

## EPILOGUE

### **CRIME PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY SAFETY: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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A wide range of issues related to the safety, health, and well-being of children and youth are explored by the papers in this collection. They include the views of researchers and academics from various disciplines who bring a great deal of passion and commitment to their work. Surprisingly, though the authors come from different disciplines and consequently employ diverse terms and concepts, they share numerous similarities. For example, it is clear from the articles in this collection that an ongoing focus on children and youth in Canada is reflected in the types of policies and programs that can be found in the different fields represented here. In the case of crime prevention, children and youth are often the focus of policies and programs, as well as community-based interventions.

The papers collected here promote the idea that policies and interventions should be more sensitive to the diversity and particularities of children's everyday lives. Many of the authors argue that problems associated with current universal conceptions of childhood have to be avoided if we are to develop more flexible and child-sensitive policies and programs in the future. Part of this discussion includes a recognition, widely shared among the contributors to this collection, that children in our society occupy a marginal position often lacking power and voice. The challenges and consequences of such a position are amplified in the case of poor, Aboriginal, and other minority youth. For ameliorative action to occur, this marginalization and inequality has to be addressed.

Like notions of childhood, the authors carefully scrutinize the concept of community in this volume. While many hold high expectations for community-based interventions, the concept itself is often problematic. It is ambiguous and poorly conceptualized and the tendency is to invoke the notion of community as a panacea – a solution to all problems of contemporary society. It is clear from the analyses presented here, that “community” is neither a panacea nor an automatic site for effective intervention. The articles in this collection rightly examine the potential offered by the concept of community and encourage a careful consideration of the role of this concept in the lives of children and youth.

The focus on community safety and crime prevention highlights a number of challenges faced by policy-makers, researchers, and those working in communities. First, there is evidence that some crime prevention strategies do work. Indeed, a body of empirical evidence is building up and this should form the basis for future strategies. It is also clear that the police in Canada play a central role in crime prevention activities, especially in relation to the safety and well-being of children and youth. The papers in this volume, however, note that the police cannot and should not act alone in this effort. Indeed, many authors noted the importance of partnerships at the community level and the need to involve children and youth in a meaningful way. The need for comprehensive policies and programs sensitive to diversity was reiterated in the context of community-based crime prevention initiatives. Such initiatives should reflect the changing social and political realities including the changing needs of young people.

With respect to the existing responses of the various institutions in this country to children and youth, much needs to be done. It was noted time and again that young people face systemic barriers in general and that some young people are especially marginalized by the existing institutional order. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of a diverse population of young people. Their issues and concerns should not be obscured or overshadowed by those of adults, families, or communities. Instead, institutions and organizations should promote flexible and comprehensive strategies that recognize and even celebrate the diversity in the youth population. A holistic and multidisciplinary approach should be fundamental here.

It is clear from the analyses presented in this collection that policy-making and program development for children and youth should be based on empirical evidence. A number of articles note the importance of evidence-based decision-making, notwithstanding the lack of such an approach in areas like community safety and crime prevention. At the same time, both theoretical and methodological issues related to producing evidence-based results need to be addressed. In particular, the authors emphasize appropriate methodologies for including young people in the research process and most of the articles in this collection discuss the need for a comprehensive approach, one that includes the involvement of key stakeholders in the research process. Children and youth *are* key stakeholders.

It is evident that an exchange of ideas among policy-makers and researchers is essential. This project began with the notion of promoting an ongoing dialogue among policy-makers and researchers. While the focus was community safety, health, and well-being for Canadian children and youth, the outcome was a far more thoroughgoing engagement with basic issues of citizenship and social justice. Importantly, these issues emerged by applying an analytical lens that reflected the experiences children and youth. While the analyses presented in this collection indicate that much needs to be done, they also provide a direction that will help us move forward toward a safer and healthier environment for young people.