

Youth Violence and Self-Help

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Abstract

In this article, the focus is on youth violence in neighborhoods, including confrontations with the police. In the light of Black's theory of crime as a form of social control, we raise the question whether this kind of youth violence can be explained as a form of self-help.

In the aftermath of two cases involving public disorder, we interviewed offenders, victims, bystanders and residents as well as members of the police force, the justice department and the city government about their views on the events in question as well as why they thought confrontations with the police had occurred. Based on an analysis of risk factors, we conclude that three particular conditions are necessary to youth violence: institutionalized mistrust, a neighborhood subculture with strong elements of territoriality, and an environment that harbors a continuous threat of violence.

Introduction

In the course of maintaining public order in neighborhoods, or intervening in conflicts among residents, police are occasionally confronted by popular resistance while apprehending suspects. According to Wiles (1999), one of the characteristics of troubled neighborhoods is that residents block the attempts by the police and other authorities outside the neighborhood to solve the problems within the neighborhood. Examples of violence against the police have been reported in the suburbs of French cities, where young North Africans have seized possession of the public domain, treating the police as a rival gang that has to be prevented at all costs from entering what they consider to be their territory (Body-Gendrot 2000).

In the Netherlands, we studied a case of youth violence in a traditional working class neighborhood in Groningen which escalated into a riot against the police (De Haan e.a., 1998; Nijboer 1999; De Haan, Van der Laan, and Nijboer, 2001). In the eyes of the police management, the situation was so grave that it was considered irresponsible to send a squad of riot police to suppress the riot and restore order. In analyzing the background of this riot, we came across a history of serious threats and intimidation of the neighborhood residents by youth. Strangely enough, they were encouraged to this kind of violence by adults, who either openly expressed approval or turned a blind eye to these practices. Moreover, we discovered that local police officers were unaware of this violence as victims rarely reported violent incidents to the police.

Such forms of overt violence against the police can not only be observed in traditional working-class areas, but also in the post-war suburban areas with a predominant immigrant population. In Amsterdam, for example, police faced serious risks in trying to maintain public order, in particular from young Moroccans, who have also threatened residents with violence (Muller et al. 1998).

Concentration and isolation of homogeneous, socio-economically vulnerable groups in relatively neglected anonymous urban areas, is seen as one of the main causes of 'urban violence' (Body-Gendrot 2000). However, explaining youth violence against residents as well as the police requires more than structural indicators of disadvantage such as high unemployment, poverty, bad housing, concentrated immigration or ethnic heterogeneity and high residential mobility. While in some clearly disadvantaged neighborhoods this kind of youth violence has not occurred, in other less disadvantaged areas with relatively good facilities, youth violence against the police has escalated and even resulted in collective violence. To understand and explain this violence, it is necessary to look at the structural features of the neighborhood, the socio-cultural background of the population, and the everyday experiences of the youth growing up in the neighborhood (Body Gendrot, 2000). Violence may be territorially bound and related to neighborhood cultures or it may be related to different sub-cultural groups in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood cultures have traditionally been seen as a collective answer to the accumulation of problems confronting disadvantaged areas resulting in a negative spiral of decline: increasing levels of unemployment; welfare dependency; loss of income, status and ontological security. The nuisance caused by drug addicts and idle youth without perspectives amplify feelings of insecurity among residents, forcing those who can afford it to move to safer neighborhoods. Conversely, settling in a disadvantaged neighborhood becomes a negative choice of those who cannot afford to live anywhere else.

As a result of these selective processes of moving in and out, the composition of the neighborhood's population changes dramatically. Tensions emerge between the remaining residents and the newcomers who are – however, mistakenly - seen as causing the decline of the neighborhood. In reality, the decline of the neighborhood has more often been the cause for departures than for new arrivals. Real or perceived differences in lifestyle between old and new residents often result in neighborhood cultures, which strongly articulate aspects of a traditional working-class culture. In an empirical study of a traditional working-class neighborhood, Terpstra (1996) showed that residents who did not conform to generally expected life styles were intimidated and forced out by threats or even overt physical violence. Within the traditional neighborhood culture, this kind of criminal violence was considered fairly 'normal' and just as justified as the use of violence in confrontations with the police. This same phenomenon is seen in suburban neighborhoods with a large immigrant population. A strong identification with the neighborhood, which characterizes the traditional working-class neighborhoods, does not seem to exist in the relatively new suburban areas, where a sense of belonging is articulated more readily along ethnic lines.

