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## U.S. House of Representatives

SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES  
385 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING ANNEX 2  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

### WITNESS LIST

#### HEARING

"DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS:  
VIOLENCE BY AND AGAINST AMERICA'S CHILDREN"

Tuesday, April 16, 1989, 9:30 a.m.  
22 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC

#### PANEL 1

Carl C. Bell, M.D.	Director, Community Mental Health Council, Chicago, IL, on behalf of the American Psychiatric Association, Washington, DC
Howard Spivak, M.D.	Deputy Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Boston, MA
Hon. Reggie B. Walton	Associate Judge, Superior Court of the District of Columbia; and nominee for Associate Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy, Washington, DC
Deborah Meier	Principal, Central Park East Secondary School, New York City, NY
Gregory A. Loken	Executive Director, Covenant House, Institute for Youth Advocacy, New York City, NY

#### ACQUISITIONS

#### PANEL 2

Jacqueline Simms	Captain and Acting Commander of Youth Division, Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, DC
Delbert S. Elliott, Ph.D.	Professor of Sociology, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO
Karl Zinsmeister	Adjunct Research Associate, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, DC

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## OPENING STATEMENT

CONGRESSMAN GEORGE MILLER, CHAIRMAN  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

MAY 16, 1989

Violence involving children is the subject of today's hearing by the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families. In the past, the Committee has highlighted problems of youth violence, gangs, and growing racial tensions among teenagers. But during the last several months, the dramatic incidence of violence among young Americans has shocked and outraged the nation.

Whether in response to a band of youth "wilding" through New York City's Central Park brutally raping a woman and attacking others, or District of Columbia, Los Angeles or Miami youth fighting fatal drug wars over "turf", or an Alexandria, Virginia teenager killing his friend over a pair of sneakers, a sense of outrage at this lawlessness and a desire for swift and fair justice affects all of us.

Unlike the protests which brought our cities to flames twenty years ago, today's violence is not about a cause. Indeed, experts trace this violence to the breakdown of a sense of community, of shared values, of a meaningful stake in the society, and a chance to hope and dream about opportunities in the future. These factors help explain the level of violence, but they do not begin to justify it.

Incidents such as the Central Park attack, which appear unusually savage and senseless, are actually part of a growing trend of serious violence by and against children and youth. Between 1983 and 1987, arrests of male juveniles for murder increased by 23 percent and for aggravated assault by 17 percent. Police officers across the country report that victims and perpetrators of violent crimes are younger than ever before.

Gunfights and murders have become so common in some inner city neighborhoods that we risk becoming numb to their traumatic impact on the children and families who are witness. Homicide is the second leading cause of death among

(over)

all 15 to 24 year olds in the United States. Among black youth, homicide is the number one cause of death. The ready availability of guns and drugs has undoubtedly exacerbated this problem.

As violence has become more visible, the public, the media, and legislators struggle to understand it. Whether youth are victimizers or victims, the causes of this violence are complex and the solutions multifaceted. We have a national emergency in our midst that is not entirely comprehensible, but which requires martialing our best knowledge, our longheld principles of right and wrong, law, and justice, and our deepest sense of compassion. If anything is clear, it is that we have yet to find satisfactory answers.

For this reason it is important to resist the inclination to supply simple explanations or quick fix solutions. We must at once condemn violent behavior by children or anyone else, but also strive to prevent it. Historically, condemnation has proven very easy, while prevention has remained elusive.

As we attempt to increase our knowledge about violence, however, it is important to remember that the attacks and killings that receive the most attention from the media and the public are not the typical incidents of violence. If we are serious about reducing violence, we must attend to the less sensational, daily incidents that take place outside of television spotlights.

Our witnesses today include noted leaders in law enforcement and the judicial system, criminologists, public health officials, psychiatrists and educators. They come from the communities which have directly and recently experienced the incidents now well known around the nation and the world. We will learn not only of the increases in violent behavior by youth but that four factors -- poverty, abuse as a child, witnessing family violence, and substance abuse -- increase the risk that a child will later become a victimizer. We welcome them to the Committee, and look forward to their ability to assist the Congress and the public to better understand this deeply disturbing national crisis.

**U.S. House of Representatives**SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES  
385 HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING ANNEX 2  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515**"Down These Mean Streets:  
Violence By and Against America's Children"****A FACT SHEET****HOMICIDE, SUICIDE LEADING CAUSES OF YOUTH DEATH**

- \* Between 1985 and 1986, the U.S. homicide rate increased 17% for 15-24 year olds and 8% for the general population. There were 21,731 homicide victims in 1986, 6,561 of whom were under age 25. (National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS], 1988)
- \* Homicide is the second leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds in the U.S, claiming 5,552 lives in this age range in 1986. Only motor vehicle accidents claimed more lives. It is the fourth leading cause of death for 1-4 and 5-14 year olds. (NCHS, 1988)
- \* For black 15- to 24-year olds, homicide is the leading cause of death, claiming 2,644 victims in 1986, or nearly 50 per 100,000 in this population. It is the second and third leading cause of death for black 1-4 years olds and black 5-14 year olds. (NCHS, 1988)
- \* Three-quarters of homicide victims are male; 82% of homicides are committed by males. (NCHS, 1988; Unified Crime Reports, Federal Bureau of Investigation [UCR], 1988)
- \* 80% of homicides occur between members of the same race. (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 1986)
- \* Compared with 13 industrialized nations studied, the United States had the second highest homicide rate for males aged 0-24 years, and the highest rate for females in the same age range. Only Mexico had a higher homicide rate among males. The U.S. rate for 15-24 year old males was more than 5 times higher than the 11 other nations. Among 15-24 year old females, the U.S. homicide rate is more than 10 times greater than the rates in Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom. (Census, 1989, unpublished)
- \* Suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth ages 15-24, claiming 5,120 youths' lives in 1986. Between 1970 and 1980, the suicide rate among 15-24 year olds increased 40%, while the rate for the remainder of the population remained stable. (CDC, 1986)

**TEENAGERS DISPROPORTIONATELY VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME**

- \* From 1982 through 1984, teenagers ages 12-19 were the victims of 1.8 million violent crimes annually, twice the rate of the adult population over age 20. (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 1986)
- \* Of all age groups, teens ages 16-19 have the highest victimization rate for violent crimes (excluding homicide). Teens ages 12-15 have the third highest rate. (BJS, 1986)
- \* Among victims of violent crimes, older teens are more likely than the general population to be attacked by strangers. Younger teens are more likely to be attacked by non-strangers. (BJS, 1987)

**VIOLENT CRIME BY JUVENILES INCREASING**

- \* Violent crime, especially by juveniles, has been increasing since 1983. Between 1983 and 1987, the number of juveniles (under 18) arrested for murder increased 22.2% to 1495. Forcible-rape arrests increased 14.6% to 4,604; and aggravated-assault arrests increased 18.6% to 36,006. Over the same period, the number of juveniles arrested for robbery and burglary declined by 19.2% and 14.6%, respectively (UCR, 1988)

- \* Between 1986 and 1987, the number of juveniles under age 15 arrested for murder increased 21.7% to 191; for rape 5.2% to 1,600; and for aggravated assault 4.4% to 10,767. (UCR, 1988)
- \* A study of young parolees found a 69% recidivism (rearrest) rate. The study found no relationship between recidivism and the length of time served in prison by parolees for their previous offenses. Recidivism rates were highest among parolees with the most previous arrests. (BJS, 1987)
- \* Four out of five juveniles confined in long-term, State-operated juvenile institutions report previously having been on probation; more than half report having been committed to a correctional institution in the past. (BJS, 1988)

#### YOUTH IN CUSTODY HAVE LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION; MORE LIKELY TO HAVE GROWN UP WITHOUT BOTH PARENTS

- \* Only about 42% of juveniles and young adults in juvenile detention, correctional, and shelter facilities have completed more than 8 years of school, compared to 76% of the general population in this age group. Among those age 18-24 in these facilities, fewer than a tenth have graduated from high school, compared to 79% of this age group in the general population. (BJS, 1988)
- \* More than half of all juveniles and young adults in juvenile institutions reported that a family member had served time in jail or prison. A quarter of the residents reported that their fathers had been incarcerated at some time in the past. (BJS, 1988)

#### DELINQUENCY STRONGLY CORRELATED TO CHILD ABUSE AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

- \* In a study of delinquents and nondelinquents, a history of abuse and/or family violence was the most significant variable in predicting membership in the delinquent group. Compared to their nondelinquent peers, delinquent adolescents were also more likely to suffer subtle forms of neurological impairment and severe psychiatric symptoms, and to have learning disabilities. (Lewis, et al, 1987).
- \* Studies of juveniles sentenced to death in the U.S. indicate that these youth are multiply handicapped; they tend to have suffered serious head injuries, injuries to the central nervous system, multiple psychotic symptoms since early childhood, and physical and sexual abuse. (Lewis, et al, 1986; Lewis, 1987)
- \* Delinquent juveniles, particularly institutionalized delinquent juveniles have significantly higher rates of child abuse than the general youth population. Among institutionalized juvenile offenders, 26-55% have official histories of child abuse. (Austin, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Testimony before the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families, May 1984)

#### CHILD ABUSE FATALITIES AND OVERALL MALTREATMENT ON THE RISE

- \* Between 1982 and 1987, the national rate at which children are reported for abuse and neglect increased 69.2% from 20 to 34 children reported per 1000 U.S. children. Missouri, Nevada, South Dakota, and California all had rates of more than 50 children reported per thousand children in the population. (The American Humane Association, 1989)
- \* Over 2.2 million child abuse reports were filed in 1988, up 3% from 1987, and 1,225 children were reported to have died from abuse or neglect in 1988, a 5% increase from the year before. Nonetheless, the majority of states made no increase in their child welfare budgets, forcing most states to cut back on child protection workers and services for victims. (National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse [NCPCA], 1989)
- \* Two-thirds of the states that responded to a recent national survey cited parental substance abuse as the dominant characteristic among their child abuse and neglect caseloads. (NCPCA, 1989)

### INCREASING NUMBERS OF YOUTHS KILLED BY FIREARMS

- \* Between 1984 and 1986, the number of 15-24 year olds killed by firearms in the U.S. increased more than 16 percent from 6,765 to 7,852. Among black males in this age range, firearm fatalities increased more than 20%. (NCHS, 1988)
- \* In 1987, 43.7% of homicide victims under the age of 18 were killed by firearms. (UCR, 1988)
- \* Firearms were used in most suicides of 10-14 and 15-24 year olds. (Waller, et al, 1989; CDC, 1986)

### OVERALL DRUG USE BY YOUTH DECLINING

- \* Overall drug usage, including cocaine and "crack" use, among high school seniors declined between 1987 and 1988, although 57% had tried an illicit drug at some time and over one-third had tried an illicit drug other than marijuana. (This survey does not include measures for the 15-20% of the age group who did not finish high school.) (Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1989)
- \* An estimated 30% of arrested juveniles in the District of Columbia, 49% in Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona, 44% in San Diego, California (only males tested), and 35% in Tampa, Florida, test positive for illicit drug use. (District of Columbia Pretrial Services Agency [DCPSA], 1989; Treatment Assessment Screening Center, Phoenix, Arizona, 1989; U.S. Department of Justice, 1989)
- \* Cocaine use among arrested juveniles in the District of Columbia increased from a negligible number in 1984 to 23% in 1988. Between 1987 and 1988, overall illicit drug use has declined among juvenile arrestees, except for the youngest ages. Between 1987 and 1988, illicit drug use by 12 year old arrestees increased from 6% to 14%, by 13 year old arrestees from 9% to 21%, and by 14 year old arrestees from 17% to 20%. (DCPSA, 1988-89)

May 1989

TESTIMONY BEFORE U.S. HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Howard Spivak, M.D. - Deputy Commissioner  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

May 16, 1989

Violence and its consequences of injury and death represent a major health problem in this country. The United States has the fifth highest homicide rate in the world, 10 times higher than that of England and 25 times higher than that of Spain. In fact, the U.S. homicide rate rivals countries that are experiencing considerable social, economic, and political turmoil. In 1980, homicide and assault were responsible for over 23,000 deaths, 700,000 potential years of life lost, 350,000 hospitalizations, 1.5 million hospital days, and \$640 million in health care costs. And, the problem is growing.

