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Crime Prevention Strategies: Can children be better served by directing public policy to the real causes of crime?

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Crime Prevention Strategies: Can Children be Better Served by Directing Public Policy to the Real Causes of Crime?

Pauline Keegan and Dr. Aiden Carthy

Social Care & Social Policy in Ireland:

Seeking Social Justice in the Era of Austerity & Beyond

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Background

- Research Overview
- Garda Youth Diversion Projects
- Methodology
- Preliminary Findings
- Conclusion and Recommendations

Research Overview

- Wider scope: exploring the experience of children involved with the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDP)
- Understand the nature and effectiveness of the projects from the children's perspective
- Examination of the direction of public policy



Research Questions

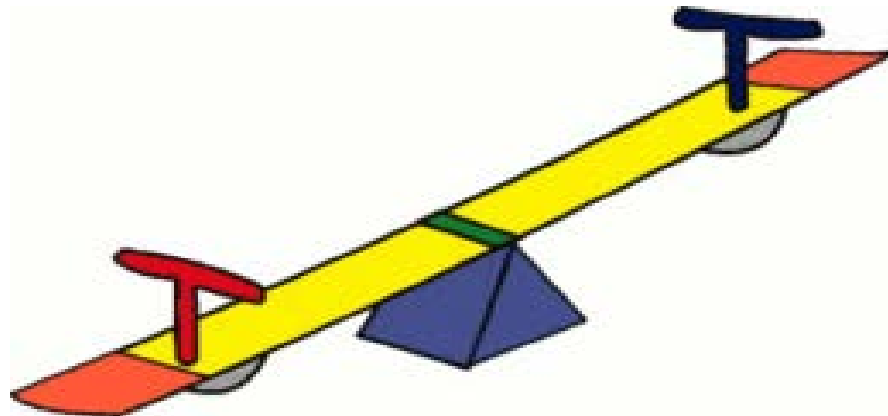
Do the children believe the programmes work?

If so, why?

Would public policy be better focused elsewhere?

Garda Youth Diversion Programmes (Irish Youth Justice Service)

- Community-based intervention programmes
- Target children who have been involved in crime and diverting them from becoming further involved
- Target children who are at risk of offending
- Irish Social Policy balances holding children accountable with keeping them out of the Criminal Justice System



Garda Youth Diversion Programmes

- Available to children between 13 and 17 years of age
- Each child is allotted two hours per week (organisation dependent)

Methodology

- Mixed methods research design
- Qualitative (Interviews with children in focus group meetings)
- Quantitative (Questionnaires completed by Youth Leaders)
- 58 children participated (45 boys, 13 girls)
- 10 different projects (5 in Dublin, 5 in country locations)
- Ages range from 13 to 21 years old
- 10 youth workers received questionnaires (9 were returned)

Preliminary Findings

- The children consider the programmes are working for them
- Some children report that the projects do not disengage them fully from crime, but do note a reduction in their criminal behaviour

Behaviour	Continued (%)	Discontinued (%)	Did Not Say (%)
Drinking	55	17	28
Crime	57	43	0
Drugs	16	31	53

n = 58

Why do the children find the programmes effective?

- Children were confident that the Youth leaders truly care for and support them (92%)
- Children held the youth leaders in high regard (85%)
- Children are delighted with the projects, and are more than happy to attend (83%)
- Children attend to meet their friends (17%)
- Keeps them off the street, otherwise they are bored (85%)

Youth Leaders

*“Its Allen, it’s
just everyone
likes Allen.”*

*“You can tell
her anything,
you can trust
her”*

*“Cause we
trust them”*

*“...they’re all real
nice, like ye can
tell them how ye
feel, like”*

Youth Leaders

*“ or if ye told her, like,
ah, I’m struggling with
this in school but I’m
embarrassed to say it
to the teacher, she’d
say it to them”*

*“...they stay till 8
o’clock, so that’s 3
hours off their
own time”*

*“They will ask if
everything is all right
at home and if it’s
not can we come
down and talk about
it”*

What do the **GYDPs** do?

