Justice Committee - An examination of the drivers of violence and criminality.

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There is no one type of person who participates in violence and criminality, for example, we know that gender based violence exists across all age groups and all socio-economic brackets. There are different types of violence and each of these can be driven by different factors; community violence, domestic violence, political violence etc. Attempts to reduce our understanding of violence to single factors fails to understand the full spectrum of reasons people participate in violent and criminal behaviour and is frequently used to stigmatise groups by virtue of their social class or ethnicity.

The accumulation of psychosocial burdens and risk factors in an individual's environment are the most important determinant of involvement in offending behaviour. In other words, while there are biological, psychological, and socio-cultural risks during development, it is the wider life experiences which will increase or mediate the risk of offending. Individual development is situated within the wider context of ones' environment, including the impact of physical, emotional, family, education, situational, cultural, or political factors.

Research consistently shows that age is a significant factor in violent and criminal behaviour. Criminal activity tends to peak during adolescence and early adulthood, then declines as individuals age. This phenomenon is known as the age-crime curve and applied to a range of risky behaviours in adolescence such as driving, drug use, accidents etc. **Gender** differences in violence and criminality are also well-documented, with men being more likely to engage in violent and criminal behaviour than women. This disparity is attributed to various factors, including biological differences and socialization processes.

The **family** is both a risk and protective factor, and one of the most important interventions in a child's life trajectory is how well a society supports a family system to function. Ensuring that core needs are met (housing, health, education), ensures an environment for flourishing.

Social Conditions can be a driver for crime, many conditions create hopelessness and potential psychological trauma, such as poverty, homelessness, experiences of social exclusion and access to education and employment. Victimization is heavily featured in the histories of those who are criminally involved, where experiences of bullying or violence have resulted in the victim becoming a perpetrator.

Trauma, mental health and substance dependence are significant drivers of criminal behaviour and violence. A number of research projects conducted by us in Applied Psychology UCC have highlighted the higher prevalence of childhood trauma experiences in people struggling with addiction and/or justice involvement. The Irish Prison Service estimates that approximately 70% of people come into prison with an addiction or substance use problems. Addressing the drivers of violence and criminality requires a multifaceted approach that considers the complex interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors. By implementing comprehensive prevention strategies, some have been mentioned in my written submission, with a focus on mental health, education, employment, social inclusion, and community development, policymakers can create conditions that reduce the likelihood of criminal behaviour and promote safer, more cohesive societies. Policies and practices that only consider justice related responses to criminal behaviour incur a large cost on the burden on individuals and the State and are ineffective at targeting the drivers for violence. Many international approaches have moved to viewing violence as a public health issue that requires a public health response.