Fatalities from violence represent only the tip of the iceberg; nonfatal intentional injuries occur as much as 100 times more frequently. Assault and intentional injuries identified in medical settings can be four times that reported to the police, suggesting that medical institutions are a primary site for identification of individuals with violence-related problems. This fact alone requires that a health and public health perspective be incorporated into the effort to respond to this serious problem.

In addition, violence is a major cause of death among adolescents and young adults. Homicide has risen over the past several decades to become the second leading cause of death for all 15 to 24 year olds in the United States. Young black men are at the greatest risk for death and injury from violence. Their rate of death from homicide is from six (for 15-24 year olds) to twelve (for 25-44 year olds) times higher than the national rate.

The issue of violence has traditionally been delegated to the police and criminal justice system. The characteristics of a large majority of violent events and homicides do not, however, suggest that the after-the-fact response of the criminal justice system and the threat of punishment for violent behavior will have a major effect in deterring violence. Although the media typically presents violence as coldly premeditated, randomly directed to innocent bystanders, or related to criminal activity such as robbery or drug dealing, the more common scenario is dramatically different. A majority of homicides occur between two young men of the same race who know each other; who have been drinking; who get into an argument (often over a relatively minor issue); and, one of whom is carrying a weapon. The spontaneous, unplanned, and intimate nature of these events make it unlikely that the criminal justice consequences are taken into consideration before the violent behavior leads to injury or death.



Statistics demonstrate that social and cultural factors such as poverty, racism, availability of weapons, media influences, gender expectations, etc. place certain persons at greater risk of violence. Furthermore, individual factors, such as family history of violence or low self-esteem, substance abuse, weapon carrying, etc. also increase the risk of violence. Knowledge of these factors can help in the identification and intervention of individuals at special risk for intentional injury.

A common misconception about violence is that it is interracial. In reality, 80 per cent of homicides occur between members of the same race. Although racism adds to the anger and stress that can contribute to violence, little violence actually is racially instigated. Rather, it is increasingly clear that socioeconomic status is a greater predictor of violence and that the over-representation of blacks in the violence and homicide statistics reflects their over-representation in poverty. Studies that have corrected homicide rates for socioeconomic status have found that racial differences in these rates disappear when poverty is taken into account.

Most homicide victims (77 per cent) are male. Women are also subject to and involved in intentional violence, but are much less likely to be seriously injured. Differences in weapon-carrying behavior and social expectations may contribute to their lower rates of more serious injuries and homicide. However, with increases in the number of media-portrayed female heroes who are as violent as their male counterparts, we can expect that the gap between male and female homicide and intentional injury rates may be reduced.

Adolescents are at high risk for violence because of the rapid psychological and physical changes that occur in the transition to adulthood. Teenagers face a number of major developmental tasks, including (1) individuation from family through a narcissistic period of self-development; (2) development of a sexual identity that includes a period of identification with sexual extremes, such as the macho image for males and extreme femininity for females; (3) development of a moral and personal value system through experimentation; and (4) preparation for future employment and responsibility.

Many of the behaviors associated with these developmental tasks predispose adolescents to violence. The narcissism of adolescence has a strong component of self-consciousness and makes teenagers extremely vulnerable to embarrassment, even from the most minor insult. Peer pressure, which is important to facilitating success in many developmental tasks, also can enhance the likelihood of violent behavior. If fighting is expected by peers, then an adolescent will have considerable difficulty disregarding the pressures to fight. In addition, anger associated with the limited economic options of poverty and racism exacerbates this situation and lowers a young person's threshold for violence.

It is the personal, behavioral, and spontaneous characteristics of violence that both raise the most concern and offer direction for intervention. Almost 60 per cent of victims and assailants know each other, and 20 per cent of victims and assailants are members of the same family. One half or more of homicides are precipitated by an argument as compared to only 15 per cent of homicides occurring in the course of committing another crime. Alcohol use also contributes to violent behavior; approximately half of all homicide victims have elevated blood alcohol levels.

The availability and carrying of weapons is also a major factor in this situation. It is estimated that there are over 20 million unregistered hand guns in the U.S., in addition to the millions and millions of legally licensed firearms. Young people are getting access to these weapons and are carrying them in increasing numbers, often in the context of "self protection". One survey in Boston, Massachusetts reported that over one quarter of high school students (37% of boys, 17% of girls) carried guns or knives, at least on occasion.

Most importantly, the evidence is mounting that violence is a learned response to stress and conflict. Exposure to violence in the home has been strongly associated with violent behavior in children and youth. There is growing also evidence that young people learn from and demonstrate the violent behavior that they observe on television. This is particularly relevant given the extent of violence displayed in the media and the predominance of heroes on television and in motion pictures who choose violent means as their primary mechanism to solve problems. Violence is generally presented in the media as the first choice option for dealing with conflict. Furthermore, it is portrayed as always successful and without negative consequences.

One young man being treated in an emergency room for a gunshot wound told me that he was surprised that the injury hurt; his perception from television was that such injuries were neither painful nor incapacitating. It is particularly important in this context to point out that when children observe nonviolent problem-solving strategies on television, they are found to mimic these behaviors when conflicts arise. So, the prosocial behaviors and responses to conflict also can be learned. Unfortunately, such positive exposures are the exceptions and too infrequent to counter the negative images. This can be changed.

Addressing the problem of interpersonal violence involves the collaboration of a broad base of professionals and community organizations. Given the relatively recent focus on the problem, there are only a few programs to look to for assistance in developing interventions. Most efforts to date have focused on the role of the criminal justice system, which has for the most part provided after-the-fact, punitive responses to violent events.

The fact that most intentional injuries are produced by known assailants, are not premeditated, and are associated with identifiable psycho-social and behavioral risk factors begs for other avenues of response to the problem that must be developed.

Efforts to handle these characteristics can and should be implemented in the following ways: (1) primary prevention of violence as a response to anger and conflict; (2) screening for and early identification of high-risk individuals; (3) increased availability of secondary level services for the high-risk population; and (4) improved rehabilitative services. Within this context, the medical and public health communities can play an important role in collaboration with other appropriate human service, mental health, education, community, and criminal justice institutions.

Violence needs to be incorporated into the health care system agenda. While individual clinicians cannot address violence in isolation, the public health sector can play a role in establishing a broader context for violence prevention. An increased level of awareness and understanding needs to be established at the community level.

One such effort is currently in progress in the city of Boston. This program is a large-scale initiative concerning violence prevention that includes community-based education through schools, existing community agencies, and mass media. The program is targeting two specific urban neighborhoods with high adolescent homicide rates in an effort to assess the impact of a violence prevention project.

Another public health approach used in addressing health problems involves attempts to manipulate the environment to reduce risk. For example, safety locks on firearms (analogous to safety caps on medication bottles) may reduce unintentional firearm injuries, as well as provide a moment for second thought in unplanned violent events. In this context, mechanisms to reduce access to weapons must be seriously considered.

The public health system also can contribute to the establishment of improved secondary prevention and intervention services through: advocacy of more extensive mental health services for those with problems of violent behavior; and collaboration between the health care and criminal justice systems to improve access to supportive services for individuals at high risk for violent behavior.

These strategies have a sound basis for what is already known about violence. Further development and evaluation of primary prevention initiatives will contribute greatly to our understanding of the problem and its potential solution. As this is an issue that particularly affects the minority community, input and involvement of that community is of great importance to assure that inappropriate stereotypes are avoided and cultural perspectives are maintained in addressing the problem.

The magnitude and characteristics of the problem of violence cry out for new, creative approaches and the need for insights from different perspectives. The public health community can make a real contribution to its resolution through prevention, treatment, and research. The extent of the violence we experience in this country is deeply rooted in our values as expressed by media images, availability and acceptability of weapons, use of violence to solve problems, and through messages we express to our children and youth. We must act now to address these values and turn the tide before we become overwhelmed by the consequences of these values.

The Honorable Reggie B. Walton  
Associate Judge  
Superior Court of the District  
of Columbia

TESTIMONY BEFORE U.S. HOUSE SELECT  
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILY

In the recent past there has been a steady escalation of the volume and severity of criminal offenses committed by juveniles. The recent assault in Central Park in New York City and the growing number of teenagers being charged with committing serious assaults and murders in the District of Columbia illustrate the growing problem.

In addition to increased participation in crimes of violence, many teenagers, and even pre-teenagers, are involved in the illicit sale of drugs. This is especially true in the inner city. Fueled by the large profits made by drug dealers, juveniles are increasingly involving themselves in such activity. Nevertheless, the vast majority of young people do not participate in illegal activity and this point cannot be emphasized enough.

For those juveniles committing criminal acts, the community has a right to have in place a system of laws which adequately protects it against such individuals. It matters not from the perspective of a victim or a neighborhood being ravished by the drug epidemic that the per-

petrator is a juvenile. The pain and suffering are the same irregardless of whether the person who commits the crime is 14 or 25.

However, there are remarkably different ways that we treat individuals prosecuted in the adult system as compared to prosecutions in the juvenile justice system. In some circumstances this distinction is justified because of the belief that the conduct was caused by youthful indiscretions. However, there are certain crimes which are so heinous or so detrimental to the community that the difference in treatment must be questioned.

For example, if the 14 year old young men in the Central Park case had committed their assault in Rock Creek Park, they could not be prosecuted in this jurisdiction as adults. Thus, if convicted in the District of Columbia of what can be characterized as nothing other than an act of savagery, the 14 year old young men could only be detained for two years and would have to be released back into the community at that time if their institutional conduct had been good.

Many of the young people involved in the illegal drug trade do so because the risk of prosecution does not act as a deterrent. Knowing that a conviction in juvenile court will in all probability result in little or no punishment,

the benefits derived from involvement in the drug world outweigh the risks. In fact, many juveniles are being recruited by older individuals to sell drugs where the risk of apprehension is the greatest, knowing the consequences following arrest are not substantial. We must not permit this situation to continue unabated.

