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***Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime: What Actions  
will Reduce Violent Crime by 2030 to Achieve SDG 16.1***

**Irvin Waller**

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**Irvin Waller**

## **Science and Secrets of Ending Violent Crime: What Actions will Reduce Violent Crime by 2030 to Achieve SDG 16.1**

The next generation of preventionists must be inspired to get decisive action now from governments to achieve a 50% reduction in violent crime by 2030. We have achieved so much but much more work is needed (Waller 2011; Waller 2019; Waller 2020). This chapter will highlight some of those achievements but it is a call to preventionists to be activists to accelerate progress towards dramatically reducing victimization and multiplying basic rights and services for victims. The opportunities for rapid advances are made possible by the extent of our knowledge, examples of good practice, international exchanges and our knowledge of how to get buy in but also by the new affordability of social media, modern ways to communicate and willingness of millennials to engage politicians.

In 1985, the UN General Assembly resolved to go beyond criminal justice to prevent victimization and provide victims with rights across the world. This resolution has become known as the Magna Carta for victims. It justified the action because of the magnitude of victimization and its consequences (UNGA 1985; Waller Martinez, 2015). While some governments in Europe and other rich countries have made significant progress, much more is needed and particularly in the countries with the most and highest rates of victimization. UN entities, governments and academic criminologists must transform their way of thinking consistent with the vision of dramatically reducing violent crime and closing the justice gap to which world leaders have committed in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The commitment to transformations in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a first step, but we must help governments to put their laws and money where their mouth is. Preventionists

must use science, model practices and social media to build on, and emulate. They must engage politicians and become policy leaders now to get transformations so that effective upstream prevention and victim rights become the new normal by 2030.

### **Tragic Consequences of Ignoring the Rights of Victims**

Globally each year, half a million victims will be murdered (UNODC 2019), an estimated twenty five million women raped (extrapolated from Waller 2019, 9-10), and one billion children victims of violence (World Health Organization 2017). These are outrageous numbers given our knowledge and pathfinder successes.

These statistics reflect victims who suffer injuries, pain, trauma, financial loss and more. The victims are often the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Where these tragedies have reached epidemic proportions, they threaten economic development and reduce the Gross Domestic Product. They threaten democracy and rule of law (Inter-American Development Bank 2018; Muggah 2019). These numbers reflect outrageous pain and loss that is preventable and often made worse by a flawed and often failed system of criminal justice.

### **Governments Agree to Dramatically Reduce Violent Crime by 2030**

All major world leaders committed in 2015 at the UN General Assembly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which include the commitment to reduce dramatically the numbers of victims of violent crime in SDGs 16.1, 5.2, 16.2 by 2030. "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (UNGA 2015) requires a new way of doing business. The new ways are results based, build on progress in a network of domains, use evidence, and focus on transforming policies in both advanced and developing nations.

There are approximately 15 indicators in the SDGs for targets that are measuring whether violent crime has been significantly reduced. Six of the most important for this chapter are set out in the following tables for the subsections in SDG 5 for the reduction in victims of violence against women and in SDG 16 to the reduction of victims of violence and homicide and violence against children. They include access to justice but not yet clearly for victims of

crime though one indicator is the proportion of victims who report to police in SDG 16.3.1.

### **Homicide in SDG 16:**

#### **16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere**

16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age

16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months

### **Rape in SDG5**

#### **5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation**

5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age

5.2.2 Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

### **Violence against children in SDG16**

#### **16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children**

16.2.1 Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past

16.2.3 Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18

The indicator for homicide is measured regularly and considered reliable enough to make comparisons over time and between countries (UNODC 2019). The indicators on sexual violence and violence against children will require the use of surveys such as the gold standard victimization survey known as the Intimate Partner

and Sexual Violence Survey developed by US Centers for Disease Control (2011; Together for Girls 2019a).

Goal 17 is a new concept for UN activities as it focuses on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. It includes knowledge sharing, capacity building, policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, data monitoring and accountability. These are focused on Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) but have relevance for high income countries.

### **Governments must put their money where their mouth is**

But the road to hell is paved with good intentions as governments have not acted to achieve them. "Violence is on the rise in certain regions of the world, but it doesn't have to be. In fact, the world possesses the knowledge, tools, institutional structures, legal instruments, and data-collection capacity to halve violence, in all its forms, within a decade" (Locke and Steven 2019, 1). By 2015, the world had accumulated solid science on how to prevent violent crime and celebrated many national actions to provide victim rights (Waller 2019).

SDG16 plus has provided remarkable leadership to get governments to accelerate the transformations to achieve the noble SDG goals. A growing number of pathfinder governments are signing up to collaborate but much more is needed (SDG16 plus 2019).

Decisive action is needed to accelerate action to use this science. The Under Secretary General, who is the head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), stated that "unless the international community takes decisive steps, targets under Sustainable Development Goal 16 to significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates by 2030 will not be met" (UNODC 2019, 1). This statement could equally be made about gender based violence and violence against children. So how can they take decisive action now?

Preventionists must get to know the science, how to implement it and how to convince policy makers to invest in it. I have now written a book to share this knowledge with preventionists, policy makers, faith based organizations and Non-governmental or-

ganizations, entitled the “Science and Secrets for Ending Violent Crime” (Waller 2019). The book makes the evidence based case for a major shift from over use of criminal justice and incarceration to effective solutions that prevent violent crime and victimization before it happens. It is based in a careful analysis of the science available from many academic sources as well as websites like [crimesolutions.gov](http://crimesolutions.gov) of the US department of Justice and [info violence](http://info.violence) from the World Health Organization. It explains the conclusions in terms that are easily understandable by politicians, victim advocates and the public. Here are some of the highlights.

## **Causes of Violence**

Since 1985, significant knowledge has accumulated on what causes the violence and how to tackle these causes. There are several factors that lead to increased risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence, which are sometimes grouped under the labels of individual, family, community, and environmental (WHO 2002). Studies of life cycle development and the downstream impact of adverse childhood experiences – child victimization - have given us significant data on how the accumulation of negative life experiences, such as poverty, inconsistent and uncaring parenting, failure in school and lack of jobs correlates with persistent offending in adolescence and young adulthood (WHO 2002; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2019; Waller 2019).

## **Solid sources of knowledge about effective violence prevention**

The science of violence prevention is solid but not yet widely known or used by policy makers. We have accumulated significant proven and evidence-based knowledge about what is effective and cost effective in stopping interpersonal violence. This knowledge is endorsed by some of the most prestigious organizations in the world. It is freely available on websites, including that of [crimesolutions.gov](http://crimesolutions.gov) of the US Department of Justice (2015), [info violence](http://info.violence) the World Health Organizations (2017; 2009a; 2009b) and the tool kit of the British College of Policing (2019, p, 23-32).

In 2017, WHO released the most international and extensive of these websites with its Violence Prevention Information System - Violence Info” (WHO 2017). This is a global interactive know-

ledge platform of scientific findings about the prevalence, consequences, causes and prevention of various forms of violence. The tool contains global, regional and national homicide rates from WHO Global Health Estimates, and country-specific information on laws, policies, strategies and victim services to prevent and respond to violence (WHO 2017).

These portals collectively access thousands of clinical trials that show which projects have stopped crime before it happens. In addition, national academic councils and commissions have reviewed the research to arrive at conclusions (Waller 2019, p. 32-36). Further analyses of these projects available on a portal of the State of Washington in the USA shows these projects are remarkably cost effective by stopping harm to victims and saving the costs of reacting after crime has happened (Washington State Institute for Public Policy 2018; Waller 2019, p. 31-32). These prove an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

### **Proven Solutions**

The book explains solutions that violence prevention science shows are effective and cost effective and how to find out more (Waller 2019, 37-114), including both prevention and implementation of victim rights. It highlights and explains the solutions that have been proven scientifically to prevent violent crime before it happens. It shows these solutions to be more effective and cost effective than over-relying on a reactive criminal justice system after crime has victimized people. The science shows that smart investment in prevention will avoid lives lost, trauma to victims and wasted taxes for all.

It teases out programs that have been proven to reduce violent crime by 50% or better than our criminal justice system and explains them for politicians. These include some well-known but still little used programs that must be targeted to tackle factors of risk. The programs include outreach to youth such as Cure Violence, school curricula such as Becoming a Man, Hospital Interventions with victims, family support and early childhood, life skills training in schools and proactive policing (See Waller 2019, 63-70).

## Smart Ways to Implement National and City Strategies

It focuses on guidelines, agreed at UN bodies such as UNODC (2019), UN Habitat (2019) and WHO (2016) that are little known but are essentials for governments to successfully implement that science and achieve sustained reductions in victimization. These have been integrated into an impressive model for national governments (EuroSocial 2015).

