

Dynamics of Youth Violence and the Prevention Efforts of Fútbol for Good Programs in Colombia



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Problem:

- Over a third of male youths facing physical violence in Colombia.
- **The only safe space (non-violent) for boys during the out-of-school time were fútbol (soccer, football) programs.** (De la Vega-Taboada et al., 2023).
- Few studies embrace the complexity of youth violence, and none have studied how sports can transform those dynamics in Colombia.
- Research question: **How do fútbol for Good (FFG) programs work to prevent youth violence in the Caribbean region of Colombia?**

Methods:

- **System Dynamics** embraces the complexity of behaviors by including various variables that co-act nonlinearly and is recommended by eminent developmental sciences scholars (e.g., Overton, Lerner), but not consistently used.
- First, we interviewed **forty adolescents** and obtained the principal factors promoting/preventing violence (e.g., drug and fútbol). Then we draw the model **and iterate it with four community coaches.** After that, we refined with **two government officials and one Sports NGO leader.** During this process, **four scholars informed the CLD model.**
- We presented it **back to the community coaches.**

Dynamics of the System:

- **Violence and Drugs:** When violence emerges in the streets, adolescents perceive they need protection. Consequently, adolescent feel attracted to gangs due to their perception that gangs can protect them from violence.
- **Fútbol and Nonviolent Messages:** The legitimization of violence to solve conflict generates concerns in people who care, they translate those concerns into FfG programs. These programs attract adolescent and teach them non-violence and provide a safe space.
- The programs generate **parental skills** through training or individual coach-parent conversations.



Discussion:

- Reinforcing loops driving violence shows a misguided mental model happening to the youth. Non-aggressive people defend themselves from drug users with violence or by joining gangs. **That same action leads them to experience more violence later.**
- Fútbol for Good (FFG) programs prevent violence by these four ways: **decreasing the legitimization of violence, creating safety in the field, competing with gangs in attracting youth and training parents on socioemotional skills.**
- Significant delays between socioemotional learning -in parents and youth- and the decline in the legitimization of violence: **immediate benefits are not visible to funders.**
- **Community coaches and gangs are competing.** They compete to attract youth, but the gangs have more power (resources).

- Diagraming the system through the CLD uncovered **a self-organizing principle within the communities.** Community leaders and fútbol coaches monitor the legitimization of violence (culture of violence among youth) and intervene through fútbol when the variable exceed certain threshold.
- External organizations and **programs must prioritize enhancing existing fútbol programs** or established coaches with relationships and positions within the relevant community.

References:

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