While some will suggest that prosecuting 14 year old criminals as adults is unduly harsh, in my opinion, some offenses call out for such treatment. At a time when the moral fabric of many of our communities is being shredded, those who are destroying the quality of life for the good, honest and law abiding citizens who live in such communities must be made to pay for their conduct. Failure to do so will only further contribute to the decline of our society.

In many respects, the juvenile justice system has served us well. In other respects it has not. The entire system must therefore be scrutinized and the ills of the system corrected. We must rethink whether the artificial ages which control when a person can be prosecuted as an adult should be retained. While some might like to think that we can save everyone, such thoughts are naive. Certain people, for whatever reasons, are evil or prone to engage in criminal activity and nothing we do will change

that reality. Such individuals must be separated from the rest of us for the good of society. Crimes like the Central Park attack cannot be totally alleviated, but those who commit such acts must be punished harshly, regardless of the age of the perpetrator or where the act is committed. A slap on the wrist will just not do.



PREPARED STATEMENT  
OF  
GREGORY A. LOKEN

BEFORE THE  
SELECT COMMITTEE  
ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 16, 1989

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF GREGORY LOKEN

Mr. Chairman, Congressman Bliley, and members of the Select Committee, I am very grateful for this chance to appear before you to discuss a topic that shapes--and all too often frustrates--our work at Covenant House, violence against and by American adolescents.

I am Executive Director of the Institute for Youth Advocacy and a senior staff attorney at Covenant House in New York. Over the past twenty years our work at Covenant House has brought us face to face with some of the most troubled youth in the entire country: those who have been cast adrift on the streets of our cities and forced to invent ways to survive, and reasons to go on surviving. It has been our privilege to attempt to offer these children and teenagers not just crisis shelter and services, but relationships built on a covenant of absolute respect and unconditional love.

The challenge of such relationships is as much to avoid sentimentalism as to establish trust. We are sentimental neither about the violence of street life as our kids are forced to live it, nor about the violence in the homes and in the culture that shaped them. Love for these young people compels us to look clearly at the conditions in which they have grown up and in which they live, and to admit frankly to ourselves the responsibility we all share for the good and evil in their lives. Respect for them requires equally that we help them understand that responsibility for their actions ultimately rests on their shoulders, and their consciences, alone.

At Covenant House we can chronicle, but cannot pretend fully to understand, the violence that has increasingly infected the heart of adolescent culture in many neighborhoods and cities. For the young people we try to help, physical, sexual, and emotional violence is virtually all they have ever known, and for many has entered root and branch into their daily lives. The Committee can judge for itself whether their experience is, in part at least, a reflection of teenage life in this country generally. We do believe, however, that certain changes in society and in government policy could substantially reduce the violence that our children suffer and inflict.

### I. Violence in the Lives of Street Youth

Over 16,000 children and teenagers under age 21 come to Covenant House programs in New York, Houston, Fort Lauderdale, New Orleans, Anchorage, Toronto, Los Angeles, and Central America every year. Covenant House turns no

youth away who asks for shelter or services--our "open intake" commitment--but even in the cities in which our programs currently exist we serve only a fraction of homeless and runaway youths. Worse, many of the young people who do come to us are already so damaged that we cannot, in the context of crisis care, provide them real healing. We honestly admit our limitations and our failures with many street youth because it helps us learn to find new ways to try to help them, and because others need to understand how deep and serious their wounds are.

It is not hyperbole, nor even metaphor, to describe the youths at Covenant House as wounded. Thus over half of the boys young men who receive even routine medical treatment at our clinic in New York carry on their bodies the scars of previous gunshot or knife wounds. A majority of Covenant House youths have been so seriously physically abused at home that hospitalization was required or scars are still visible. A recent study in one of our programs found that over 70 percent of the sample reported a serious incident of sexual abuse in their past; for 30 percent of the boys and 50 percent of the girls this incident was in an incestuous context. Twenty-four percent told the researchers that they had been raped at least once in the past.

Their lives have been as unstable as they have been violent. Only a tiny fraction--in New York less than ten percent--of the youth we see have come from intact, two-parent homes. By contrast, about half have previously been in foster care, where some of them have been moved through dozens of placements. Drug and alcohol abuse is rampant in the homes of those who have been living with parents or relatives. In such environments it is quite literally impossible for children and adolescents to receive even a mite of the love, guidance, and discipline they need for healthy growth.

When children with such chaos and betrayal in their backgrounds arrive at Covenant House, they bring with them another sorrow, the brutal legacy of life on the street. Often, especially for boys, their street life began well before they left home, as they sought from equally damaged peers the sense of belonging that they were denied elsewhere. "Gangs," "posses," and the like provide that sense of acceptance at a terrible price to society and often to the members themselves, but the vitality of gang culture in spite of that price shows how great is the adolescent need to belong.

With or without transition, life on the street is cruel and deadly. About one half of the youths who come to Covenant House have been sexually exploited during their time on the street, and according to one study, 32 percent have been asked to participate in sexually explicit photos.

In a recent cooperative study between Covenant House New York and the New York State Department of Health, the HIV infection rate among the youth sampled in our clinic was 7 percent, climbing to over 10 percent among 20-year-olds.

Of those young people who come to Covenant House repeatedly, our most recent research indicates that nearly one in seven admit to involvement in drug dealing; one in five admits to committing other crimes to survive. If asked where they spent their last three days, 53 percent will answer that their only option was to sleep on the street, on a subway or in a bus terminal, or with a john. Of the rest many will say they have stayed with a "friend", but on closer questioning the "friend" will usually turn out to be someone they have known less than a month. In one sense, then, it is possible to explain their criminal, and not infrequently violent, behavior as a simple act of desperation.

In the last four years, however, a new source of violence among youth on the street has become frighteningly powerful. Crack is the first illegal drug that has produced widespread addiction among Covenant House clients, although lesser degrees of substance abuse, especially alcohol abuse, have always been a part of street life. Crack is different, though, not just in its affordability and its capacity to make addicts out of kids. It is a powerful stimulant that in our experience directly causes violent behavior by many who use it. (For many it causes suicidal behavior as well, violence no less tragic because directed at the self.) The siege of murder and assault inflicted on huge portions of New York City over the past several years can only be explained, we believe, in relation to crack and the industry that manufactures and distributes it. Because the drug itself creates such a high risk of addiction and violence, we think they are seriously mistaken who call for its legalization as a means of reducing drug-related violence.

## II. Directions for Action

Because time is short today, and because time to prepare for this hearing has been short as well, it is impossible to consider more than a few areas of action to reduce youthful violence. As a beginning, we suggest the following:

A. Youth Priority in the War on Drugs. Illegal drugs, especially crack, are turning thousands of children into addicts who commit crime and who engage in prostitution to support their habits, and who commit random acts of violence while "high". We believe that the federal effort against drug abuse should concentrate its always limited resources on providing immediate access to treatment programs for

youth under age 21. Federal law enforcement efforts should likewise be concentrated on punishing those who sell crack and other hard drugs to children and adolescents.

B. Alternatives to the Street. Much of the violence by youth on the streets of this country is the simple result of the desperation they feel when their options run out, when no family, no relatives will give them shelter and help. Young people who are violent on the street are rarely violent inside the walls of Covenant House and of other runaway and homeless youth programs around the country. Yet thousands, indeed tens of thousands of youths are annually turned away from shelters because of lack of space. We think it is a scandal that the entire annual federal budget for runaway and homeless youth programs has remained under \$30 million for the entire decade of the 1980's. At present small private donors, ordinary taxpayers of no great means, are contributing over \$50 million a year to support Covenant House's programs alone. We challenge the federal government at least to match that sum in its appropriation for Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

Further, we urge the Committee to consider the need for longer-term programs for homeless youths, programs that focus on their specific needs. Thus we have established at Covenant House a special program for HIV-positive youth, and a different long-term program for substance abusers. Our Rights of Passage program offers street kids one to two years of training in independent living, career-oriented job placement, remedial education, values-oriented character development in a residential setting. We invite you to visit any or all of these programs, and we ask you to consider the need for variety and experimentation in responding to the needs of homeless teenagers as you shape government policy.

C. Challenging Communities to Challenge Kids. In confronting youthful violence, however, it would be wrong to assume too great a role for government. Children and teenagers who commit violent deeds are most often beyond the effective reach of government, not able to comprehend its punishments or its incentives. As Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay concluded in their seminal work, Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas in 1942, "[d]elinquency . . . has its roots in the dynamic life of the community." It is in the family, the neighborhood, the school, the church and the media that children encounter the forces that most encourage or discourage violent behavior.

While the work of this Committee has affected all of these institutions through helping to shape their relationship with government, you can have, we believe, a particularly direct and substantial influence, on at least two of them: churches and the media. Neither is subject to

government control, but both are extremely sensitive to public scrutiny and pressure. And you have the power to educate and influence the public, as you have proved often in the past.

Churches and all religious organizations should be challenged by government officials to provide a comprehensive program of community service, values education, and social life for all their teenage members. At present few religious bodies pay close attention to children from age 10 to 18, and it is an enormously costly omission. Churches, synagogues and other faith-centered groups can provide precisely the peer support, the guidance, and the sense of belonging that so many dysfunctional families cannot (and that so many youth gangs currently do). Obviously government officials and committees cannot mandate what religious groups do, but you can openly challenge the largest national religious organizations to take immediate action in this area. Later you can report on what they have done, and failed to do. We think the impact of such a challenge could be great and immediate, and we urge you to consider it.

We also ask that similar challenge be directed at those who shape the media in this country, especially television programmers. As television has come to dominate the free hours of America's children, it has become increasingly violent and lurid in content. Most Americans are sick of this trend, and angry at the networks for refusing to reverse it. Although you cannot constitutionally control the content of television shows, you can most certainly tell the public which ones are particularly bad for children to watch, and which ones seem to portray children in an unhealthy or dangerous light. Because of your visibility and credibility, many parents would heed your advice. More important, many broadcasters would likely rethink their approach to programming in the face of specific and careful criticism.

Ours is an individualistic culture that prefers, if only marginally, random violence to repression. It is thus one that may play into the worst features of the adolescent search for worth and identity, by downplaying personal restraint and emphasizing skepticism about common values. At Covenant House we are continually confronted with the personal courage and beauty of the kids who come to us, and the incredible ugliness of the world from which they come. They deserve better than to be considered beyond hope, but their hope lies as much in reforming ourselves as in our efforts to reform them.

Again, please accept my gratitude for your gracious invitation to appear today, and my best wishes for your extremely important work on behalf of children.

CONGRESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

VIOLENCE BY AND AGAINST AMERICA'S YOUTH

May 16, 1989

9:30 A.M.

Congressman George Miller  
Chairman

GOOD MORNING CONGRESSMAN MILLER AND MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES. I AM CAPTAIN JACQUELINE SIMMS OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT'S YOUTH DIVISION, APPEARING ON BEHALF OF CHIEF OF POLICE MAURICE T. TURNER, JR., WHO UNFORTUNATELY IS UNABLE TO ATTEND DUE TO PRIOR COMMITMENTS. I AM VERY PLEASED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE IN THIS DISCUSSION ON YOUTH-RELATED CRIME, VIOLENCE, AND DRUGS.

