

PAPER 3E: SOCIAL SCIENCE

For information only, not to be translated: The following text is an extract from a study on anti-social behaviour, commissioned in 2005 by the Joseph Rowntree Trust. Translate into your target language for publication in a journal for social work practitioners.

TRANSLATION TO BEGIN HERE

Anti-social behaviour strategies: finding a balance

The Government has attached great importance to tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB), and has introduced a range of new measures to deal with it. This study, by King's College London, looked at public attitudes towards ASB nationally and examined the problems and solutions in three case-study neighbourhoods with high levels of ASB.

In all three areas, graduated enforcement strategies culminating in the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) were combined with a range of preventive measures by different agencies. Some of these measures were funded through mainstream services and others through special initiatives.

In each of the neighbourhoods, interviews and focus groups were organised with residents and ASB practitioners. In all three areas, issues relating to children and young people caused particular concern. Residents and practitioners spoke about boisterous and rowdy behaviour by children, young people congregating, young people causing damage to property and the environment, and anti-social use of cars and motorbikes by children and young people. People were also concerned about drug and alcohol misuse, and the impact of neighbour disputes and 'problem families'.

Focus groups with residents showed how exposure to ASB can provoke a profound sense of powerlessness and lack of control over the social environment. People had real concerns about retaliation if they intervened, and felt that the statutory agencies were largely impotent in the face of serious misbehaviour by young people.

Explaining and responding to ASB: three perspectives

Three main strands of thought or perspectives on ASB emerged, although these were by no means mutually exclusive or discrete:

- Social and moral decline – ASB problems were seen as symptoms of wider social and cultural change, and more specifically a decline in moral standards and family values.

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- Disengaged youth and families – ASB was thought to be rooted in the increasing disengagement from wider society of a significant minority of children and young people and (in many cases) their families.
- 'Kids will be kids' – ASB was seen as a reflection of the age-old tendency for young people to get into trouble, challenge boundaries and antagonise their elders.

Those who saw ASB as an issue of social and moral decline were often highly cynical about the effectiveness of the new range of provisions for tackling it, such as ASBOs and dispersal orders. However, they also saw little hope in alternative approaches other than, possibly, community mobilisation against ASB perpetrators.

Those who largely viewed ASB in terms of 'disengagement' thought that early preventive intervention, intensive youth work and community partnership offered the most promise. From this perspective, enforcement was necessary, but had to be used selectively and with great care.

The 'kids will be kids' viewpoint implied that diversionary activities for young people should be the cornerstone of local ASB strategies.

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