early intervention and prevention, ARACY commissioned the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute to produce a pathways analysis of risk and protective factors associated with violent and antisocial behaviours among young people. Based on a sample of around 8000 Australian students aged 10-14 years old, the findings confirm that young adolescents are already engaging in unhealthy and risk-taking behaviours at high levels and that an opportunity exists to focus intervention strategies on the early adolescent years (ie, before these behaviours become an entrenched pattern in the young person's life).

Next steps

ARACY has commissioned the production of a discussion paper which will be used to guide and inform national consultations on evidence based action to substantially reduce the level of violent and antisocial behaviour among young people. It is expected that the primary audience for the consultation, which will be conducted in early 2010, will be policy makers, service managers and people who work in a direct service delivery capacity.

ARACY has been liaising with senior personnel responsible for violence and crime prevention initiatives with the aim of undertaking an audit of current Government programs that address issues relating to youth violence in the different jurisdictions. This information will include strategic and operational details for each program to provide a means for the sharing of ideas and experiences.

ARACY is seeking partners to further develop project strategies and promote its outcomes.

² The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth is currently undertaking an inquiry into the impact of violence on young Australians. Previous parliamentary inquiries have been conducted in New South Wales (1993) and Victoria (2009). Queensland established a Youth Violence Taskforce which produced a report on prevention strategies (2007) and Western Australia published a Green Paper on Community Violence Prevention (2005)

³ Papers already produced as part of this project are [available on the ARACY website](#)