FROM A STATISTICAL PERSPECTIVE, DURING THE PAST SEVERAL FISCAL YEARS, OUR POLICE DEPARTMENT HAS EXPERIENCED SUBSTANTIAL INCREASES IN JUVENILE-ARREST LEVELS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN FY 1986, THERE WERE 3,727 JUVENILE ARRESTS; IN FY 1987 THERE WERE 5,387 JUVENILE ARRESTS; AND IN FY 1988 THERE WERE 6,499 JUVENILE ARRESTS, OF WHICH, 35 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO WENT TO COURT TESTED POSITIVE FOR ILLEGAL DRUG USE. IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, JUVENILE ARRESTS HAVE DRAMATICALLY INCREASED AT A RATE OF 74 PERCENT. WITHIN THESE STATISTICS THE DEPARTMENT'S JUVENILE DRUG ARRESTS TOTALS SHOW COMPARABLE INCREASES: IN 1986 THERE WERE 1,222 ARRESTS; IN 1987 THERE WERE 1,442 DRUG ARRESTS AND IN 1988, THERE WERE 1,913 JUVENILE DRUG ARRESTS. THIS DRUG ARREST DATA REFLECTS AN INCREASE OF 56 PERCENT. COMPOUNDING THIS PROBLEM IS A JUVENILE RECIDIVIST RATE WHICH HAS AVERAGED 60 PERCENT OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS.



IT IS CLEAR THAT WE HAVE A SERIOUS YOUTH-CRIME PROBLEM IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA. IN RESPONSE TO THIS ESCALATING PROBLEM, OUR DEPARTMENT HAS DEVOTED MORE RESOURCES TO THE YOUTH CRIME AND DRUG PROBLEM. THE YOUTH DIVISION AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIVISION ARE FOCUSING EFFORTS TO DETER YOUTH FROM CRIME AND ILLICIT DRUG ACTIVITY.

IN AN EFFORT TO COMBAT THIS EMERGING PROBLEM, GREATER EMPHASIS IS BEING PLACED ON PREVENTION AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES. SPECIFICALLY, WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED AN EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM THAT IS DESIGNED TO IDENTIFY AT RISK YOUTH BEFORE THEY BECOME INVOLVED IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM. THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, FOR SELECT FIRST OFFENSES, ARE REFERRED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE METROPOLITAN POLICE BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS. THIS INTERVENTION PROVIDES COUNSELING AND OTHER YOUTH SERVICES AND ASSISTANCE.

I BELIEVE THAT BY MAKING AVAILABLE THIS TYPE OF PROGRAM TO YOUNG PEOPLE WE CAN BEGIN TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE YOUTH-CRIME PROBLEM. WE ARE AWARE THAT THESE YOUTH OFTEN EXPERIENCE SPECIAL PROBLEMS, FREQUENTLY DRUG-RELATED, WHICH INTERFERE WITH THEIR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS. THIS IS REFLECTIVE IN THE HIGH DROPOUT RATE, DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR AND TRUANCY. TOO MANY YOUTH ARE MAKING THE CONSCIOUS CHOICE TO SELL DRUGS FOR MONEY AND MATERIALISM WHILE TURNING THEIR BACKS ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. WE MUST FIND SOLUTIONS TO THIS PROBLEM. WE KNOW THAT THERE ARE SOME VERY GOOD

PROGRAMS THAT HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE IN ADDRESSING THIS DRUG ISSUE IN THE AREA OF PREVENTION, EDUCATION, AND TREATMENT. ALTHOUGH THESE PROGRAMS ARE OFTEN COSTLY, EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT EVERY DOLLAR SPENT ON THESE EXTREMELY HIGH-RISK YOUTH WILL SAVE HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS LATER IN THE TREATMENT OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR AND DRUG ABUSE.

A COMBINED EFFORT AMONG THE DEPARTMENT, PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, AND OTHER AGENCIES HAS PROMPTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A "DRUG-FREE ZONE" POLICY AROUND SELECT CITY SCHOOLS. IN IMPLEMENTING THIS CONCEPT, THE D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM AND THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT ESTABLISHED A MODEL DRUG PREVENTION PROGRAM REFERRED TO AS "Z-1000". THIS MODEL PROGRAM IS DESIGNED TO EDUCATE PARENTS AND STUDENTS, IDENTIFY HIGH RISK YOUTHS, AND DIVERT THEM TO THE DEPARTMENT'S EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM.

THROUGH EFFORTS OF THE POLICE DEPARTMENT AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS, A 1,000 FOOT DRUG-FREE ZONE WILL BE ESTABLISHED, OFFICIALLY POSTED AND ENFORCED AROUND THE TARGETED PUBLIC SCHOOLS. ONE OF THE ASPECTS OF THIS PROGRAM WILL BE TO PROVIDE ALL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND SECURITY PERSONNEL; LOCAL RELIGIOUS GROUPS; SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS WITH DRUG RECOGNITION TRAINING.

FIVE (5) SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN SELECTED AS PROTOTYPES IN THIS INITIATIVE. THE FACTORS USED IN THE SELECTION OF THESE SITES

INCLUDE: 1) THE NUMBER OF HOMICIDES IN THE AREA; 2) THE NUMBER OF OPEN-AIR DRUG MARKETS AROUND THE SCHOOL; 3) ARRESTS IN THE VICINITY OF THE SCHOOL; 4) CRIME IN THE SURROUNDING AREA; AND 5) THE FREQUENCY OF CALLS FOR SERVICE IN THE AREA. THE YOUTH DIVISION WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL DATA COLLECTION ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM. ALSO, THE CAREER CRIMINAL UNIT WILL BE MONITORING THE ARRESTS AND COURT (FEDERAL AND LOCAL) INTAKES OF ALL NARCOTIC VIOLATORS MADE WITHIN 1,000 FEET OF D.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

CHIEF TURNER IS OF THE OPINION THAT WE ARE IN NEED OF AND HAS SUGGESTED THAT THERE BE A 24-HOUR HOTLINE FOR ALL PARENTS, SO THAT THEY CAN BE EDUCATED TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND IDENTIFIABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF DRUG ABUSE. MY EXPERIENCE IS THAT MANY PARENTS ARE OFTEN UNAWARE OF WHERE TO TURN WHEN THEY SUSPECT THEIR CHILDREN OF BEING INVOLVED WITH DRUGS. PARENTS, IN THEIR FRUSTRATION AND ANXIETY, OFTEN NEED AS MUCH HELP AS THE SUBSTANCE ABUSER. AS A CONSEQUENCE, IT IS NECESSARY THAT WE ESTABLISH SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR THEM AS WELL.

IT IS MY OPINION THAT WE WILL HAVE TO CONTINUOUSLY ANALYZE DATA TO ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS AND STAY ABREAST OF THE CONSTANT CHANGES OCCURRING IN THE CRIME AND DRUG CULTURES. BUT I AM CONVINCED THAT THE LONG-TERM SOLUTION TO OUR YOUTH-CRIME PROBLEMS IS IN THE AREA OF STRONG FAMILY VALUES AND TRAINING, COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION, PREVENTION AND TREATMENT FOR YOUTH

BEFORE THEY BECOME INVOLVED IN DELINQUENCY AND CRIME. MORE DISCONCERTING IS THAT WE HAVE MADE POLICE, FAR TOO OFTEN, THE INSTITUTION OF FIRST RESPONSE, RATHER THAN OF LAST RESORT IN ADDRESSING PROBLEMS WITH OUR CHILDREN. WE USE POLICE TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN THE SCHOOLS, TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS OF TRUANCY AND MOST RECENTLY, THROUGH LEGISLATION, WE ARE TRYING TO USE POLICE TO KEEP CHILDREN IN THEIR HOMES AND NOT ON THE STREETS.

COLLECTIVELY, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. WE HAVE TO ENLIST MORE CHURCHES, MORE PRIVATE-SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS, MORE AGENCIES AND MORE BUSINESSES IN HELPING TO SOLVE YOUTH PROBLEMS. WE ALSO HAVE TO MAKE THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE A PRIORITY OF THIS NATION. WE ARE ALL GUILTY, TO SOME DEGREE, OF FAILURE, BOTH AT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVELS. THERE IS NO NEED TO POINT FINGERS OR MAKE ACCUSATIONS. HOW WILL WE FACE THE COMPLEX CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE IF WE HAVE A GENERATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE CRIPPLED BY DRUGS?

THANK YOU.

## ADOLESCENT VIOLENCE

Testimony for the House Committee on Families  
Children and Youth

Delbert S. Elliott, Ph.D.  
University of Colorado  
May 16, 1989

Introduction. The recent events in Central Park involving a brutal assault and gang rape of a woman jogger by members of a young adolescent gang highlight the dramatic increase in adolescent violence over the last 10 years which has been documented by criminologist and law enforcement agencies. Not only has this trend been observed in official police data, but it is also observed in studies which rely upon youth's self-reports of their own involvement in delinquent behavior and substance use. I assume the committee is aware of the magnitude of this problem and I will not attempt to document it further here.

It is not clear, however, whether this increase in the rate at which violent offenses occur in the adolescent population is a result of an increase in the proportion of adolescents who commit violent crimes or in the frequency at which violent offenses are committed by those youth who are active violent offenders in any year (or some combination of these two types of change). This is an important issue which has direct implications for how we should approach this problem. Although the data appropriate to this question are limited, the available evidence suggests the latter is the case, i.e., the major part of the observed increase in adolescent violence is the result of higher individual offending rates on the part of those relatively few youth who commit violent offenses; while there may be slight increases in the proportion of youth involved in violent behavior, this does not appear to be the primary explanation for the increased rate of violent offending. This is an issue I will return to later.

Particularly alarming is the number of homicides and aggravated assaults with serious injury involving adolescent offenders and victims. While the proportion of adolescents involved in violent acts may not be any higher than in earlier years, we are witnessing a level of violence on the part adolescent offenders which is far more serious. What is different today as compared with 10 years ago is the extent to which weapons are implicated in assaults by adolescents.

Developmental Progression into Violence. For the past 15 years my colleagues and I at the University of Colorado have been directing a study of a representative sample of American youth who were aged 11-17 in 1976, following these youth over time, examining the different life-trajectories in this sample, and how

particular life paths put youth at particularly high or low risk for crime, violence and substance use/abuse. The following observations about the antecedents of adolescent violence focus upon risk factors that are present or emerge during adolescence (age 11-21). I am thus focusing upon the more proximate causes and risk factors for crime, violence and substance use/abuse.

