I. Introduction

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the pervasiveness of violence is recognized as one of the most urgent threats to adolescent health and development. The leading causes of death among people between the ages of 10 and 19 include homicide, suicide, and motor vehicle crashes. Twenty-nine percent of all homicides in LAC occur in this age group (Breinbauer and Maddaleno, 2005).

Alcohol is often a major factor in these leading causes of death and injury. Globally, alcohol consumption causes 3.2% of deaths (1.8 million) and there are causal relationships between alcohol consumption and more than 60 types of disease and injury (WHO, 2002). Alcohol use is also a risk factor for numerous other serious health issues, including traumatic injury, drowning, burns, property crime, high risk sex, fetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol poisoning, and need for treatment for alcohol abuse and dependence.

Reducing harmful alcohol use and violence among youth is a priority for many countries in LAC. However, little research has been conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of strategies to prevent or reduce alcohol-related youth violence. As a result, public health officials and prevention practitioners, especially at the local level, have little guidance in selecting potentially effective strategies.

The objective of this document is to provide a comprehensive summary of strategies and policies found in an environmental approach that have evidence or show promise in the prevention or reduction of alcohol-related violence affecting young people in LAC. The strategies and policies included in this document can be categorized into two groups: 1) strategies and policies that deal directly with reducing youth access to alcohol and 2) strategies and policies that target its conditions of use. The first set of strategies and policies prevent or reduce the violence related to alcohol use by operating under the assumption that youth are more likely to engage in violent behavior under the influence of alcohol; therefore, curbing access to alcohol would likely have an effect in reducing youth violence. The second set of strategies and policies operates under the assumption that there is a greater likelihood that youth (and adults) will engage in violent behavior under certain circumstances or conditions, where heavy alcohol use is likely to occur, such as in bars and at sporting events.

This document is divided into three sections. Section one summarizes youth alcohol consumption and the role that alcohol plays in the violence affecting young people in LAC. This section also provides background on the importance of addressing prevention of alcohol use as a means of preventing or reducing violence. Section two provides a summary of environmental prevention strategies and policies that have been identified to reduce alcohol-related violence affecting youth, including examples from LAC where available. The final section, section three, contains recommendations for next steps and identifies areas in need of further research and evaluation.

2 In this report youth are defined as being between the ages of 10 and 29 to be consistent with the definition provided in the World report on violence and health (Krug, 2002).