

## **Impact of Violence on Child Development**

"We found that children who witnessed more community violence were also likely to behave aggressively two years later, regardless of their age. For older children (in grades 4 to 6), witnessing community violence not only led to more aggressive behavior, but also to greater endorsement of beliefs that aggression was acceptable, and more time spent fantasizing about aggressive acts. It may be that witnessing serious violence on a regular basis requires a type of coping strategy to minimize fear, particularly for children. Fantasizing about violent acts, and thinking about it as an acceptable behavior that is a normal part of life, may serve to desensitize children to its true consequences. Although this may make it easier for them to cope with witnessing violent acts in their neighborhoods, it may also make violence seem more like a regular part of life, leading to increases in their own aggressive behavior. Our findings suggest that efforts to reduce community violence may lead to reductions in aggressive behavior among schoolchildren. In addition, for those children who are exposed to community violence, interventions are needed to weaken beliefs that aggressive behavior is acceptable"

***Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 74, Issue 5, Community Violence Exposure, Social Cognition, and Aggression Among Urban Elementary School Children by N.G. Guerra, L.R. Huesmann, and A. Spindler. Copyright 2003 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.***

## **Community Violence/Mental Health**

"In brief, a child becoming a victim of gun violence can develop PTSD. There is also evidence to support that exposure to gun violence can cause children to externalize the problem and begin to view the act of committing violence as a problem solving mechanism. There is also some evidence that shows that children will begin to desensitize and become emotionally detached as exposure to gun violence increases."

***Fowler, Patrick J., et al, "Community Violence: A Meta-Analysis on the Effect of Exposure and Mental Health Outcomes of Children and Adolescents," Development and Psychopathology 21 (2009):227-259***

## **Community Violence**

Community violence can be defined as exposure to acts of interpersonal violence committed by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim. More than 33% of American children and adolescents reported being the direct victim of violence. Over 75% of children reported having been exposed to community violence. Parents report that their children are exposed to about half of the violence that the children themselves report. Children learn by example, and some children may come to feel that violence is justified and see violence as a valid way of dealing with interpersonal conflict. In any case, parental

involvement and support is one of the key factors in children's mental and emotional well being.

*Summarized from: [://www.nccev.org/violence/community](http://www.nccev.org/violence/community).*

### **Child Development-Community Policing (CDCP) Program**

The Child Development-Community Policing (CDCP) Program -- a collaborative effort of the New Haven Department of Police Services and the Child Study Center at the Yale University School of Medicine -- was developed to address the tragic psychological impact of exposure to violence on children. The CDCP Program consists of interrelated training and consultation components that focus on sharing knowledge and developing ongoing collegial relationships between police officers and mental health professionals. Since its inception, the CDCP consultation service has received more than 700 referrals regarding more than 1,000 children. These consultations concerned children of all ages who have been involved in a variety of violent incidents as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators. The CDCP Program serves as a national model for police-mental health partnerships and is being replicated in several cities.

*Summarized from: [://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun\\_violence/profile48](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/profile48).*

### **Youth Violence and Gang Prevention Programs**

Interventions to reduce youth violence must address a variety of individual and social factors. Violent behavior is influenced by a variety of family, peer, neighborhood, and societal factors. There are two lines of thought about the development of violent and delinquent behavior. One is that youth who engage in violence have failed to develop appropriate social skills. The second viewpoint is that delinquent youth are very good at analyzing and interpreting behavior, but they employ this skill in a socially unsanctioned way. According to this view, many delinquent youth live in violent and unforgiving environments and have adopted a violent pattern of response to survive.

Early violence prevention programs targeted older adolescents age 15 and above. Newer programs target younger children as well. Most of these programs are designed to improve social skills, problem solving, and anger management, while promoting beliefs that are favorable to nonviolence. Few violence prevention programs have been subjected to carefully controlled evaluation. Those that have been evaluated produced mixed results. Most produced only modest effects on self-reported rates of aggressive or violent behavior and did not change the underlying views of youth or measured rates of serious violence.

Changing long-established patterns of behavior may require a more sustained commitment to education and follow-up than was previously appreciated. Programs that ignore group dynamics by focusing entirely on individual behavior diminish their chances for success.

*Summarized from: [://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun\\_violence/sect07-a](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/sect07-a).*

### **Federal Programs: Partnerships to Reduce Juvenile Gun Violence -- U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

In 1997, as part of its commitment to address the escalating problem of youth violence, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention awarded grants to demonstration sites to implement partnerships to reduce juvenile gun violence. The purpose of these partnerships is to increase the effectiveness of existing youth gun violence reduction strategies by enhancing and coordinating prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies and strengthening linkages between community residents, law enforcement, and the juvenile justice system. Seven strategies are being implemented to achieve these goals:

1. Institute a suppression strategy that reduces juvenile access to illegal guns and illegal gun trafficking.
2. Develop a juvenile justice strategy that applies appropriate interventions to respond to the needs of juvenile gun offenders.
3. Implement a law enforcement strategy that expands neighborhood communication, includes community policing, and initiates community supervision to educate at-risk and court-involved juveniles on the legal consequences of gun violence.
4. Provide positive opportunities for youth, such as mentoring, job-readiness training, and after school programs.
5. Institute an educational strategy in which students learn how to resolve conflicts, resist peer pressure to carry or possess guns, and distinguish between real life and television violence.
6. Implement a public information strategy that uses radio, local television, and print outlets to communicate the dangers and consequences of gun violence to juveniles.
7. Implement a community mobilization strategy that engages neighborhood residents, including youth, in improving the community.

*Summarized from: [://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun\\_violence/sect08-h](http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/gun_violence/sect08-h).*