Self help in disadvantaged neighborhoods

In both old and new disadvantaged neighborhoods, the police are unlikely to receive reports from residents concerning threats or acts of physical violence. If relatively low levels of reporting to the police are observed in disadvantaged areas, this does not mean that there is no need for formal police control. Low levels of reporting to the police may also reflect the existence of alternative resources of informal social control. Social control theorists have tended to emphasize conventional informal resources like primary and

secondary social networks, social support, collective efficacy, and neighborhood-based organizations (Baumer, 2002). However, the availability and efficacy of conventional informal social control mechanisms usually declines as the neighborhood's level of disadvantage increases. Moreover, a cultural code that discourages reporting to the police and supports self-reliance becomes increasingly prevalent the greater the level of disadvantage. The main substitute in disadvantaged neighborhoods for police intervention may be an unconventional system of values that encourages residents to respond to problems by taking the law into their own hands. Whenever citizens think official authorities, and the police in particular, are failing to maintain public order and safety in their streets, they may resort to revenge and violent self-help.

Legally, self-help is described as 'the spontaneous and relatively immediate activity of individual citizens who have experienced a crime either directly as victim or, indirectly, as a witness or bystander without involving the police (Denkers, 1985; 15). Whereas self-help is legally considered to be a relative immediate, individual activity by citizens against some form of crime, the sociologist of law Black (1988) views it in a much broader sense as any answer to deviant behavior, where an insulted parties take action on their own accord. In his view, "a great deal of the conduct labeled and processed as crime in modern societies resembles the modes of conflict management ... that are found in traditional societies that have little or no law (in the sense of governmental social control). Much of the conduct is a punishment or other expression of disapproval, whether applied reflexively or impulsively, with coolness or in the heat of passion. Some is an effort to achieve compensation, or restitution, for a harm that has been done" (Black, 1998: 31). This 'crime as social control' is more likely wherever 'law' is less available, for example, in places where legal protection is withheld as a matter of public policy. In this way, violence can be seen as a reaction, n immediate or delayed, of an individual or a group to a directly or indirectly experienced injustice.

Research problem and design

In our research, self-help is considered in this broader perspective. We assumed that violent self-help would be more likely where the 'law' is less in evidence and that this will apply particularly to disadvantaged neighborhoods, albeit in different ways. In the light of Black's theory of crime as social control, we raise the question concerning the extent to which youth violence against residents and police may be explained as a form of self-help and in which situations and under which conditions such forms of self-help can be expected. Do young people in these neighborhoods resort to illegal, violent self-help because they feel they cannot rely on legal protection? Do they prefer violent self-help rather than formal social control, even at the price of a higher general level of violence? Or would they – as Sampson suggests – rather have more formal controls of crime, but of a different kind than currently provided by the police (Sampson, 2002)? To what extent do traditional working class neighborhoods differ from migrant neighborhoods with respect to violent self-help? And, finally, how should the police react to forms of youth violence as form of self-help?

In order to answer these questions, we carried out qualitative exploratory research in two neighborhoods: one in the city of Amsterdam and the other in the city of Groningen. Interviews were held with youth about their experiences with violence and their views regarding self-help. Twenty-one boys from a neighborhood in Amsterdam

and twenty-five young people (seventeen boys, eight girls) from a neighborhood in Groningen were interviewed. The boys in Amsterdam, mainly Moroccan but with some boys from Surinam and the Antilles, had an average age 18, ranging from 14 to 21. The average age of the (mainly native Dutch) youth in Groningen was seventeen, ranging from 15 to 26.

The respondents provided a purposive sample (Baarda & De Goede, 1990) of youth who had been involved in one or more violent incidents. In Amsterdam, sixteen of the twenty-one boys had been involved in violent incidents as perpetrator (in a total of 35 violent incidents), while in Groningen fourteen out of seventeen boys had been involved in violent incidents as a perpetrator in a total of twenty violent incidents. One of the older girls also admitted she had been involved in a fight in which she acted as perpetrator. Most cases concerned forms of overt violence (fights, group violence), assault or threats. In the majority of these cases, the perpetrators and the victims knew each other only superficially. Violence against the police was also discussed. Most of the violence in which the respondents had been involved took place in their own or an adjoining neighborhood. Some violence occurred when they were 'going out', i.e. "down town" (Terlouw, de Haan & Beke, 1999).

