



CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY

SUSTAINING CRIME REDUCTIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

PRIORITIES FOR PREVENTING YOUTH CRIME

BY ASHLEY CANNON & STEPHANIE UEBERALL



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past several decades of law enforcement efforts in New York City resulted in the unprecedented low crime rates New Yorkers enjoy today. This landmark achievement ushered in a new era of policing: one in which more time is spent preventing crimes than reacting to them. For this new strategy to succeed, and for New Yorkers to continue to see decreases in crime rates, an increased focus on prevention efforts within the youth population is needed.

First and foremost, more effective interventions must be implemented to provide help to youth who are exposed to violence or victimized. A disturbing percentage of youth are exposed to violence and are victimized every year. The effects can be devastating to mental health and positive social development. Therefore, any comprehensive plan aimed at preventing youth crime needs to be trauma-informed, with the organizational structures and treatment frameworks in place to handle clients who may have suffered trauma.

To supplement this, schools must work with government agencies to provide enhanced workforce development programs to youth. Since education and employment have direct correlations to reduction in criminal offending, they are critical to any successful crime prevention strategy.

The justice system itself must address educational and employment needs of young offenders. Further, reform must be made in how schools handle disciplinary issues, especially concerning developmentally appropriate behavior and behavior that results from exposure to trauma.

In implementing any crime prevention strategy, the police and government agencies must work to enhance legitimacy, by incorporating procedurally just tactics. This is critically important because when youth view the police and other government agencies as legitimate and believe these entities treat people with respect and make decisions fairly, youth are more likely to cooperate with, trust in, and obey authority.

Legitimacy can be further enhanced through better coordination among stakeholders, and by identifying and resolving the negative impacts policies may have on youth. These efforts will in turn increase ownership of prevention efforts among community members, policymakers, community-based organizations and government agencies (e.g., education, child welfare, housing, labor, mental health) that have not traditionally been viewed as having crime-related responsibilities.

By incorporating these ideas into a comprehensive strategy, youth crime prevention can ultimately become an embedded approach in how we continue to reduce crime rates in New York City. Without such a strategy, the problems that plague youth and create conditions that increase risks for offending and victimization will continue, creating countless more victims and perpetuating cycles of crime and violence.

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We are at a critical moment in New York City. New York City successfully brought crime down to historic lows, yet serious crime in some areas persists. Now there is an opportunity – and an imperative – to explore new strategies that can help drive crime down even further.

In response, the NYPD is undergoing a fundamental shift. It is now focused more on crime prevention, while attempting to share ownership of public safety issues with stakeholders—such as government agencies, prosecutors, courts, community-based organizations, policymakers and community members.

Youth are an important population to consider when developing new crime prevention strategies. There are more than 2.7 million youth ages 25 and under living in New York City.¹ During 2013, 7,604 juveniles (ages 7 to 15)² and more than 141,400 adolescents and young adults (ages 16 to 25)³ were arrested in New York City; the majority for low-level offenses.

As New York City embarks on this new era of preventing crime, the police and the growing body of responsible stakeholders should prioritize efforts that *address youth victimization and exposure to violence; develop the youth workforce; enhance legitimacy; break down silos to improve coordination; and address the negative impacts that state and local policies have on youth.*

YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW ERA

1. ADDRESS YOUTH VICTIMIZATION AND EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Youth are more likely than adults to be exposed to crime and violence. This exposure can cause lasting physical, mental, and emotional harm that carries into adulthood, and increases their risks for further victimization and delinquency.⁴ Moreover, research has found that most victims engage in delinquency and most delinquents have been victimized at some point during childhood.⁵

The National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence found that more than 60% of youth were exposed to violence, either directly or indirectlyⁱ, within the past year.⁶ The age at which risk of delinquency and victimization increased was younger for girls (11 and 12) than for boys (13 and 14).⁷ Youth who both engage in delinquency and have been victimized (“delinquent-victims”), report more life adversitiesⁱⁱ, lower levels of social support, and higher rates of mental health symptoms (e.g., anger, depression, anxiety).⁸ Both girl and boy delinquent-victims report significantly higher victimization rates for sexual victimization (58% and 40%, respectively) and internet victimization (33% and 14%, respectively) when compared to youth who are “primarily delinquent” and “primarily victims.”⁹ All three categories of youth report high rates of exposure to community violence.¹⁰ (see *table 1*)

i. Indirect exposure to violence includes witnessing a violent act, learning of a violent act against a family member, neighbor, or close friend, or a threat against a youth's home or school.

ii. Life adversities were measured as experiencing 15 possible events in the past year such as natural disaster, parent being incarcerated, and homelessness.