It shares some inspiring examples of cities that have acted consistently with these essentials to achieve dramatic reductions in homicides within as little as three years. It highlights the success of Glasgow in Scotland who achieved a 50% reduction within 3 years and has sustained the decline over much longer. The Glasgow model is being adopted by the Mayor of London, UK (2019). The largest Canadian Province now requires every municipality to have a community safety and well being plan (Ontario 2019).

It shows how cities have planned their ways to reduce street violence significantly and importantly why those cities succeeded when so many have not. The 7 Essentials for Success (Waller 2019, p. 117-122) are:

- Establishing a permanent violence and crime reduction board for the city;
- Being informed by violence prevention science and data;
- Having an integrated crime prevention plan;
- Mobilizing sectors able to tackle causes;
- Having adequate and sustained funding;
- Developing standards and training for human talent;
- Having public support and engagement.

## How to get Buy in

It identifies how to foster sustainable and smarter investments by policy makers. It make a giant step further forward to getting this knowledge used by using my several decades of experience in the USA and elsewhere to get buy in. Prevention is a big shift but includes the benefits of savings to taxpayers, reductions in mass incarceration, and meeting the visions of many victims to stop violence (see Waller 2019, 183-200).

So how do we make the transformations to make our communities safer and use tools to do it such as action briefs, training courses and twitter (CMNCP 2019). Effective violence prevention is not only more affordable and successful than policymakers think; a modest equivalent of 10 percent of what they spend on police, courts, and corrections will do it and often before the next election! Violence prevention is achievable because voters, contrary to what the media tells us, want much more than reaction, they want prevention (see Waller 2019, 221-228). Yes they want tough on crime, but they also want tough on causes.

### **Think of a World where Preventionists Helped Reduce Violence by 50% by 2030**

The stakes are high. The science and successes show that a 50% reduction in violent crime is achievable by 2030 (Waller 2019; Locke and Steven 2019). Globally this reduction saves 250,000s lives from homicide for the target in SDG 16.1, more than ten million women from rape for the target in SDG 5.2 and half a billion children from violence for the target in SDG 16.2.

The innovations needed are in the interests of governments by spending money better, managing cities to make cities safer, investing in disadvantaged families, and legislating support for affordable, popular and cost effective preventive solutions. In high violence countries and communities, it will increase GDP and well-being (Inter-American Development Bank 2018; Waller 2019).

### **The Challenge for Activist Preventionists**

Preventionists now must get to know the science and model practices as well as use social media and political engagement. They must spear head decisive action, in partnership with UN agencies and pathfinder governments, by five initiatives: (i) get to know the science, the essentials for success, and how to get buy in; (ii) raise awareness among politicians and the public of effective solutions and strategies, using modern communication tools; (iii) foster the human talent to implement effective strategies successfully; (iv) act locally to deliver effective solutions (v) work collaboratively to convince policy makers to invest now, including policy proposals based on effective solutions and strategies (Waller 2020).

## Conclusion

This identifies the decisive action needed now to dramatically reduce violent crime by 2030 as required by SDG 16.1, 5.2 and 16.2. It shows how to cut violence in half and so avoid each year 25000 homicides, 10 million or more rapes and half a billion child victims of violence. These reductions would increase GDP and decrease corruption and political instability. It is about shifting from (mis-)spending on what does not work to investing in the futures of young and disadvantaged people to save lives and taxes, while generating economic growth and political stability.

In 2019, we not only have the knowledge of what are effective solutions, successes in implementing them, and reasons for decision makers to shift investment, but we have social media and data analysis tools that were not available twenty years ago, we have cities that have been successful, we have guidelines agreed by governments. So we need to share the good news and get action now.

Preventionists can accelerate the transformations needed by partnering with UN agencies and pathfinder governments and cities. They must expand the leadership in the core network of those who already know the science, raising awareness of the strategies and the benefits to share this knowledge virally, develop the talent to make it happen, and help decision makers to see the benefits (WHO 2019; Waller 2020). They can foster national prevention legislation and a shift from an agenda of punishment by the state to an agenda of prevention investing in people guided by science. To succeed, decisive action is needed from funders to develop these tools, talents and the momentum towards a world safer from violence by 2030.

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