In semi-structured interviews, the young people were asked to define violence and to relate which forms of violence they had personally been involved in and how they reacted to it. Also, they were asked under which circumstances they believed the use of violence was understandable or necessary and whether violence should be permissible under such circumstances. Their experiences with the police and the legal system were also discussed.

Results

In many cases, becoming a perpetrator is anything but clear-cut as many respondents have been both perpetrator and victim. In such cases, violence begins when one party takes offence at having been – whether or not accidentally – touched, addressed, or simply looked at by the other party. When an intended or unintended provocation is responded to in an aggressive way or when one party is challenged by the other and their honor is at stake, the situation is ready for confrontation: verbal (scolding, threatening), physical (pushing and shoving) or violent (kicking, hitting). In the case that weapons are used, this confrontation may result in (serious) physical injury (Polk, 1999). In many cases, the cause of an incident seems so trivial or banal that one gets the impression the confrontation was deliberately sought. For example, an eighteen year old boy from Amsterdam explained: "You bump into them and then he says: "You bumped into me". I say: "Yes, you bumped into me". And then it starts." A twenty-year-old young man from Groningen put it: "If someone looks at you like that, you'll think 'what does he want from me?'" Why are they giving me that dirty look and behaving in such an arrogant and challenging way? But they kept doing it. So, you know, that's when we beat them up,"

Sometimes even the involved parties don't remember how an incident started. 'Well, I don't really remember, but once I just hit someone. Then, you know, I started pushing. Then he pushed me back. Then I immediately punched him. Just like that. I didn't mean to do it', a seventeen-year-old boy from Amsterdam told us. As a seventeen-year-old boy from Groningen put it: 'I didn't even know what was going on. But neither did they'.

In other cases, however, something has occurred previously, which evokes a response, sometimes from an individual, but most often from a group. A twenty-year-old young man from Amsterdam told us: ‘Something happened, and then a few guys came over here, to this neighborhood. They totally beat up one of my friends (. . .). Then we beat them up’. And a fifteen-year-old boy from Groningen: ‘You hear that someone has been threatened by a whole group, then you just go there with a whole group, then you just want to get them’.

The examples mentioned above show that such violence has many of the characteristics of self-help in the broader sense. According to Black (1998: 40) however, self-help is not only a function of the lack of available legal resources for solving conflicts. It is also dependent on social conditions in which it takes place. In order to examine under which social conditions such forms of violence take on the character of self-help, we analyzed the descriptions of incidents in which an individual or a group respond to behavior experienced as illegitimate by using violence – either directly or indirectly. It appears there are three conditions that are of importance.

Institutionalized mistrust

The first condition under which juvenile violence can take on the character of self-help is a lack of trust in police. This lack in trust is displayed in the fact that the respondents were reluctant to report incidents to the police. When they had been the victim of theft (of their scooter, for example) or of assault (or having been in a fight) and where asked whether they wanted to report these crimes to police’, they generally answered with ‘no’. Few respondents claimed to have reported the crime and in some cases, they only reported the theft but not the violence. As a twenty-year-old from Amsterdam put it: “. . . when you get beat up, it’s a whole different story”

Most respondents, however, frankly admitted that they would never report being the victim of an assault. This can partly be explained by the fact that in violent crimes it is not always clear who started it and what the victim’s part in the incident was. Or, in the case of robbery, it is not always clear who actually owned the stolen goods. In such cases, there is confusion concerning the identity of the perpetrator and of the victim, making it problematic for the young people to explain what happened in conversations with the police. This may account for their reluctance to report crimes.

But the most important reason why young people do not report being a victim of assault lies in their profound distrust of the police and the legal system, more generally. This distrust is manifested in their explicit statements about ineffective and unjust law enforcement. Young people have little or no trust in the willingness of the police to protect their interests. A sixteen-year-old boy from Amsterdam: ‘I’m not going to involve the police. What will the police do for me? Nothing, you know. I don’t want anything to do with them’. Others, such as a seventeen-year-old boy from Amsterdam, are skeptical about the effectiveness of police performance: ‘I’m not going to call the police. He’ll get caught, you know, but then what? In only a month he’ll be free again. As though a month would do any good. (. . .) He’ll just keep making victims’.