TABLE 1: EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE - Characteristics by Delinquent/Victim Group (10- to 17-year-olds)¹¹

Delinquent/ Victim Group ⁱⁱⁱ	Males (n=1,039)			Females (n=1,051)		
	Delinquent- Victims (n=198)	Primarily Delinquent (n=222)	Primarily Victims (n=167)	Delinquent- Victims (n=155)	Primarily Delinquent (n=140)	Primarily Victims (n=214)
Victimization Type (% Yes)						
Witness Family Violence	26%	15%	12%	36%	18%	19%
Exposure to Community Violence	70%	49%	63%	71%	54%	63%
Assault	91%	57%	80%	90%	62%	68%
Sexual Victimization	40%	0%	13%	58%	7%	27%
Property Victimization	56%	24%	43%	63%	38%	45%
Maltreatment	45%	1%	25%	59%	4%	33%
Bullying	40%	16%	58%	51%	34%	53%
Internet Victimization	14%	5%	1%	33%	12%	7%

These findings suggest that youth who experience lower levels of social support and more adverse life events, victimizations, and mental health symptoms are at increased risk of engaging in delinquency.¹² Crime prevention strategies must address these factors and ensure youth's victimization histories are not minimized, particularly among youth who experience multiple types of violence, crime, and abuse (i.e., guard against treating youth as simply victims of bullying when they are also victims of child abuse).¹³

This research supports anecdotal reports from criminal justice professionals and community-based anti-violence organizations who have found that many youth who are involved in gun violence were victims of robbery, assault, shootings, and/or stabbings before they resorted to picking up a gun. When these victimizations go unaddressed, and often unsolved, it can cause youth to normalize violence and feel unsafe and unprotected. This in turn can lead youth to find ways to protect themselves (e.g., picking up a gun).

iii. A total of 452 male respondents and 542 female respondents were categorized as neither victims nor delinquents.

Delinquent-Victims were categorized in three groups: violent delinquent-victims (criteria: any interpersonal violence or weapon carrying and three or more victimizations); delinquent sex/maltreatment victims (criteria: two or more delinquencies and any sexual victimizations or child maltreatment); and property delinquent-victims (criteria: property delinquency, no interpersonal violence and three or more victimizations).

Primarily Delinquents were categorized in two groups: assaulters (criteria: any interpersonal violence or weapon carrying and less than three victimizations); and property delinquents (criteria: property delinquency, no interpersonal violence and less than three victimizations).

Primarily Victims were categorized in two groups: nondelinquent sex/maltreatment victims (criteria: less than two delinquencies and any sexual victimizations or child maltreatment); and mild delinquency victims (criteria: no violent and no property delinquency and three or more victimizations).

To address youth victimization and exposure to violence, stakeholders should:

