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Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime prevention

Developmental and early intervention strategies for the reduction and prevention of crime can operate across all three levels of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Developmental prevention is intervention early in developmental pathways that may lead to the emergence and recurrence of criminal behaviours and other social problems. It does not just mean early in life, although inevitably many of the critical moments for effective intervention will occur during the early years.

Developmental prevention emphasises investment in strategies and programs for creating “child friendly” institutions and communities. It also focuses on the manipulation of multiple risk and protective factors at crucial transition points across a lifetime. Such points can be around birth, the preschool years, the transition from primary to secondary school, and subsequent transitions to higher education, employment, and so on.

In Australia, developmental prevention programs typically cover areas such as parenting and early childhood support, health care assistance and home help, literacy training and alternative learning programs, anti-bullying initiatives in schools, programs addressing violence reduction, self-esteem and self-empowerment development and training, job skills training and development, establishment of theatre and arts groups, sport and youth centres for recreation, and early school-leavers’ programs.

The growing interest in developmental and early intervention for the prevention and reduction of crime is mainly driven by two closely related factors:

- frustration at the apparent failure of conventional strategies to prevent the long-term growth and recurrence of crime in the community; and
- evidence from a small number of well researched and evaluated initiatives which strongly suggest that significant long-term benefits (particularly financial) will accrue from effective developmental and early intervention programs.

The most significant challenge for developmental and early intervention crime prevention remains moving the research evidence into effective everyday programs.

Further reading:

Hamel, R. et al. 1999, *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches to Crime in Australia*, Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, Canberra, <http://www.ag.gov.au/www/ncpHome.nsf/Web+Pages/B78FEDFB9A1D980ACA256B14001A096E?OpenDocument>