Let me make several descriptive observations about the timing and developmental progression of serious violent behavior in this representative national sample. Approximately 15 percent were classified as serious violent offenders (aggravated assaults, robberies, sexual assaults or gang fights) for one or more years between 1976 and 1984. For virtually all of these persons, the onset of violence took place in early to mid-adolescence, only one percent initiated violence after age 18. Nearly 70 percent terminated their violent offending prior to age 18, and the average career length was 2.3 years. The typical progression in problem behavior begins with minor forms of delinquency, then initiation of alcohol use, initiation of marijuana use, escalation into more serious delinquency (including violence) and then to multiple illicit drug use. Illicit drugs (other than marijuana) is not typically an antecedent to serious violent behavior. Our data show that the onset of illicit drugs are causally implicated in the maintenance of violence, i.e., they lead to longer careers and higher rates of violence on the part of those using illicit drugs, but they are not implicated in the onset of serious violence. There is no evidence for a systematic effect of using drugs on violent acts, i.e., that those under the influence of illicit drugs are any more or less likely to commit a violent act. This is not to deny that some persons under the influence of drugs commit violent acts, but it is to note that as many others are less likely or equally likely to do so. In general, those who are violent under the influence of drugs are also violent when not under the influence of drugs. Violence is a pre-condition. There is more support for the direct effect of alcohol on violence than for illicit drugs. There is also a strong connection between selling drugs and violence, but violence again appears to be a selection factor rather than an effect. Developmentally then, violence begins in early-to-mid adolescence, lasts for several years, is extended over the lifecourse and exacerbated by alcohol and drug use, and is typically terminated by age 18 (although longer for those involved in polydrug use/abuse).

Antecedents and Risk Factors. The primary risk factors for those who became involved in serious violence involved low levels of bonding to the family and weak ties to the school (or any other conventional group or institution), a set of personal beliefs which tolerated deviant behavior generally and which justified crime and violence as appropriate behavior under a wide range of perceived "mitigating circumstances", and involvement in peer groups where these behaviors were modelled and encouraged. Developmentally, weak ties to the family, poor integration and performance at school, and weak internal controls on behavior

(beliefs and values) lead to the selection of particular types of peer groups. Those youth with strong bonds to family and school typically choose prosocial youth as friends whereas those with weak bonds to family and school choose other alienated and delinquent youth as friends. The strongest predictor of delinquent behavior, violence and drug use, is thus the type of peer group in which the youth becomes involved. The causal influence of early parent training and bonding, and school bonding and beliefs, is thus channeled largely through the type of friends chosen during early adolescence. In the absence of delinquent peers, there is little risk for any serious violent behavior, and virtually no risk for any sustained involvement in serious violent behavior. Those at highest risk for violent behavior are thus youth who are overbonded to their peer group, those who have essentially no bonds to any other persons, groups or institutions, who are isolated from conventional society and who are almost entirely dependent upon the peer group for emotional and social support and where this group is highly tolerant of or even encourages deviant forms of behavior. While formal gangs (one form of delinquent peer group) are most likely to emerge in disorganized neighborhoods, more informal delinquent peer groups can be found in most school settings and are facilitated by the way we structure our educational programs (putting all "problem youth" into the same academic track and grouping them in the same classes for better control and management).

Implications for Interventions. First, the evidence suggests that the current escalation in adolescent violence is most likely a result of increasing rates and seriousness of violence on the part of a relatively constant proportion of active offenders, not an increase in the proportion of youth involved in serious violence. The change in violence is thus not the result of increasing vulnerability to the basic antecedents of violence which lead to increasing proportions of the population becoming involved in serious violence. Rather, it may be attributed to two primary factors: the maintenance effects of drug use and selling and the ready access to guns and other high-tech weapons. The most obvious and dramatic reduction in violence is linked to changing these two conditions.

Second, given the critical role of the adolescent peer group in the onset and maintenance of violent behavior, several things follow: 1) once youth are in mid-adolescence, attempts to intervene with parents, to provide parent effectiveness training, to improve school performance and otherwise strengthen school and family bonds, are not likely to be successful unless there are simultaneously changes in the youth's peer group involvement; 2) the peer group should be targeted as a primary intervention point; 3) Existing delinquency prevention programs should be examined to make sure that they are not inadvertently facilitating the formation and increasing cohesion of delinquent peer groups. This is clearly one of the by-products of our treatment facilities--state training schools and even community



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## STATEMENT

### OF THE

### AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

### BEFORE THE

SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### ON

### CHILDREN AND VIOLENCE

### PRESENTED BY

CARL C. BELL, M.D.  
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH COUNCIL  
SOUTHSIDE, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 16, 1989



Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Carl C. Bell, M.D., a practicing psychiatrist with the Southside Chicago, Illinois, Community Mental Health Council, and a member of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee of Black Psychiatrists. I am pleased to appear before the Committee to represent the views and concerns of the American Psychiatric Association, a medical specialty society representing over 35,000 psychiatrists nationwide.

The purpose of this testimony is to outline the problem of family violence and the problems children may have who are victims of or witnesses to this violence. In addition, solutions to the problem will be suggested. The majority of the observations presented are the result of empirical work done at the Community Mental Health Council, a comprehensive community mental health center located on the south side of Chicago serving a predominately Black community.

#### The Problem

In 1986, Blacks accounted for 44% of the murder victims in the United States, and, as in previous years, more than 90% of those Black victims were slain by Black offenders; yet Blacks comprised only about 12% of the population, (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1987). Black-on-Black murder is the leading cause of death in Black males 15 to 44 and the leading cause of death in Black females 15 to 34. Black men have a 1 in 21 chance of becoming a homicide victim, Black women have a 1 in 104 chance; White men have a 1 in 131 chance of being a homicide victim, and White women have a 1 in 369 chance, (Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health, 1985).

Further, since less than 6,000 Black men were killed during the entire Vietnam War, there have been several single years during which there were more Black men killed in this country than killed during that entire war.

From 1976 to 1983, Black homicide victims knew their assailant in 59.8% of the homicides which occurred during those years. Among Black males, homicide victims knew their assailants in 58.3% of the cases and over three-fourths of those men who knew their assailants knew them as friends or acquaintances. Black female victims knew their assailant in 65.8% of the cases, and in 43.8% of those homicides the assailant was a family member, (Centers for Disease Control, 1986). Related to the fact that most victims and offenders knew each other is the fact that most often the homicide was classified as a primary homicide (64.8%), i.e., a homicide not related to any other felony, but one which usually occurred during a non-felony circumstance such as an argument. To make matters worse is the finding that for every one homicide there are 100 assaults, (Rosenberg & Mercy, 1986).

When one considers the years of potential life lost from homicide; the cost of days lost from work, school or other meaningful activities; the cost of the disabilities resulting from violence; and the devastating emotional impact of violence - the true damage to society can be begun to be appreciated. It is clear, for example, that battered women suffer more frequently from general medical problems and psychological symptoms of stress such as suicide attempts, alcoholism, drug abuse, and depression (Stark & Flitcraft, 1982). Family violence is often cited as the major reason for divorce and can be thought of as a destructive force eating away

at the American family. The full effects on children of witnessing such violence is unknown, but many of the children who witness violence suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and have many other behavioral disturbances in childhood and adult life.

In order to gain a better appreciation of how the above national statistics on violence impacted on the community it served, the Community Mental Health Council (CMHC) began to do a number of field surveys in its community.

The first of the surveys was performed on 536 elementary school children from CMHC's catchment area and revealed that 26% reported having seen someone shot and 29% had seen a stabbing, (Jenkins and Thompson, 1986). Looking at the Council's mentally ill population we learned that 4% of the men and 1/3 of the women had been raped; 40% of the men and women had been physically assaulted; and 1/4 of both the men and women knew of someone who had been murdered, (Bell et al., 1988). Similar findings were reported by Troutman and Braunstein (1989) in a part of the Milwaukee County Mental Health complex that serves a predominately poor, African-American population. This study found that 30% of the men and 50% of the women had been raped; 56% of the men and 66% of the women had been physically assaulted, and 30% of the men and 42% of the women knew of someone who had been murdered. A more in-depth study of a representative sample of CMHC's victimized mentally ill population revealed that a large proportion of these patients' physical and sexual assaults were perpetrated by friends and family. Furthermore, many of these patients reported being multiply victimized. For example, 25% of the women who reported being raped had been raped both as children, and, then again as adults, (Jenkins, et al., 1989).

In looking at the medically ill population in a poor west side Chicago community, it was learned that 14% of the women reported having been raped; 15% of the women and 36% of the men reported having been assaulted; and 28% of the women and 46% of the men reported of knowing someone who was murdered.

Community Mental Health Council Victims Services staff have continued to go to several community high school and elementary school classes and have currently surveyed over 1,000 students (65% in high school and 35% in elementary school). Thirty-nine percent reported seeing a shooting, 34% a stabbing, and 23% seeing a murder, (Shakoor, et al., 1989).

After a local school social worker contacted CMHC about her work with children in one of the schools we'd surveyed, the problem took even a sharper focus. Dyson (1989), was individually referred to six children from the same class of 33 for intervention in their behavior problems and poor academic performance. Her individual interviews revealed histories of extensive family violence resulting in a murder of a close family member. Her article illustrates the severity of violence inner-city school children are faced with which drastically interferes with the normal learning process. She notes that an overwhelming number of inner-city children experience major losses by death of a close family member yet remain unassisted in working through the mourning process, and, further, that aggression (in the form of violence) may represent this unresolved grief. Her interventions were able to help the six children referred to make improvements in their behavioral and academic performance.

Thus, we have empirical evidence of how the broader national violence statistics have a specific effect in the community, local schools, and individuals. Clearly, the exposure to violence increases the potential for future violence and hinders emotional and intellectual development of children exposed to violence. These empirical-Chicago based findings have been supported by other psychiatrists and researchers around the country. For example, Dr. Quinton James, a psychiatrist at the Augustus F. Hawkins Mental Health Services in Los Angeles, has informed me that in looking at 132 consecutive intakes of children to the center, 13 (10%) had a chief complaint of being witness to homicide. An examination of one-half of the homicide cases in Detroit in 1985 found that 17% were witnessed by a total of 136 youths ages 18 and younger, (Batchelor & Wick, 1985). Of the 2,000 homicides in Los Angeles County in 1982, 10% were witnessed by a dependent youngster (Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Pynoos and Eth (1985b) asserts that "intrusive imagery from violence within the family and its associated affect, markedly interferes with the child's ability to learn." Finally, Lewis, (1985) has identified being witness to or victim of violence as a factor associated with children who later murder; thus, violence may well beget violence in some children.

#### Solutions to the Problem

The solutions to the problems have been fully discussed elsewhere (Bell, 1987; Bell, 1988; Bell, in press) and will not be discussed here. Rather, an outline of solutions which fit various aspects of the multifactorial problem of violence in society will be given.

