

# **Canada's Early Childhood Development Policy and Programs: Guiding Principles**

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# Introduction

- Early Childhood Development Agreement
  - Theoretical rationale
  - Research evidence
  - Guiding Principles
  - National Crime Prevention Strategy

# Early Childhood Development Agreement

- National policy instrument
- Enhance and increase risk-focussed services and programs
- Pre-school children and their families

# Theoretical Rationale

- Early period of life is critical
- Skills and competencies acquired from ‘socializing units’
- Children raised in disadvantaged households at risk
- Aggressive behaviour and conduct disorders precursors to future offending
- Age-specific measures target risk and protective factors
- Interventions linking risk factors to prevention policy and programs termed “risk-focussed prevention” or “developmental prevention.” (Farrington, 2001)

# Early Childhood Development Policy Informed by Research

- Longitudinal surveys
  - Establish key risk factors
  - Illustrate that conduct disorders, delinquency, crime and victimization are not random
  - Identify developmental pathways of behaviour

# Early Childhood Development Policy Informed by Research (Cont.)

- Aggression and conduct disorders in pre-school children acquired through a developmental process
  - Pre-school years critical period to learn to regulate and control physically aggressive behaviours (Lochman, 2002)
  - Frequency of physical aggression increases during first 18 to 30 months and then steadily decreases (Tremblay, 2002)
  - Children who continue to exhibit high levels of aggression have difficulty making transition to school, engaging in the learning process, and forming positive relationships (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2002)
  - Elementary school children who display physically aggressive behaviour are at high risk for violent behaviour and drug abuse during adolescence (Stratton, 2002)

# Early Childhood Development Policy Informed by Research (Cont.)

- Risk factors for aggression and conduct problems in preschool children
  - Prenatal – prenatal alcohol, cigarette and drug exposure, poor maternal nutrition, birth complications (Raine, 2002)
  - Family – low income, low education, high family stress, substance abuse, teen mother (with little or no educational/employment skills or social supports), family violence, maternal depression, isolation, parental deviant/criminal behaviour (Stratton, 2002; Farrington, 2001)
  - Parenting – inconsistent, critical, abusive, disengaged child management techniques (Keenan, 2002)
  - Community – unsafe, deprived & disorganized neighbourhoods (Farrington, 2001)
  - Individual – impulsive, inattentive, hyperactive personality traits (Stratton, 2002)

# Early Childhood Development Policy Informed by Research (Cont.)

- Early childhood development perspective draws on:
  - Social learning theory
  - Control theory
  - Attachment theory



# Canada's Early Childhood Development Agreement: Guiding Principles

- Holistic
- Multidisciplinary
- Continuum of early interventions
  - Promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
  - Enhance parenting and family supports
  - Strengthen childhood development, learning and care
  - Strengthen community supports
- Targeted
- Culturally Sensitive
- Community-based

# Canada's Early Childhood Development Agreement: Guiding Principles (Cont.)

- Emphasis on knowledge, information and effective practice
  - Evidence-based decision-making
  - Dissemination critical to inform and engage public
  - Agreement among governments to report annually on their progress
- Comprehensive
  - Income – e.g., The Canada Child Tax Benefit, Employment Insurance Maternity and Parental Benefits
  - Effective parenting – e.g., Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, FAS/FAE, Community Action Program for Children, Child Care Expense Deduction
  - Community supports – e.g., National Crime Prevention Strategy
  - Research and education – e.g., the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, the Centres of Excellence for Children's Well-Being

# National Crime Prevention Strategy: Policy and Program Design:

- A policy and program instrument to reduce crime
  - Risk-focussed prevention measures
  - Foster protective factors
  - Community solutions with provinces, territories and municipalities
  - Secondary prevention
  - Targeted
  - Multidisciplinary approach
  - Long-term, proactive approach

# National Crime Prevention Strategy (Cont.)

- Research, evaluation, measurement
  - Promote innovation and progress
  - Inform implementation of “results-based” strategies
  - Evaluate implementation, outcomes and economic benefits
  - Make available promising practices
  - Integrate results to foster “evidence-based” polices and programs

# National Crime Prevention Strategy (Cont.)

- Ex. CPSD programs - early childhood development interventions with children at risk and their parents
  - Perry Pre-School Project in Michigan & new generation of “Headstart” programs in Canada (such as Moncton Headstart and Aboriginal Headstart)
  - Reduce risk factors for school failure, improve child development, social adjustment
  - Prevented a range of other future social problems
  - Statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups
  - Experimental group experienced half as many criminal arrests, higher educational achievement, fewer teen pregnancies, higher earnings & property wealth (EECD Briefs, 1999)

# Summary

- Canada's Early Childhood Development Policy
  - Early intervention (0-6 years)
  - Developmental programs and services
  - Counteract aggression & conduct disorders
  - Draws on social learning, control & attachment theories
  - Program component of policy National Crime Prevention Strategy

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