

Violence and Crime in Latin America: an alternative view
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Cohen and Robinson have used an eminently reasonable strategy to address a difficult problem from a baseline of little hard data. They have produced a solid paper, although with some limitations.

Strengths: There is much to be praised. The authors correctly debunk the notion that crime and violence are spiraling out of control, while recognizing that Latin America still rates as one of the world's most violent regions. The four solutions they propose fall within mainstream approaches. Three of them are primarily public health approaches (targeting at-risk mothers, comprehensive program for youth gang violence and domestic violence prevention), while only the comprehensive prison treatment and reintegration program falls unambiguously into the criminal justice category.

Different views on problem and solutions: Although offering reasonable solutions, the paper also has a few serious shortcomings.

The discussion of *domestic violence* (better described as violence against women, since it does not necessarily take place at home) takes no account of a recent WHO study covering 15 locations in ten countries, including Peru and Brazil. Although incidence rates in Brazil were relatively low, there is evidence of a particularly high rate of physical violence in Peru. The authors also fail to draw on further studies on risk factors.

There is *over-reliance on one landmark paper on the cost-benefit ratios of crime prevention measures* (Aos 2004, 2005, 2006). But there are several other studies which might have influence the authors' conclusions, in particular a series by Miller and Levy (2006) looking at benefits and costs in the USA. This study is considerably less optimistic about BCRs for prisoner rehabilitation. Given the precarious nature of Latin American prison infrastructure, this could make this approach to crime prevention economically unattractive in the region. Cohen and Robinson also fail to take account of a cost-benefit studies on the US Violence against Women Act and a range of crime prevention initiatives in Brazil.

The authors *use out-dated information on what works in violence and crime prevention*, not taking account of more recent meta-analyses.

Finally there is a *lack of attention to several promising approaches to crime prevention*. The authors do not address policing and sentencing policies, neither do they look at cross-sectoral approaches. Initiatives such as hot-spot policing and policies to keep youths at school have great promise in Latin America.

Additional solution: Both hot-spot policing and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) can produce result in a short time. However, implementation of hot-spot policing would require a seismic shift in police culture and organization, and on this basis CPTED is recommended as an additional solution because it stands more chance of successful implementation.