1. There are a number of myths and misconceptions about who's killing who and why. Many of these misconceptions are fueled by media which tend to focus on the sensational and exceptional rather than the common place. Thus, many Blacks think it's White policemen who have killed the majority of Blacks; many people fear being killed by a burglar when their chances of being murdered by a family member, friend, or acquaintance are much higher; many are afraid of being killed by gangs in the midst of drug trade wars when (in the vast majority of cities) homicides resulting from interpersonal altercations still outnumber gang-related homicides. These myths need to be replaced by facts in a national media educational campaign. Facts such as "loaded gun kept in the home for homeowner protection from a home invader is 118 times more likely to kill a family member of friend," or that when home ownership of guns increased by five times in Detroit (due to homeowners buying guns to protect themselves after the 1969 riots), the homicide rate went from about 100 per year to 700 per year - the vast majority due to interpersonal altercations. Another myth is that homicides are due to instrumental violence, i.e., violence used to acquire goods which occurs in a robbery, when in fact most are due to expressive violence as a result of interpersonal altercations. This myth prevents the criminal justice system from accepting the part of violence in society it can impact and prevents the public health, educational, and legislative systems from taking responsibility for the aspects of violence they can influence. Consciousness on this issue must be raised.
2. There is a great deal of confusion about the fact that different ethnic groups, different cities, and different times have different dynamics of violence. For example, Hispanic men do not tend to kill Hispanic women; there is a disproportionate percentage of Black domestic homicides, etc. Thus, cities must not generalize their prevention strategies to violence based on which city has the most press on violence as each city's homicide dynamic is different. City's must tailor make their programs to fit their situations.
3. There is a lack of research on acquired biologic causes of violence such as head injury or how alcohol may cause central nervous system imbalances that promote violence. Most of these studies have been done on low risk populations, and finding a critical mass of cases to make a solid connectoin between acquired biology and violence is lacking. Related to this is the possibility that certain medications, like propranolol, may in fact, be an anti-violence drug, but has not been approved by the FDA for these indications. Such medications have been shown to significantly reduce violence in head injured individuals. It should further be noted that

Blacks and other minorities are twice more likely to suffer head injury that may promote violence.

4. There continue to be racial concerns on the part of both Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites around the issue of violence. Blacks are concerned that Whites will interpret their higher homicide rates as evidence of genetic inferiority rather than the effects of poverty. Whites are afraid that if Blacks stop killing Blacks they'll start killing Whites. These fears must be combated by exposing them to the light of awareness.
5. Institutional racism must be confronted to prevent continued systematic road blocks to the problem. For example suicide (a problem that is 2 to 3 times more common in Whites) was responded to by multiple state legislative initiatives, but homicide (a problem that is 5.6 times more common in Blacks and 2 to 3 times higher in Hispanics) does not receive such legislative favor. Another example can be found in the vigorous community response to a White woman visiting violence at a White Chicago suburban school compared to the apathy that is found when a Black child is killed in front of his class on Chicago's predominately Black south side.
6. Community development must be done. For example, if, as Dyson (1989) suggests, school children who have academic and behavioral problems are screened for having witnessed violence, then who will help those kids overcome their stress? The teachers and school guidance counselors will have to go back to school to learn how to address such issues. This is community development, i.e. developing services in the community to cope with the problem.
7. Grass roots community efforts need support, e.g. Save Our Sons and Daughters in Detroit, Black-on-Black Love Campaign in Chicago, etc. These programs appear to have the potential for successfully impacting on the problem of violence.
8. Curricula that teach kids conflict resolution skills should be taught in public schools. The same is true for family violence prevention curricula.
9. Conflict resolution centers like the OSAY Program in Washington, D.C. housing developments need to be encouraged and supported throughout the country.
10. Vocational services for teens have been shown to be able to dissuade kids from involving themselves in the dangerous, violent illegitimate economies.
11. Neuropsychiatric stimulation for infants. Along with current efforts to address nutritional and prenatal care

needs, as well as programs designed to upgrade the health status of mothers, a national campaign needs to be begun for all infants to be rocked as rocking enhances brain development which reduces potential for future violence.

12. Prevention of free falls and children being hit by cars need to be undertaken in poor communities as such head injury has been associated with violence.
13. Studies on the connection between alcohol abuse and neurochemical alterations in the brain causing explosive, impulsive violence need to be encouraged in minority populations that have high cirrhosis of the liver death rates. The results of these studies need to be widely disseminated to discourage drinking.
14. Ethnic pride needs to be stimulated and the difference between desegregation and integration needs to be clearly understood as it has been shown that a solid sense of ethnic identity "immunizes" people against drug abuse, suicide, and likely violence.
15. Secondary prevention methods such as screening for battered women in general medical settings could identify women at risk and refer them for services to address their issues of violence, i.e. women shelters. Gynecologists need to have handbooks for battered women in their offices.
16. Family therapists and mental health workers need better training on how to do family therapy for violent families.
17. Clergy need to be encouraged to get involved, identify families of violence not just in their congregation but in the community and reach out to those families with church-based services, e.g. counseling, respite and shelters.
18. School boards need to study Pynoos and Nader's paper (1988) which offers a blueprint on how to handle children exposed to community violence.
19. Mental health centers need to recognize the high percentages of victims in their population and offer victims' services.
20. Case findings in correctional facilities needs to be undertaken to identify victims and perpetrators of violence, and provide them with treatment.
21. The Attorney General's Task Force Report (1984) needs to be reread and actualized by local officials. It clearly outlines the roles the criminal justice system can play



in reducing homicide and family violence.

22. Finally, tertiary prevention needs to be begun. For example, unfortunately many cities lack meaningful public policy on what to do with a child who witnesses a homicide. Co-victims of family homicide victims need services.

### Conclusions

The problem of violence takes an exceedingly high toll on society, families and individuals. Based on over 15 years of research and direct clinical work in this area, I'm convinced there are systemic solutions that can alleviate the problem of what I refer to as "survival fatigue", e.g., the stress of surviving in a milieu of violence which is similar to the "combat fatigue" observed in war. An excellent example of such a remedy can be found in The Year 2000 Health Objectives currently being drafted by the U.S. Public Health Service. I can only hope that the nation doesn't make the same mistake Washington, D.C. made around the problem of violence, i.e., as long as violence was only a public health issue it didn't get major attention from other government resources, but when it became a political problem (i.e., when D.C. became the murder capital of the U.S.) attention was drawn and an effort to address the problem finally began.

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Deborah Meier - Testimony

Good Morning. My name is Deborah Meier. I am the Principal of the Central Park East Secondary School in East Harlem and the Jackie Robinson complex, in which Central Park East Secondary School is located. I also serve as a leader of the Center for Collaborative Education, an organization of parents, teachers and students from six public schools in New York which share a common approach to education. Some of these schools are located in Manhattan's District 4 -- a pioneer in permitting parents to choose the school their children will attend from among a variety of educational styles and philosophies. I am here, of course, representing my own views, not the view of the New York City Board of Education.

The Jackie Robinson complex includes several schools with over 1,000 students, the largest of which is CPES. It also houses an elementary school, Central Park East I, and a small Junior High called the Music Academy. We are located at Madison Avenue and East 106th St on the edge of Central Park. And we have been gripped by sadness and great introspection in the last several weeks because one of the students in the building has been charged with being part of the attack on the young woman runner in the northern part of Central Park.

My testimony today will not provide statistics, I'm sure you've been presented with these from every possible perspective.

Instead, I want to tell you about the students in my school and the staff as well as the what each faces in their daily lives, and why Congress, the Executive Branch and state governments, as well as the business and labor community, must all share responsibility for creating an environment that assures the survival of these children, and the betterment of their lives and the lives of the parents who love them.

I want to tell you about the impact schooling has on their attitude toward and propensity for violence.

I want to tell you about an alternative approach to schooling that could make a difference and the public policy implications that this example suggests.

Most of the young people I see daily are low income youngsters living in the inner city of Manhattan. They are largely African-American and Latino. But their attitudes are not uniquely characteristic of their culture or environment. And, I would like to remind you, not uniquely characteristic of this period in which we live. My daughter who lives and teaches 100 miles north in a small rural community tells many of the same tales -- tales of violence, drunk driving accidents, drug busts , vandalism and arson, most of them perpetrated by young people. It's also important to know that about 20 percent of the students in my

school are white and they demonstrate a remarkably similar set of values, fears and experiences.

Violence is normal in the world of today's adolescent. Even worse, it is glamorous and appealing. In advisory meetings, where people are frank and open, the boys will acknowledge that their ideal of manliness exudes violence. The girls are caught in a double bind: they're expected to adopt a veneer of toughness along with traditional female docility. To be a man is to sneer in the face of the weak. To be a woman is to worry about your man's needs.

One long evening before a blazing fire at an out-of-town retreat, the 12 and 13 year old boys talked about how rare it was for them to be able to acknowledge to each other their fears, worries and doubts. To let your guard down was an invitation to danger or cruel jests, at the very least. Weakness was equated with sissiness. To be a thoughtful person was to invite a rep for being a homosexual.

What's the difference between poor kids and the middle class when it comes to these attitudes? It's the difference partly in whether they see this attitude as a rite of passage, or a life long habit. Middle class kids often see this conforming cruelty as a temporary necessity of adolescence, whereas working class

and poor kids seem more prone to the view that this is the way the world is ... or should be.

This attitude is, of course, reinforced by everything they see on television and in the movies, in print and broadcast advertising, in the world of business and the world of politics. From Rambo to the corporate raiders, it's the aggressive, tough-minded guys who get the job done regardless of laws and the societal constraints. They're the admirable, effective people, unlike teachers and parents, many of whom seem to struggle and work in circumstances that offer no status, glamor or money. By comparison, they seem to be less admirable to these kids, diminishing their possibility of serving as effective role models.

When policy makers look to make changes that involve youth they look to the schools first. Yet children do not start school generally until they are five or six years of age. From the time they start until they graduate or drop out, school occupies only half the days of the year and less than half of those hours are spent in school. Seeking solutions to violence that concentrate only on changing children's lives in school won't do. The violence kids experience is rarely experienced in schools. A single act of violence is serious, but it is not a daily part of most high schools. It is, however, a daily part of many young people's experiences in their neighborhoods and even in their



homes. At least as significant is changing the communities in which these kids live and the resources available to them once the school day is over.

But schools are a critical place where society can intervene. What kind of schools are these places that we entrust our children to, and where we expect the most important preparation required by society to create a new generation of thinkers, learners, doers, workers?

If we had designed schools purposely to increase the attractions of the streets, to promote peer isolation , to undermine parental authority , to make kids sneer at "culture," we would have designed them like America's junior and senior high schools.

When such schools were first designed few youngsters were expected to complete them. A small elite, hungry for learning or getting ahead, took honors classes, joined school clubs, were leaders of their student governments and yearbook editors. The rest did as little as was necessary. Some dropped out to go to work, some got pushed out, most attended classes without interest. It was not till WW II that the average American was expected to graduate from high school. And, it was not until quite recently that all our citizens and our workforce were expected to meet high intellectual standards. Therefore, whatever their merits or shortcomings, American schools were not intended

to do the job we expect of them today. To do that different job you need a very different kind of school.

We created schools that treated kids and still treat kids as a fungible mass. We built buildings to house 1,500 to 4,000 students of about the same age (and thus presumably the same needs), organized on a factory model. But, in fact, even the mass production industries never tried anything as anonymous and mindless. Our kids are expected to spend their time going from one disconnected subject to another every 35-45 minutes with a few minutes in between. Bells announce switches and movement from place to place, preferably with as little noise, discussion of what had just transpired in the last class, or opportunity to compare notes and process ideas. Math follows English, Home Economics follows literature--and then we wonder that young people fail to notice the connections between subjects, or forget one year what they learned the last, or lack attention spans, can't stick with anything, or rarely get serious.

And what do we do to the teachers in these schools? They see some 150-160 students each day, each semester confronting a different 160 students. The kids come in groups of 25-35 sitting in rows to receive their daily dose of information, review homework, take tests and quizzes.