- Develop strategies to identify early warning signs of victimization and delinquency.¹⁴ When indications of victimization arise, further assessments should be employed to identify other types of victimizations and adversities the youth may be experiencing, including environmental factors that may perpetuate victimization.¹⁵
- Invest in interventions that address common underlying risk factors for multiple types of victimizations. These strategies should incorporate efforts to reduce stigma and cope with triggers.¹⁶
 - Interventions should be developed for youth and for caregivers to ensure that both individual and environmental risk factors are addressed.¹⁷
 - Stakeholders should prioritize interventions targeted at highly victimized youth with mental health symptoms.¹⁸
- Implement prevention strategies targeted at the ages when risks for victimization and delinquency become increased (i.e., around or before the fifth grade).¹⁹
- Devise gender-specific strategies that seek to prevent and address internet victimization.
- Raise awareness about the impacts of victimization and exposure to violence among youth and responsible adults (e.g., caregivers, teachers, law enforcement officers, service providers, justice system professionals).
- Employ credible messengers to interrupt violent incidents, prevent retaliation in the community and online, promote conflict mediation and problem-solving skills, and foster behavior change.²⁰
- Devise strategies to incorporate more victim services into the criminal justice process.
- Mobilize services, including grief counseling, to be deployed when a shooting occurs within any community. This will facilitate communities receiving the services and time they need to grieve and heal in order to alleviate the negative outcomes of traumatic events, such as fear, anxiety, and nervousness.²¹
- Provide bereavement training for staff at organizations who work with youth exposed to violence, in an effort to provide on-going support for the healing process. This training should seek to equip staff with the tools to identify symptoms and needs associated with traumatic experiences and coordinate services to address these factors.

2. DEVELOP THE YOUTH WORKFORCE

We know that education and employment are protective factors against delinquency and criminality. However, victimization and exposure to violence can lead to poor academic performance (e.g., low grades, low standardized test scores, low attendance)²² and disruptions at school or work.²³ In fact, a recent study by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics found that “about three-quarters of victims of rape or sexual assault (75%), robbery (74%), violence involving a firearm (74%), and violence resulting in medical treatment for injuries (77%) reported socio-emotional problems (defined as, “moderate to severe emotional distress, increased relationship problems, or disruptions at school or work resulting from the victimization).”²⁴

To guarantee that youth successfully transition into the workforce, it is critical to minimize disruptions in education and ensure youth complete their high school degree. This is especially important considering an analysis of Department of Labor statistics shows that, over the next decade, 78% of jobs will “require some education and training beyond high school.”²⁵

In New York City, youth are required to attend school through the end of the school year in which they turn 17 (and may continue to pursue their high school degree until the end of school year in which they turn 21)²⁶, unless they have obtained an employment certificate²⁷ permitting them to work during school hours. However, more than 20,000 New York City youth ages 16 to 19 have stopped seeking a high school degree²⁸; and approximately 38,000 are disconnected from both school and work.²⁹ Thus, more must be done to ensure that youth stay in school.

Adolescence is a time when youth test the limits and boundaries of the world, often by skipping school, experimenting with marijuana, and disobeying orders. During the 2013-2014 NYC school year, in-school behaviors resulted in 393 arrests, 563 summonses,³⁰ and 53,504 suspensions³¹. Approximately one in five NYC students are chronically absent from school;³² and of NYC youth in the juvenile justice system, 79% have records of chronic absenteeism.³³ Crime prevention strategies that place officers in schools and utilize punitive school disciplinary policies can result in the criminalization of developmentally appropriate behaviors. Moreover, such strategies can be counterproductive to crime prevention goals as they can push youth out of school and pull them deeper into the criminal justice system. Justice system involvement can hinder educational advancement as court appearances, incarceration, and collateral consequences of a criminal record can cause youth to fall further behind in their education and/or decrease their ability to attend school and college, and create barriers to obtaining employment.

Even when youth graduate high school, they may not be ready for college or the workforce. In fact, of the New York City high school students who graduated in FY 2014, only 32.6% were considered ready for college or a career.³⁴ Further, approximately 144,000 New York City youth ages 18 to 24 who have no degree beyond high school are unemployed and not in school.³⁵

Moreover, by failing to prioritize crime prevention efforts focused on education and workforce development, New York is jeopardizing public safety. National studies have found that youth who have stopped pursuing a high school diploma are three-and-a-half-times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested.³⁶ In general, an individual who has stopped pursuing a high school diploma is more than eight-times as likely to be incarcerated as someone who earned a high school diploma.³⁷ Moreover, studies show increasing average education levels by one year is estimated to reduce arrest rates by 11%; and increasing graduation rates by 10% is estimated to reduce murder and assault by approximately 20%; motor vehicle theft by 13%; and arson by 8%.³⁸

