



10 Things to Know About Measuring Social Interventions for At-risk Youth in Jamaica

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Anti-violence interventions across the world, such as those that target at-risk youth to change their behaviour and divert them from violent crime, are designed and implemented because they seem to make obvious sense that they will work, but there is often no basis for assessing the interventions' effectiveness or outcomes. This weakness in monitoring and evaluating anti-violence social interventions, and the problem of not knowing their outcomes and whether or not they "work", has been recognized in Jamaica for at least two decades.

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The Government of Jamaica spent an estimated J\$387 billion on youth programmes between fiscal years 2007/2008 and 2017/2018. This amount only represents government spending and does not necessarily include non-governmental programmes. Comparatively for the same time-period J\$898 billion was spent on education.

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Many of the anti-violence social interventions in Jamaica target males under the age of 35 years, who are undereducated and often not employed in the formal sector. Males under the age of 35 years old account for 77 percent of those arrested and charged with a category one crime (murder, shooting, larceny, robbery, rape, burglary, aggravated assault), and 80 percent of homicide victims.

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Social interventions targeting young, at-risk men who are vulnerable to participating in gangs/criminal groups, largely aim at behaviour change, whether through skills training, provision of psychosocial services, or life skills training. Social interventions whose express objective is to reducing criminogenic behaviour tend to take place in socio-economically challenged communities that are prone to high rates of crime and violence.

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There are systemic challenges with the monitoring and evaluation in Jamaica. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tends to be weak, may be missing components vital for measuring the programme, if a framework exists at all.

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Interventions that are government-run and funded tend to be weaker on monitoring and evaluation than those implemented by non-government organisations, which rely heavily on international donor funding, and are required to be more accountable and transparent.

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Where interventions overlap and are implemented in the same community, capacity, resources, strength, and impact can be enhanced by coordination and collaboration. Interventions targeting at-risk youth often operate in silos, without coordination and collaboration.

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The concept and practice of monitoring, evaluation, and learning are gaining traction in Jamaica, but too slowly. MEL is still considered abstract, and even obscure, which has hindered its embeddedness in intervention policies and practices, and many stakeholders and policymakers are still unable to relate to it.

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There is inadequate transparency in interventions targeting at-risk youth. Access to monitoring, evaluation, and learning reports of social interventions is necessary for transparency and accountability, not just among donors and programme stakeholders, but also civil society and the general population. Ordinary citizens have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent, what are the programmes the government is pursuing in the name of citizen security, and how are the programme outcomes being assessed.

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There are efforts – both governmental and non-governmental – to coordinate anti-violence intervention efforts. The Citizen Security Secretariat, a government entity tasked with coordinating a “whole-of-government” approach, aims to achieve a coordinated, comprehensive, and effective implementation of programmes in at-risk communities. The National Consensus on Crime, a civil society initiative, includes an oversight secretariat with its own monitoring and evaluation framework, which aims to hold the government accountable to its commitments, including the broad range of social intervention programmes targeting at-risk youth.

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