For the teacher, there is hardly any opportunity and certainly no incentive to compare notes with colleagues, linger with students at the end of the class or even think about an idea which might change your presentation in the next class. There is no time to know the students, their personalities, their peculiar learning styles, their names, faces. A teacher dares not give homework that requires anything more than perfunctory review. Just think, if each of the 160 students required two minutes of homework review time, the teacher would spend five hours each night just marking homework assignments. Thus the tradition of spending at least half of each short class period reviewing the student's homework. High expectations under such a system means simply rewarding those who come to school with the work done.

Think of America's schools like a badly organized conference that goes on for 185 days, day after day. Lots of plenary sessions where one is endlessly talked at. An occasional panel or video, few breaks, no time for talking with ones colleagues, poor food and refreshments, and a few bad tempered presenters who yell at the audience or belittle a conference attendee who falls asleep at the back of the auditorium. Why would we go to such a conference? Only to see old friends, network, meet new acquaintances. And that's exactly what the kids do.

Of course even the worse conference we attend is usually in a pleasant surrounding. But the settings for at least most urban

students and teachers is at best dreary and at worst shameful. Bathrooms are "kids-only" territory which wise adults avoid., as do many kids. They rarely have towels, soap, mirrors or any of the comforts we adults associate with a ladies or men's room in a modern office. Don't you think it odd, that we don't provide these amenities, but then spend money to improve the self image of "at risk" kids?

Teachers -- adults -- work without the basic facilities that the poorest office permits: telephones, computers, copying machines, typewriters, support staff. No time or place for professional privacy from the students. The message is clear...the only time you are a teacher is when you stand up in front of a class.

And how do we treat parents in these schools? Not much better. We do not require employers to let them visit schools during the day. We schedule appointments and visits at a time which either requires them to lose pay or come late after their regular jobs in order to hear a teacher's report about test scores, grades or attendance. We rarely discuss what that parent can do or should do, because we really have nothing to offer them. We've done our duty, told the tale, and now we can move on.

What do we do to tell kids to stay in school? We invite wildly successful rock stars or athletes who urge kids to graduate, and say they wish they had too. But that may in fact be

counterproductive because the kids can see how little difference it made.

Thus the school offers little to kids in the way of powerful adult figures who are in control, thinking about interesting ideas, doing exciting things, speaking with enthusiasm about education. Instead they find school a pale substitute for the exciting and dangerous world of the street, pop culture and TV mirages. Danger is no deterrent. Immortality hangs in the air. Adolescents properly seek ways to overcome handicaps, excel and conquer obstacles.

The majority of young people's time is spent out of school, with families, in communities, heavily influenced by popular culture. Certainly we have to raise questions about contemporary culture, and the false images and ideas it projects to youth. But we must remember that it is a culture which emanates from the powerful, largely white, wealthy adults who run American business. It's not a culture designed by these children.

And what has happened to the families which are supposed to provide alternative adult values to these children? Both middle class and poor families, as well as teachers do spend a great deal of time telling kids what is right and what is wrong. And both middle class and poor families work many hours to provide their kids with a secure way of life. The difference is that the

middle class winds up with the resources to provide children with after school activities, tutors, cultural enrichment all of which reinforces the parent's message. Poor families have all they can do to provide shelter, food and clothing.

If we want families to become tougher guardians of their youngsters we need to change the power relationships between the parents and the kids. Parents can exert power when they are seen as protectors. They can be fruitful models for children, when their resources, time and energy permit them to do so. Such parents can afford to make kids angry by asserting their power to protect. But where parents are seen as powerless, have no resources and dare not say, "no", because they fear children will go elsewhere, to more dangerous places, doing more dangerous things, then parents are not in the driver's seat anymore.

These are not just problems of style, culture or design. These are problems rooted in public policy. Young people's sense of being valued and valuable is not a matter of a commercial message or some public relations trick. They will know they are valuable and valued when they and their families are treated so.

If parents have no decent housing, job, health care, if, in fact, their kids can make more than they, if they must beg the authorities and the government for every bit of help they

receive, if parents are demeaned by our leaders and by the media, then their children will regard them in the same way.

There must be a renewed, visible national commitment to end the racism and sexism that still dominates our public and private lives. Things may be better than they were thirty years ago, but

that does not mean much to my students. They are children now and their pain is now. They cannot live on comparisons.

We must spend money on children, quite apart from their schooling. We need to use the facilities we already have in a more sensible way. Our schools are brick and mortar. They can house much more activity than takes place in the standard school day. They need to become part of a vast expanding network of facilities available to young people, with well-paid supervision of the kinds of programs the rich use for their youngster's after school hours. Camp facilities, swimming pools, libraries, music classes, clubs of all sorts. The fellowship of friends engaged in exciting activities--we need to offer these to youngsters rather than empty hours in front of television sets watching expensively produced videos that feed their feelings of emptiness, powerlessness and loneliness.

Then we need to address the nature of schools. Just because we built big, centralized buildings, the buildings needn't be

organized under one banner or leader. Schools buildings, like the Empire State Building, can house many different enterprises. The school can be and must be small. Small enough for teachers to know kids, and kids to know each other. Small enough for parents to interact with teachers, and small enough for staffs to convey to parents and students and each other the values, ideas that particular school cares for and believes in.

And, I firmly believe all parents need what the middle class and wealthy parent has always had...choice. That means the right to choose between accessible alternatives that are subject to evaluation. Elementary and secondary schools need teams of visiting evaluators just as schools of higher education are evaluated now by accreditation boards. The cost of funding visiting teams of evaluators is not any more expensive than we spend today to administer the vast nationwide standardized testing programs which we have been fooled to believe holds our schools accountable. These tests represent mindless accountability--accountability which has proven again and again to be useless and even damaging.

At Central Park East Secondary School we pay attention to our kids and their families. We are partners in a collaborative effort:

- o to teach young people how to think;
- o to rethink our own ideas about teaching and learning;
- o to offer parents access to our approach and techniques;



- o to help parents and students alike set goals that allow them to make sure their values are part of what we are offering their children;
- o that allow children to understand why their parents lives are admirable.

Ours is deliberately a small school, nurtured by a District committed to educational choices for the poor, as well as for the wealthy and staffed by adults who have extensive on-site power to make decisions. We cannot prevent tragedy from striking, nor can we immunize our school community from the greater world. But because we are small, we can respond to our students in a way that tells them they and their ideas are valuable. That's how kids learn compassion. At CPESS we can and do practice such compassion. It is both caring and tough. But if our school had 4,000 students we couldn't dare offer such care or we would be in perpetual grief. There are simply too many daily tragedies to contemplate in such a population of poor, urban people. But gratefully, we are small, and so in one week we have been able to deal simultaneously with the death of a beloved school secretary, the loss in a fire of members of one student's family and the tragic event in Central Park. And now, most recently, the sudden death of the first Black superintendent of schools for New York City. We have dealt with these seriously and deeply. That's one way we help young people to learn that we love life, respect all people and cherish each other.

FIGHTING CRIME AS A PRE-EMINENT "CHILDREN'S ISSUE"

Testimony before the  
Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families  
U.S. Congress

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Thank you Chairman Miller, Congressman Bliley, Members of the committee. My name is Karl Zinsmeister. I am a writer and social demographic consultant here in Washington, DC, and an Adjunct Research Associate at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. I am currently writing a book on the status and future prospects of America's children entitled The Child-Proof Society: Are Americans Losing Interest in the Next Generation? In the course of that effort I am looking at child welfare from a variety of angles, including that of public safety. What follows are some of my initial conclusions.

#### CHILDREN ADRIFT IN DISORDER

On May 12, 1987---almost exactly two years ago---an almost unnoticed event took place in this city that perfectly foreshadowed the mayhem involving children that has wracked Washington, DC since then. But this was before the subjects of crime and youth became hot topics in Washington and around the country, so almost no one commented upon what was---to me at least---a numbing event.

As a gesture toward public education, DC mayor Marion Barry substitute taught an eighth grade science class that day for gifted and talented students at Fletcher Johnson elementary school in southeast. The Mayor holds two degrees in chemistry, and in this particular class he was leading a discussion on the

food chain.

As talk turned to predation, then cannibalism, the Mayor posed a question. "We don't eat other people, we just kill other human beings. We shoot them, cut them. How many of you," Barry asked his pupils, "know somebody who's been killed?" There were nineteen students in the class. Fourteen hands shot up. The teacher went around the room: How were they killed? "Shot." "Hit by truck." "Stabbing." "Shot." "Shot." "Drugs." "Shot." The conversation quickly passed to another subject.

Remember, these were 13 year old children. And given that they were the gifted and talented class, you may assume they were from atypically privileged backgrounds compared to most of their classmates.

But on a day when the major news stories concerned Gary Hart's personal life and Robert McFarlane's testimony about what may have happened to \$3.8 million in errant Iran-contra proceeds, this revelation that murder, overdose and mayhem have become a routine part of urban life for our young was barely reported, and not commented upon at all.

And this was hardly an unrepresentative event. Over a four month period in Detroit at about the same time 102 youngsters age 16 or under were shot, nearly all of them by other children. In October of 1987---well before the current media blitz on children and crime---the Wall Street Journal ran a stunning front page story which chronicled, diary-style, three months in the life of an eleven year old Chicago boy named Lafayette Walton. That life included almost daily gun and submachine gun battles in his public housing project, beatings and maimings of relatives and

friends, recurrent rapes, gang recruiting, cocaine running by a nine-year old female cousin, and several murders.

A study completed recently by researchers at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore helps quantify more precisely the extent of this type of trauma. A sample of 167 teenagers who visited a city center clinic for routine medical care were surveyed as to their exposure to various incidents of violence. The results: a stunning 23.5 percent had witnessed a murder. 71.5 percent knew someone who had been shot. These teenagers had been victims of some type of violence themselves an average of 1 1/2 times each, had witnessed more than five criminal episodes, and knew nearly 12 persons who had been crime victims. 22.9 percent had had their lives threatened, and 8.6 percent had been raped. The doctors collecting the information point out that because of the nature of their clinic population, nearly 80 percent of the respondents were females. Among a sample of adolescent males, it is likely many of these measures of violence exposure would be even higher.

Stunning as these specific findings are, I think most Americans have realized for some time that a substantial minority of our nation's youngest citizens are badly caught up in criminal violence. But there is a reality rub---acknowledging the extent of the carnage is just too disturbing, and combatting it would be too testing, so we have often looked the other way. That, however, is becoming increasingly difficult in the face of one outrage after another.

And so earnest souls are now asking how this problem "snuck

up" on us, and what its sources might be. Frankly, I don't understand the surprise. In the course of researching my book on how Americans regard their children I have looked at a wide range of social indicators. And one does not have to look very far into national trends in public safety, family cohesion, educational quality, willingness of parents to rear their own children when they are very young, and so forth, to see that the position of children in our society has eroded. Diminished child welfare is a national problem, affecting all groups. The decay has been most pronounced, however, in our inner cities.

For three decades we have sown the seeds of social disorder. Now we are reaping the harvest:

\* Nearly one out of every four children born this year will arrive without benefit of married parents. Among blacks, more than 60 percent of all births occur out of wedlock.