These young people believe their own performance will be more effective: ‘He won’t learn anything from the police. He’ll just carry on. I’ll get him myself. I’ll beat him up or something. (. . .) Yes, I think that will be more effective”, an eighteen-year-old

from Amsterdam told us. Based on this and other remarks, we can infer their need for some retaliation. A fifteen-year-old boy from Amsterdam reasons as follows: 'I felt the pain. Now let him feel the pain'. These young people usually prefer to fulfill their need for retaliation themselves. 'I prefer getting him myself, then he'll know what really happens if he gets people', a seventeen-year-old boy from Amsterdam states.

Young people have little faith in getting fair treatment from the police. This view is partly based on their own experiences with the police and law enforcement: 'If you report a crime, you run the risk of being arrested yourself', a twenty-year-old from Amsterdam told us. In part, however, this view is based on their own ambivalent position as both perpetrators and victims of violence. A twenty-six-year-old man from Groningen told us: 'If I were the victim, they (the police) would treat me as if I were the suspect'.

Migrant youth have the additional problem that they feel the police take them less seriously than native born Dutch boys. 'Now I'm going to say something. I'm fighting you. You're Dutch, I'm Moroccan. You won't see me going to the police about this. Why? I know you will have it your way anyway', an eighteen-year-old Moroccan man from Amsterdam told us.

Some young people have the feeling that the police treat them as suspects in every situation regardless of their actions or that the police are out to get them or their friends. 'When I walk past them and I am wearing a cap, they immediately think "he is one of them"', a seventeen-year-old boy from Groningen informed us. In particular being apprehended in public is considered unjust and raises indignation. 'But we get blamed (. . .) They always arrest us for no reason', a twenty-year-old from Amsterdam explained. They often feel that the police are playing games with them. 'If I were a passer-by, I would be seen as a suspect. They always see me as a suspect', a twenty-six year-old from Groningen said.

Such experiences with police performance encourage distrust among youth against the police. This is not just an individual reaction to police performance. At a collective level, such shared experiences contribute to an institutionalized distrust against the police as an integral feature of (neighborhood) culture.

Territoriality

A second condition under which youth violence increasingly takes on the character of self-help is the presence of a specific neighborhood culture in which the unity of the neighborhood and a sense of territoriality among inhabitants play an essential role. Young people consider the neighborhood their 'own territory'. 'This neighborhood is a state in itself. The people who live here decide for themselves what happens', a twenty-one-year-old man from Groningen reported. Moreover, young people consider themselves more or less responsible for the maintenance of unwritten rules, which apply to anyone who lives in the neighborhood. 'In this neighborhood nothing will ever just happen to you. (. . .) Well, if people come messing around and are giving you lip, yes, then you can expect something to happen, but nothing will happen to you without reason', the same twenty-one-year old from Groningen explained.

In order to maintain the unwritten rules of the neighborhood, residents are kept in line by means of threats, intimidations or physical violence. As a twenty-one-year-old from Groningen put it: "If we really want people to leave, then we can get them to leave. We don't need the police to achieve that". A remark from a sixteen-year-old boy

indicates that these rules are sometimes loosely interpreted, however: 'If one of us doesn't like that particular person, if we don't like the way he looks or walks, then his fate is in our hands'.

To the extent that youth strongly identify with their neighborhood, they may also feel more authorized to punish outsiders on behalf of the neighborhood. A twenty-year-old from Amsterdam told us that 'if someone from Amsterdam East or West would come and get something from our neighborhood, for example, if he wanted to steal a scooter, and we saw that... then we would end up fighting him. It's just not on that someone comes and does that'. Some of the young people consider the maintenance of public order by the police as an invasion of their domain. As a sixteen-year-old from Amsterdam told us, 'it's our street. It's just our neighborhood. They can't take our neighborhood away'.

Institutionalized distrust against the police and a territorially bounded neighborhood culture are in and of themselves insufficient conditions for youth violence and self-help. In actual practice a third condition is required; namely the need for self-help that arises from life in an environment characterized by the ongoing threat of violence.

Threat

From previous research, we know that young people growing up in 'problem areas' with high levels of violence, develop their own norms and values regarding threats, intimidation and the use of physical violence. These norms and values are based on their own experiences with violence. In some cases, they develop their own informal rules for behavior in the public domain. For example, in order to be approached and treated in the 'right' way, one needs to command the respect that one 'deserves' (Anderson, 1994: 82). Such a street-code mitigates against reporting crimes because this is considered to be sign of weakness. 'If you go to the police it seems as if the other party wins', a nineteen-year-old from Amsterdam told us. Moreover, reporting crimes is considered a form of betrayal, which has to be punished severely. 'They got another one. Beat him up. He had reported a crime', a twenty-one-year-old from Amsterdam remembered.