Youth crime prevention strategies should prioritize efforts focused on education and workforce development and seek to keep youth in school and out of the justice system by:

- Building capacity to resolve student misbehaviors at the school-level and utilize arrest, summons or suspension only as a last resort.³⁹
 - Develop a school disciplinary policy that incorporates a graduated response system and positive discipline techniques.
 - Ensure that School Safety Agents (SSAs) are adequately trained and that training is culturally competent, includes students and school staff, and orients SSAs to the school system and available services.
 - Train all teachers, school staff, and School Safety Agents in de-escalation techniques and guidance interventions.
 - Increase the numbers of social workers and guidance counselors in schools to help address negative student behavior and to provide needed services.

- Utilizing the justice system to address educational and employment needs.
 - Create employment and education coordination offices within New York’s courts.
 - These coordination offices would provide judges the opportunity to refer youth to high school equivalency diploma preparation programs, tutoring, and workforce development programs.
 - Divert low-level cases from court and into educational and workforce development programs.
 - Seal/expunge criminal records of youth who successfully complete educational and workforce development programs.
- Investing in holistic workforce development programs for high-risk youth that incorporate a continuum of program components (e.g., life skills, job readiness training, specialized vocational training, transitional employment, job retention support) and also seeks to address obstacles to employment (e.g., criminal records, child care, mental health needs).

3. ENHANCE LEGITIMACY

Preventing youth crime is dependent in part upon how youth view the people and agencies working with them to provide opportunities and hold them accountable for their behavior (e.g., teachers, guidance counselors, School Safety Agents, police, judges, social workers, coaches). Youth’s views on these authorities influence how they engage with these individuals and agencies, including how likely they are to trust and respect their authority, decisions, and advice. Ultimately, youth are determining the legitimacy of these individuals, systems, advice, opportunities, and accountability measures.

Judgments about legitimacy are shaped through both direct and indirect experiences; thus, every encounter an individual has or learns about informs their judgment of legitimacy.⁴⁰ Therefore, agency leaders must consider the ways in which youths’ judgments of legitimacy can affect their agencies’ efforts to achieve identified goals.⁴¹ (see *exhibit 1*)

Specific to interactions between the police and the public, a police department’s reputation for legitimacy can affect the willingness of youth and other community members to cooperate with officers, to provide information to them, and to willingly obey the law/their authority.⁴³ Each of these factors can influence the success of youth crime prevention efforts. For example, if the community does not perceive the police as legitimate, they may not share their concerns about youth crime problems in their neighborhoods, they may not be willing to report a crime when one occurs, youth may not defer to and accept decisions made by police officers, and they may not voluntarily obey the law when police are not present.⁴⁴

Research shows that the quality of decision-making and the quality of treatment are the primary factors that shape an individual’s judgment of legitimacy.⁴⁵ To attain legitimacy, those interacting with youth must recognize that every encounter with a young person is an opportunity to increase legitimacy, and do so by incorporating procedurally just tactics (see *exhibit 2*) into their decision-making processes and their communications with everyone they encounter.⁴⁶

EXHIBIT 1: LEGITIMACY

LEGITIMACY IS GAUGED BASED ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH INDIVIDUALS:

- Trust and have confidence in the authority;
- Believe that the authority is trustworthy, honest, competent and concerned about the well-being of the people they deal with;
- Think that the authority treats individuals fairly and with respect, and that their actions are morally justified and appropriate to the circumstances; and
- Are willing to defer to the law and to the authority’s directives.⁴²

Examples of ways to enhance legitimacy among youth include:

- Ensuring decisions are made fairly, in a neutral, unbiased and transparent way.⁴⁷
- Ensuring youth are treated fairly, with dignity and in a respectful, courteous way.⁴⁸
- Explaining the actions being taken and how decisions were made.⁴⁹
- Listening carefully to youth about their concerns and responding to those concerns.⁵⁰
- Addressing implicit racial bias through training, supervision, and oversight.⁵¹
- Identifying opportunities for meaningful engagement with youth and utilizing these opportunities to solicit their views and concerns.
- Developing and implementing a continuum of alternatives to arrest and formal justice system processing (e.g., official warnings⁵², neighborhood adjudication panels⁵³, diversion programs⁵⁴).