\* Divorce, and abandonment of children by their fathers, now take place at roughly twice the level of the post-war norm.

\* Our society did not revolt against drug use until it became so entrenched that, today, 1.5 million children age 12 to 17 have tried cocaine or crack.

\* The idea that every able-bodied adult should work and that families should aim for economic self-reliance was abandoned more than twenty years ago. Today, 40 percent of inner city men age 18 to 21 have not worked a single day in the last year.

\* Anti-social individuals are rarely evicted from public housing anymore, and when they are it takes up to 8 to 10 months in our major cities. Most public housing is now, quite simply, a hellish place to grow up. Twenty years ago, this was not the

case.

\* Effective discipline has disappeared in many public schools, to the point where every year now 1 in 20 teachers is physically assaulted, and one-quarter of all school principals report that student possession of weapons is a problem. The extent of our efforts to assure that the persons teaching our children remain diligent and committed is perhaps best illustrated by this fact: over a recent nine-year period a grand total of one principal was fired in the entire, pathetic, New York City public school system.

\* And in our courts, the only thing standing between the vicious and predatory and the weak and dependent is often a revolving glass door.

Quite literally, large sections of urban American society have become nothing but crime factories. Given the grossly disordered conditions that prevail in many of our cities, there are those of us who would have been surprised if there had not been an upsurge of crime and violence among the young in recent years.

#### THE ROOTS OF CRIME IN FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Unquestionably, the most important root of our social dysfunction is family breakdown. The combined result of the illegitimacy and divorce trends sketched out above is that more than 60 percent of all children born today will spend at least some time in a single parent household before reaching age 18. The regression now taking place in American family structure is, as one analyst has pointed out, "without precedent in urban

history." Not only stable family life but even marriage itself is, "now almost a forgotten institution among black teens," to use the words of a recent report by one child welfare organization.

There is a great divide over the cause of this decay. On the one side there is, let us say, the Charles Murray school that argues government incentives have been a primary motive cause of the collapse of personal responsibility. On the other shore we might identify as the Daniel Patrick Moynihan position the view that the primary motive cause is a mystery, but probably cultural, and that government intervention is our best hope for a solution. The significant fact of the 1980s debate, however, is not the split over government's role, but agreement that the mortal threat in all this is collapse of traditional family structure. Today, unlike in the 1960s, both sides recognize personal behavior as the prime source of contemporary social and economic problems.

So: there is wide agreement that family structure is now the principal conduit of class structure. This is not to deny that plenty of children from intact families will have problems, nor that many offspring from single-parent families will grow up to be happy and successful citizens. But then even some of the children growing up in Beirut today will turn out fine too, nonetheless it is not to be recommended. The point is, having only one-parent's time and energy and earning and teaching power is a serious blow against a child that he or she will overcome only with effort.

That is not personal prejudice, but the verdict of the sociological literature. Let me quote from a longitudinal study



of children of one-parent families put out by the National Association of Elementary School Principals:

One-parent children, on the whole, show lower achievement in school than their two-parent peers....Among all two-parent children, 30 percent were ranked as high achievers, compared to only 1 percent of one-parent children. At the other end of the scale....only 2 percent of two-parent children were low achievers---while fully 40 percent of the one-parent children fell in that category.

There are more clinic visits among one-parent students. And their absence rate runs far higher than for students with two parents, with one-parent students losing about eight days more over the course of the year.

One-parent students are consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action by every criterion we examined, and at both the elementary and secondary levels...one-parent children are more than twice as likely as two-parent children to give up on school altogether.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported recently that 70 percent of the juveniles in state reform institutions grew up in single-parent or no-parent families. Most street gang members, it has been shown, come from broken homes. And one recent study of 72 adolescent murderers found that 75 percent came from non-intact families.

But, again, these findings ought not surprise us. Fully twenty four years ago Daniel Patrick Moynihan observed that:

From the wild Irish slums of the 19th century Eastern seaboard to the riot torn suburbs of Los Angeles, there is one unmistakable lesson in American history: a community that allows a large number of young men (and women) to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future...that community asks for and gets chaos.

One of the depressing lessons we have learned since that was written is how unamenable the problems of the broken family are to monetary solutions. It is not that we haven't tried to make society-wide compensations for the withering of the nuclear unit.

Two-thirds of all female-headed families with children under 18 now get benefits from a welfare program (AFDC, General Assistance, SSI, Medicaid, food stamps, rent assistance), the Census Bureau tells us. Among unmarried mothers, over 80 percent are receiving a government check. Among minorities, the ratios are much higher. The Federal government spends more than \$100 billion every year on means-tested payments to families. Yet this assistance has not even come close to providing those households with the kind of existential security that most intact families enjoy.

For the last quarter century, American public policy has shied from the idea that certain family forms are more socially desirable than others. An idiotic neutrality has worked its way into the tax code, our property laws, our marriage and family statutes, our entitlement and welfare programs, and so forth, suggesting in the face of contrary evidence that from the point of view of larger social functioning, any one family form is as good as another. There is no attempt to support and encourage childbearing within wedlock, there is little penalty attached to child abandonment, there is little recognition of the social benefits of marriage, or of the social contributions of those who devote themselves to conscientious childrearing, there is no reward in our transfer programs for standing by kith and kin. (For just one example, since the end of World War II intact families with children have gone from being a group enjoying substantial income tax advantages to one experiencing a relative penalty.)

The most tragic aspect of this lack of nerve in defending

the integrity of the nuclear family is that it misled and left badly exposed precisely those groups who had fewest other assets to fall back on. The rich can afford splintered families--- though it may bring them heartache it is not likely to incapacitate them. But the ill-educated, the poor, the historically discriminated against---these groups once enticed out of the safe harbor of family solidarity often cannot recover.

The end result of all this is that a significant minority of American children is now growing up amidst appalling disorder. That this is hurting them is transparently clear. Childhood stress is up, with more children seeing doctors and being admitted to psychiatric wards. The teenage suicide rate has more than tripled in thirty years, a time when suicide rates for all other age groups were falling. Youth drug abuse has levelled off in recent years, but it remains very high compared to earlier decades, and among underclass youngsters serious drug abuse has rooted deeply. And of course we are experiencing an unprecedented crime wave directed at and by juveniles.

In the most troubling cases, we are seeing a pattern of extreme remorselessness in youth crime. The Central Park attack, where the perpetrators reported "it was fun" is the latest, heinous, example. An earlier case in Washington saw a group of youths rob, gang rape and murder a 99-pound middle-aged mother named Catherine Fuller while singing and joking. In another case a 17 year-old shot an unsuspecting cab driver in the head "because he wanted to try out a gun." In a third, two teenagers killed another youth who passed them on the street because they

wanted his "boom box" radio. Many other similarly disturbing cases exist. At homicide scenes across the country, investigators report that juveniles are often found laughing and playing.

Some observers have identified a pattern of crimes by children who do not seem to have a conscience. These analysts point out that most such individuals have been so-called "unattached children," who never form a satisfactory relationship with a primary caregiver. In cases of child neglect, early and impersonal daycare, some divorces and certain other instances---with several of these factors on the upswing---it is believed that a child can grow up never having learned to trust or love any one person. In some such unattached children, partial psychopathic symptoms result. Seemingly inexplicable brutality can follow.

#### WHEN CHILDREN BECOME VICTIMIZERS

This brings us to an important point: the origins and influences of childhood disturbance are of undeniable interest to public policy makers. If we can identify those children who are threatened by the turmoil swirling around them, possibly some of that turmoil can be reduced. But I would suggest strongly that once a particular juvenile has himself committed a serious crime, the "whys" can no longer be a central issue. At that point, justice must be pursued---for the sake of the aggrieved, and to maintain the essential proposition that crime brings on punishment. Often we become paralyzed trying to decide whether the juvenile criminal is a victim or victimizer. That leads to very dangerous territory.

The last DC policeman to be killed in the line of duty was shot by a 17-year-old in the process of burgling a clothing store while on PCP. His criminal record began at age 10, when he was charged with sexually assaulting a 5-year-old. In subsequent years he was arrested for robbery, force and violence; then grand larceny, assault with intent to rob, obstruction of justice, and second-degree burglary; then robbery, force and violence, and assault with attempt to rob; then second-degree burglary; and, one year before shooting the police officer, with assault with a deadly weapon. In failing to punish these offenses as the serious crimes they were, an ineffectual juvenile justice system merely extended a tragic trail of heartache further than it need have led.

And this is a particularly risky moment for us to indulge juvenile lawlessness. In just the last few years, in several American cities the number of juveniles arrested for drug distribution exceeded the number arrested for drug possession for the first time. A lost generation has just graduated from victim to victimizer. If we hope to have any chance of preventing them from infecting a class of successors, and from stalking an innocent public, then we must see with clear eyes what they have become: sad cases, now part of the problem. Unless this current crop of teenage marauders is incapacitated, we will institutionalize the vicious cycle of youths preyed upon and then preying on others.

That would bring not only a host of personal tragedies, but also a terrible social cost. Homicide is now the leading cause of death for children in American inner cities. Among blacks

there was a 15 percent nationwide increase in homicides just from 1985 to 1986. Given the trends around the country in the last two years, that figure will rise sharply again when the 1987 and 1988 figures become available. In fact, the loss of life among young blacks has already become so dramatic as to drag down overall life expectancy rates for all black Americans for two years running, an unprecedented event in a developed country. While white life expectancy was rising, the black rate fell for the second consecutive year in 1986, all the way back to its level in 1982. This was basically a reflection of the epidemic of young blacks killing other young blacks. Only unflinching legal intervention will break this tragic circle.

#### SOLUTIONS

I suggest our response to the current upsurge of child crime must be multi-part:

To begin, we need positive measures to strengthen family integrity and independence. More rhetoric and more action reinforcing the two-parent family as the preferred locus of childbearing is called for. We also need to improve the general family atmosphere in this country, through the tax code, through expanded support for childrearsers, with a better public education system. We ought to aim to help parents by giving them more choice, more independence, more responsibility.

Two, we need to consider some negative sanctions against parents and other adults who threaten and prey upon children. For instance, we are now experiencing an epidemic of children born physically damaged and addicted to drugs due to substance

abuse by their mothers throughout pregnancy. Dr. Richard Guy, who chairs Washington, DC's Mayor's Advisory Board on Maternal and Infant Health has estimated that an astonishing 45 to 50 percent of the mothers delivering babies in the District of Columbia today use drugs. Cities ranging from Minneapolis to Oakland to Los Angeles are experiencing a similar upswing. If this continues, generational catastrophe could result. There is a trend toward prosecution of such mothers as child abusers in cases where they refuse treatment during pregnancy. This ought to be encouraged. Similarly, we ought to consider stronger penalties for using drugs in the presence of minor children, for recruiting children into criminal enterprises, and so forth. As Pliny the Elder said, "What is done to children they will do to society."

In addition, parents ought to be held more closely accountable for the actions of children involved in anti-social behavior. We already have limited laws, for instance, holding parents responsible for truancy and early school dropout by children, and for support of a grandchild born to one of their minor children in a welfare household. There is growing agreement that keeping control of one's children ought to be a condition of residence in public housing. