



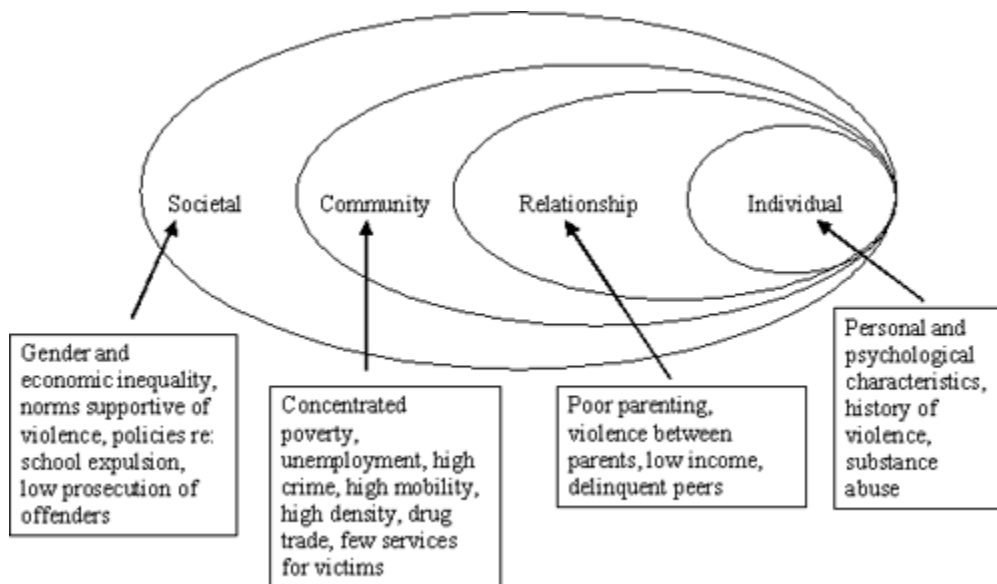
Crime Prevention Ottawa's Submission to

**Growing Stronger Together
Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy
(July 2008)**

Introduction

Crime Prevention Ottawa's mission is to "contribute to crime reduction and enhanced community safety in Ottawa through collaborative, evidence-based crime prevention." Our role is to build community capacity, foster community action, nurture partnerships and engage in policy dialogue.

The objective of this paper is to offer Crime Prevention Ottawa's targeted recommendations with regards to the intersection of crime prevention, reduction of victimization and poverty. The general risk factors that lead to young people getting involved in crime are well known and well researched as are the risks of being a victim of crime. Living in poverty increases the risk both that an individual will be involved in criminal activity and that an individual will be a victim of crime. This World Health diagram is the classic representation of the complex risk factors for crime:



Krug et al. 2002. *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

We have identified four key recommendations to address both poverty and crime:

- Ensure equality of outcomes in the education system.
- Create a provincial-municipal-community recreation strategy targeting children, youth and their families who are living in poverty.
- Make targeted investments in community development initiatives in high risk neighbourhoods.
- Improve access to mental health and addictions services.

Access to Education

Although Ontario has a public school system open to all, there are many costs associated with school attendance, including but not limited to: school fees, school supplies and transportation. The province should consider banning all school fees, reinstating public funding of school supplies and making transportation assistance more realistic. For example, the focus groups for Ottawa's Pathways to Education program identified one of the major barriers to school attendance was the cost of bus passes. In fact, the theft of bus passes is a crime problem in some Ottawa neighbourhoods – it gets very cold here and financial assistance is only available to those who live more than three kilometres from school. Two and a half kilometres is a long cold walk especially if you are crossing a highway.

School failure and early school leaving are significant risk factors for life long poverty. Many new provincial initiatives have addressed this problem, such as the student success teachers. We encourage continued, targeted, investments in schools most in need of support. Crime Prevention Ottawa inventoried the extra programming in schools and found that individual schools vary enormously in their extra programming for high needs children. Supports need to be in place to inspire principals – educational leaders – to develop local projects that build positive engagement in their schools and their communities. Projects could include homework clubs, mentoring and anti-violence programming.

Finally, the province needs to pay attention to differential outcomes within the education system based on factors such as family income and family background. More research is needed on the long-term effects of early childhood war trauma.

Access to Recreation

Young people need access to a range of recreational opportunities so that they can develop skills, be part of a positive group and occupy their leisure time with pro-social activities.

After clothes, I-Pods and bus passes, it is perhaps in recreation that the gap between rich and poor and the gap between engaged and disengaged parents is most stark in young lives. While some families invest thousands of dollars and endless hours for their children's swimming, hockey, dance or other activities – a large number of children never participate in any organized activities outside of school hours. Many parents are too poor, too overwhelmed, overworked,

depressed, addicted or otherwise incapable of attending to the recreational needs of their children.

The City of Ottawa provides a range of recreational programming, but because the City is in a tight financial situation, most programming is run on a cost recovery basis. The City's "Fee Assistance Program", although well intentioned, does not come close to addressing the needs of most at-risk children and youth. The provincial "Communities in Action Fund" offers small amounts of short term project funding for recreation programming.

Crime Prevention Ottawa strongly recommends that the province, in partnership with municipalities and the community, develop a strategic approach to recreation for children and youth living in poverty which would address the issues of access, continuity and a range of offerings suitable to the full diversity of Ontario. There are many examples of recreation programming having a significant impact on the lives of young people, such as the "Youth Inclusion Program in the United Kingdom.

Neighbourhoods

The presence of concentrated poverty, drugs, weapons and gang activity in a neighbourhood increases the likelihood of poor outcomes for young people and their families. Unfortunately these problems tend to be concentrated in specific neighbourhoods in Ottawa and in the rest of the province. Special attention needs to be paid to the fabric of these neighbourhoods with investments in community development through locally based organizations and initiatives. Community Houses, which in Ottawa are largely supported by the City and the United Way, are an example of successful programs that need more support.

Many neighbourhoods are terrorized by entrenched drug operations that the regular systems of landlord and tenants laws and criminal law do not seem to be able to dislodge. It is unacceptable for children to grow up next door to crack houses. The province should implement "Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods" legislation to enable authorities to deal with these problem properties in a timely and efficient manner.

In Ottawa, and in other cities, the downward spiral of deteriorating social housing is a problem the municipality cannot afford to address. These are often the same neighbourhoods experiencing elevated levels of violence and poverty. Significant investments will be required to bring this housing up to acceptable standards.

Mental Health and Addictions

Too often, problems associated with mental health and addictions lead people into lives of poverty. Far more attention needs to be paid to the role of mental health and addictions in our overall delivery of health care. As has been well documented in the “Housing First” movement, the cost of our current lack of support services and reliance on emergency services is a cruel and expensive tragedy played out everyday in Ottawa and other towns and cities. While we welcome increased addictions services for youth in Ottawa, there are still huge gaps in the system that need to be addressed.

Conclusions

The various factors that are at the roots of poverty , crime and victimization need to be addressed by a wide range of interventions across many ministries, institutions and community stakeholders. In order to address these factors in a concrete, long term, strategic manner, a wide ranging strategy, which will lead and coordinate these efforts is called for. Only when poverty is seen as the complex, multifaceted problem that it is, can real, long term solutions be found.