Instead of reporting crimes, the collective ability for self-help is propagated. The remarks many young people made during the interviews clearly indicate how they orient themselves to such informal codes of behavior: 'What do you mean, reporting a crime? I just take care of things myself' and 'Just get revenge, don't go to the police and don't report the crime. I just take the law into my own hands'.

For these youth, the street code justifies taking care of their own safety and using violence if necessary. 'If you have a problem with a person, then you are the one who has to solve the problem', an eighteen-year-old boy from Amsterdam explained. And a fifteen-year-old from Groningen recounted: 'He tells you someone has been threatened, one guy by a whole group, then you go back with the whole group because you just want to get them'.

The consequence of a street code is that other forms of conflict regulation, such as the avoidance of violence, are unacceptable. As the use of violence becomes more integrated into the lives of young people and gains social function, it generates more violence and youth are increasingly confronted with situations in which they must rely on themselves or the help of others to maintain their safety. In their attempts to adapt

themselves to a violent environment, they develop collective protection strategies and, consequently, use counter violence in order to achieve the safety they need.

In our research, we came across a series of violent incidents, which had escalated. A sixteen-year-old boy from Groningen told us: 'Well, then we went back too. (. . .) There were ten of us then and that group had twenty-five people that we had a fight with. We ran into them and then we shot at them'. The remark of a twenty-year-old from Amsterdam indicates that the reactions of both sides can sometimes lead to an end of the violence as well: 'At a certain point they came to see us, to this neighborhood. And, you know, then we started coming to their neighborhood. Another fight. Later they came back here again and we started fighting again. Then we went back to their place. And then it just stopped'.

From these descriptions of violent incidents, it becomes clear that under the three conditions mentioned above, violence is both cause and consequence. When self-help is seen as part of a process by which violence increasingly takes on an endemic character, the continuous threat of violence is not only a condition for self-help, but is also the result.

Discussion

Based on our analysis of interviews with youth from neighborhoods in Amsterdam and Groningen, youth violence can be seen, in part, as a form of self-help rather than what was initially seen as ordinary violent crime. From a legal anthropological view, however, such self-help can also be regarded as a relatively autonomous form of informal social control with its own logic, organization, and characteristic features (Black, 1983, 1998). It appears that youth develop distinctive norms regarding the legitimacy of threats, intimidation and the use of physical violence. These norms are based, in part, on their own experiences with violence. They are reluctant to alarm the police, considering it a sign of weakness or even betrayal. Conversely, they propagate individual and collective self-help as a more acceptable and effective way to protect themselves.

In our analysis we have distinguished three conditions which contribute to youth violence taking on the character of self-help: distrust against the police and the legal system, a subculture in which the unity of the neighborhood or the own ethnic group is expressed through territorial claims, and, finally, a continuous threat of violence in the neighborhood. These conditions can interact and intensify each other, ultimately producing a subculture in which violence against police becomes a serious risk. Collective reactions against police enforcement of public order may even result in large-scale riots.

If the police begin to intervene more actively (following a policy of tolerance, indifference or neglect), by enforcing the law and ensuring public order and safety in a problem area, they are frequently met with resistance. Young people experience an increase in police control as a violation of their rights and may, consequently react with defiance or even violence to the efforts of the police or other agents of social control who attempt to discipline them. As law enforcement fails, an opportunity structure favoring delinquency may become established in a neighborhood, requiring even more repression. Indiscriminate, aggressive enforcement of public order in disadvantaged neighborhoods, however, creates additional problems, alienating conventional informal control agents. If

aggressive enforcement is experienced as illegitimate, it may even undermine conventional forms of normative support. (Van der Vijver and Gunther Moor, 2001).

One starting point for preventing an increase in youth violence and self-help, which is perhaps not the most important but certainly the most direct, is an improvement of the relationship of the police to youth in problem areas. Young people often experience a misbalance in their relationship with the police. On the one hand, they dislike being subjected to police control, but, on the other hand, they miss police making an effort to protect them. As a consequence, they begin to doubt the legitimacy of police interventions in the neighborhood (Walgrave & Vettenburg, 1996). After a long-standing policy of tolerance, additional problems emerge as more active interventions by the police to enforce public order and safety in a neighborhood are met with resistance (Wiles, 1999). Young people often consider police reactions to their behavior as a provocation. Our research indicates that ‘demonstrative’ arrests of youth in the presence of their peer groups often lead to vandalism and violence. By contrast, a more discrete, but, nevertheless, forceful request that young people report to the police station, may result in fewer problems. As the policy of the police becomes more repressive and appears more selective and random to youth, the risk of resistance during arrest and large-scale riots increases.