To support staff in enhancing legitimacy among youth, agency leaders must also incorporate procedurally just tactics internally.⁵⁷ When employees feel supported and identify with their department or agency, they are more likely to align their behaviors to reflect the values set by their employer.⁵⁸

By treating employees with respect and dignity, making fair, neutral and transparent decisions, and providing employees a voice, leaders can increase the likelihood that employees will adopt organizational values and seek to do a good job.⁵⁹

Procedurally just tactics that can improve internal legitimacy include:

- Providing clear and meaningful opportunities for employees to advance their careers;
- Promoting fairness and transparency in the disciplinary system;
- Giving employees a voice in decisions about organizational policy and practice; and
- Explaining to employees why and how decisions were made.⁶⁰

By incorporating strategies like these, the police and government agencies can build trust with youth and the community, increase respect for police and government authority, improve employee performance, and ultimately achieve youth crime prevention goals.⁶¹

**EXHIBIT 2:
PRINCIPLES OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE**

Research shows that positive changes in judgments of legitimacy can be achieved by adopting the four principles of procedural justice into any type of crime prevention strategy.⁵⁵

THE 4 PRINCIPLES OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE ARE:

1. Provide individuals a **voice** before making decisions that affect them;
2. Display **neutrality** in decision-making;
3. Treat individuals with **respect and dignity**; and
4. Convey **trustworthy** motives.⁵⁶

4. SILO-BUSTING: COORDINATE CRIME PREVENTION EFFORTS

The police, government agencies, community-based organizations, policymakers, and the community must collaborate and coordinate crime prevention strategies to maximize their efforts and avoid needless duplication.

Some examples of how these stakeholders can work together include:

- **Coordinating Program Recruitment Efforts To Follow Large-Scale Crew Arrests**

The NYPD and local District Attorneys have carried out large-scale crew^{iv} takedowns in neighborhoods from Harlem, to East New York, to Brownsville, and Crown Heights, arresting up to 100 crew members at a time.⁶² Anecdotal evidence suggests that the period following a large-scale arrest is typically a time when the stronghold of crew leaders is absent and youth are fearful of being arrested. This combination of factors creates an opportunity to engage youth who may be looking for an alternative to crew life, before new crew leaders emerge.

The NYPD and local District Attorneys should work with community-based organizations and community members to mobilize program recruitment efforts to immediately following large-scale crew arrests as a means to engage youth in programs and services. These efforts should also incorporate strategies to change community norms and increase awareness of the costs of violence to individuals, families, and the community. Youth in these communities often feel that no one values them and that the crew is the only resource for help and protection.

By reaching out to youth during this time, service providers and community members can show local youth that there are people who care and who can help. The response may also deter continued crew activities because it will show that the community is watching them and does not approve of crew activity.

- **Building Partnerships Among Stakeholders Enabling Them To Serve As Portals Into Services**

The police, government agencies, and community-based organizations each connect with youth in various ways. It is rare that any one of these stakeholders has the capacity to address all of the needs that the youth they encounter present.

Therefore, each of these stakeholders should serve as portals into needed services. By building partnerships and networks among these stakeholders, they can utilize their contacts with youth to connect them to services such as mental health, substance use, legal, housing, employment, and education, and maximize their crime prevention efforts.

To support stakeholders in making successful referrals, training should be provided to staff regarding identifying youths' needs and case management, and stakeholders should adopt referral processes that enable them to track case progress and associated outcomes.

iv. For the purposes of this report, "crew" is defined as a fluid group of youths formed based on where members live, such as a building or block, creating violent turf rivalries.

5. ADDRESS THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS STATE AND LOCAL POLICIES HAVE ON YOUTH

When policies are implemented, a variety of unforeseen consequences may arise which can produce undesirable impacts on youth crime prevention goals.

