Prevention of Juvenile Violence: The Role of Public Health

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Abstract

Juvenile violence and crime in general can undermine the sustainability of towns, cities, and regions. This can occur for many reasons, including instilling fear in citizens which in turn may cause them to stay in at night and avoid using public services; discouraging corporate investment; a loss of jobs; and fleeing residents. Over the past 15 years, the field of public health has displayed a growing interest in juvenile violence and its prevention. This development has been observed especially in the U.S., where fatal and nonfatal injuries resulting from interpersonal violence are viewed as critical public health problems. The public health approach to violence prevention is characterized chiefly by a focus on primary prevention, which involves addressing the scientifically identified risk factors for offending or victimization. This is in contrast with juvenile justice, which relies on addressing the offending behavior after-the-fact. On its own, this approach can undermine sustainability by harming both parties: the victim of the violent act and the offender, who is removed, sometimes permanently, from society. This paper assesses the growth and present status of public health’s involvement in the prevention of juvenile violence cross-nationally. It pays particular attention to developments in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom. The paper also explores how juvenile justice can benefit from the health community in preventing violence by young people.