(Irish Youth Justice Service)

Provide suitable activities to facilitate personal development and behavioural change

Encourage civic responsibility

Support Garda relations

Change attitudes around offending, drugs and alcohol

Preliminary Findings

Quantitative Results

Common concerns raised by the Youth Workers

Between 60% and 100% of the children have behavioural problems and difficulties in school

All from disadvantaged areas with high levels of crime and drugs

Poor view of Garda

Vulnerable to peer pressure

Low self esteem

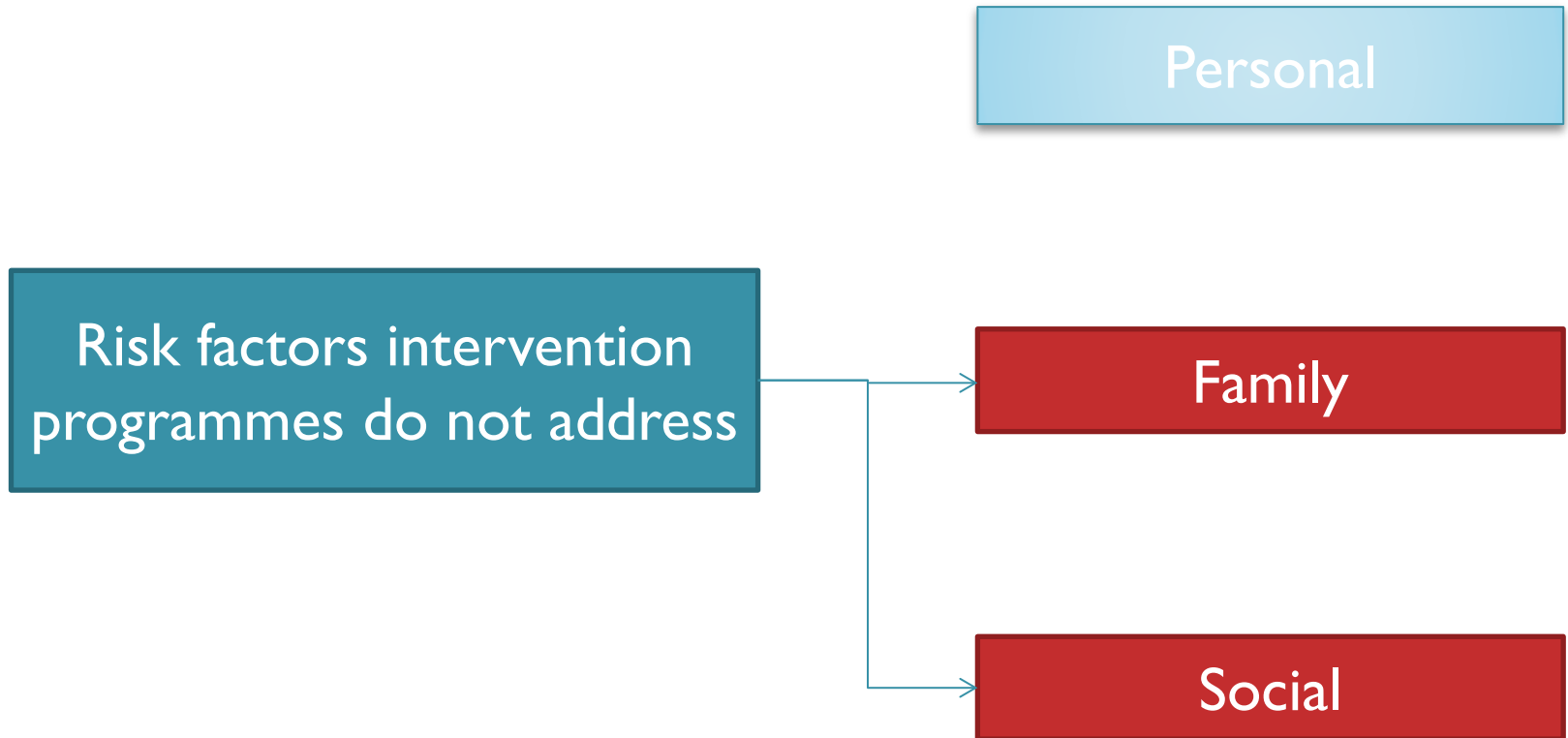
Family problems

Risk Factors for Crime

Carroll, Houghton, Durkin and Hattie (2009)



Risk Factors for Crime



Preliminary Findings

Issues Identified

- Programmes do not address all the risk factors
- Most crime prevention strategies tend to focus on individual behaviour, rather than the social forces that create that behaviour (Lewis, Grant and Rosenbaum 1988)
- The link between young offenders and poverty has been well established (The Irish Penal Reform Trust)

Current Research

- Research has found that children raised in poverty suffer a wide range of negative outcomes (Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana and Collins 2009)

Children raised in poverty
suffer from

- Children interviewed displayed similar outcomes

Low academic
achievement

Behavioural and
Emotional problems
including
disobedience

Impulsiveness and
aggression

Family problems

Less positive peer
relationships

Recommendations

- Create jobs and employment within disadvantaged areas
- Change anti-discrimination laws to include socio-economic status (Combat Poverty Agency 2006)
- Prevent the onset of criminal behaviour by early intervention in pre-school and primary school. Improve social conditions and institutions (Farrington and Welsh 2007)
- Might be more effective and less expensive



Thank You for Your Time

Any Questions?

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