In the course of analyzing interviews with migrant (mainly Moroccan) youth from Amsterdam and native-born (Dutch) youth from Groningen, we did not assume beforehand that differences in ethnical background would be significant for the degree of distrust against police. References to differences in criminality between ethnic groups frequently draw upon cultural explanations, which are easily made, but often unfounded (De Haan, 1990). Nevertheless, it is possible that there are actual differences between migrant and native-born youth in their relationship to the police. Coppes et. al. discovered that the police and Moroccan youth both possess highly negative images of one another. As a result, the police approach Moroccan youth with ‘a high dose of distrust’ and Moroccan youth, in turn, consider the police as an enemy that ‘has it in for them’ (Coppes et. al., 1997: 64-66).

Our research shows that the differences in their relationship with the police between migrant (mainly Moroccan) and native (Dutch) youth are far from absolute. They are rather gradual in nature. Also the conditions, which contribute to youth violence taking on the character of self-help, are essentially the same in the immigrant and the traditional working class neighborhood, despite some minor differences.¹

One difference is that Moroccan youth perceive an ethnic bias in police contacts, while for native youth in Groningen, these contacts are perceived as biased solely in terms of social class. Another difference is that distrust of the police on the part of Moroccan youth in Amsterdam is based mainly upon their own experiences, while in Groningen this distrust is also traditionally transmitted from the older generation to the younger generation. The reason for this is that in Groningen the older generation’s relation with the police is more one of ‘cultural defiance’, whereas the relationship of older first generation Moroccan immigrants in Amsterdam can be characterized as ‘cultural fear’.

Concerning territoriality, both the demographic and geographic demarcation of the traditional working class neighborhood in Groningen is more marked than the more

much larger and heterogeneous suburb in Amsterdam. Thus, in Amsterdam the concept of territoriality tends to be more diffuse.

Also with regard to the mix of formal and informal social control, there are some differences. Although both in Groningen and Amsterdam the younger generation was the primary agent of violent self-help, the older generation also played a significant, albeit somewhat different role. In Groningen, adult residents of the neighborhood played both a stimulating and mitigating role, often morally supporting the actions of the youth against other residents or against the police. At the same time, the older generation ensured that the violence remained within certain boundaries. In Amsterdam, the older generation did not actively support the actions of the youth against other residents or against the police. In contrast to Groningen, some of the adult Moroccan men in Amsterdam organized themselves as 'Neighborhood Fathers' (De Haan en De Jong 2004). In cooperation with the police and the local justice department and with support of the welfare, district and city councils, these men tried to implement informal social control in their neighborhood by addressing the young Moroccan boys in a direct manner and by trying to correct their behavior when necessary. The older Moroccan boys heeded their interventions, remembering how adult men would publicly correct the behavior of youth back home in Morocco. Younger Moroccan boys, however, were less likely to recognize the authority of the 'Neighborhood Fathers'. They claimed that it was not up to the Fathers to correct their behavior but rather the task of their own parents and – ironically - the police. Both in Groningen and Amsterdam, youth seemed to prefer violent self-help to formal social control, even at the price of a higher general level of violence. This also applied to some of the adult residents in Groningen. However, adult Moroccan men in Amsterdam seemed to prefer more formal controls of crime, albeit of a different kind than currently provided by the police.

Our research suggests that, in the interests of preventing self-help style violence, the police would do well to take away the distrust of the youth and gain their confidence by offering them something, which they need – namely protection in violent surroundings. A first step in that direction would be to take the perspective of young people more seriously. The police do not have to accept or tolerate violence committed by youth. However, in order to respond to violence adequately, it is important to realize that youth sometimes use violence as a means for exercising social control in their neighborhood. Lacking other means and possibilities, this is sometimes their only means to ensure their own safety and autonomy. As long as the police lack insight into the motivation among youth to use violence as a form of self-help, even the most well intended attempts to diminish and prevent youth violence will likely overshoot the mark. Without the development of a more sensitive and differentiated approach toward target groups, any police plan for a neighborhood based approach to public order and safety will be likely to fail.

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