



Youth at Risk in Latin America and the Caribbean: Understanding the Causes, Realizing the Potential (Directions in Development)

Wendy Cunningham, Linda McGinnis, Rodrigo Garcia Verdu, Cornelia Tesliuc, Dorte Verner

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Realizing the potential of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean is essential both to their well-being and to the region's long-term welfare. Young people are often seen as the source of problems that plague the area, namely rising levels of crime and violence, unemployment, and drug use. However, there is little understanding of the problems young people face, the reasons that some engage in risky behaviors, and how best to support the most vulnerable. *Youth at Risk in Latin America and the Caribbean* attempts to fill this knowledge gap by identifying at-risk youth and providing policy makers with evidence-based guidance that will make their countries' investments in young people more effective. The authors find that more than half the region's young people can be considered "at risk" of engaging in negative behaviors, which each year reduce regional economic growth by up to 2 percent. They also confirm that the causes of risky behavior in developed countries—weak relationships with schools and family, poor self esteem, household poverty, negative gender norms, and misguided laws—are also relevant in Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on this analysis, the authors describe 23 policies and programs that experts agree are the foundation of a successful youth development portfolio, ranging from early childhood development programs to parent training to cash transfers granted in exchange for positive behaviors. It also lays out strategies for implementing such a portfolio in a budget-constrained environment. This book will be of great interest to those working in the areas of social analysis and policy, social development and protection, and poverty reduction.

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