Some examples of state and local policies that have negatively impacted youth include:

- **NYCHA Community Center Policies**

During the school year, NYCHA Community Centers operate educational and recreational programs from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM.⁶³ However, participation is restricted by age and time of day—youth ages 6 to 12 are eligible for programming during the after-school hours from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM and youth ages 13 to 19 are eligible for programming during evening hours from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM. Therefore, youth ages 13 to 19 are not permitted in the community centers during the children's programming; however, children are permitted to attend the center during teen hours if a parent signs a release. This leaves teenagers without local after-school activities and may leave them unsupervised and vulnerable to criminal activity. For example, nearly one-third of all violent crime committed by youth under age 18 occurs between 3 PM and 7 PM⁶⁴; therefore, it is critically important to open NYCHA community centers to youth ages 13 to 19 during this time period.

- **NYCHA Arrest & Conviction Policies**

For youth who reside in public housing or are seeking to live in public housing, a criminal *arrest* or *conviction* can prohibit them from doing so. Individual housing authorities have the discretion under federal law to determine whether they will bar applicants with criminal histories, and whether they will consider the individual circumstances of an arrest.⁶⁵ In New York City, everyone ages 16 and over residing in public housing is subject to a criminal background check.⁶⁶ Further, a conviction (including for violations)⁶⁷ can bar youth from continuing to live with their family for a specified period of time, depending on the offense. Exclusionary periods range from two to six years, to a lifetime ban.⁶⁸ In addition, criminal activity and convictions can lead to eviction.⁶⁹ Therefore, an entire family applying for or living in public housing suffers if one member—as young as age 16—engages in criminal activity or is convicted. As a result of these policies, youth (and their families) can end up homeless.

- **New York's Low Age Of Criminal Responsibility**

For more than 50 years, New York has treated youth ages 16 and 17 as criminally responsible adults, subjecting them to prosecution and incarceration in the adult criminal justice system. This approach to youth justice has devastating impacts on youth and our communities.

For example, a criminal conviction can severely limit educational and employment opportunities because New York youths who are convicted of crimes at 16 and 17 years of age have to report their conviction if asked on a college or job application. Meanwhile, 16- and 17-year-olds who are convicted of the same crimes in 48 other states do not have to carry that burden.

- **Youth Incarceration**

Incarcerating youth has been found to create significant consequences (e.g., not continuing their education, gang membership, victimization), which can be counterproductive to crime prevention goals:

- Incarceration can cause youth to fall further behind in their education. In fact, two-thirds of youth released from jail do not return to school in the community.⁷⁰

- Incarceration exposes youth to anti-social peers and violence. Gangs have been prevalent in correctional facilities for decades. Moreover, New York chapters of some national gangs were founded in city and state correctional facilities (including chapters of the Latin Kings and Bloods).⁷¹ The New York City Department of Correction reports that of the more than 11,000 individuals in the daily jail population⁷², 19% are gang members.⁷³ Evidence suggests that many youth begin their affiliation with national gangs while incarcerated.⁷⁴
- Youth incarcerated in adult facilities are at high risk for victimization. In fact, the U.S. Department of Justice recently found that youth held at Rikers Island were “not adequately protected from physical harm due to the rampant use of unnecessary and excessive force by New York City Department of Correction staff and violence inflicted by other inmates.”⁷⁵

By keeping youth out of correctional facilities, the city and state could potentially avoid these consequences and better achieve youth crime prevention goals.

CONCLUSION

New York City has made enormous strides in preventing crime, achieving unprecedented, sustained crime declines over the last 25 years. Prioritizing efforts to address youth victimization and exposure to violence, develop the youth workforce, enhance legitimacy, break down silos to improve coordination of crime prevention efforts, and address the negative impacts state and local policies have on youth, will support stakeholders' efforts to prevent crime and to drive crime to record-breaking new lows. Working together, this new era of crime prevention can lead us to a day when we consider an arrest to be a failure because the warning signs precipitating the crime were not recognized and addressed.

ENDNOTES

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SUSTAINING CRIME REDUCTIONS IN NEW YORK CITY

PRIORITIES FOR PREVENTING YOUTH CRIME

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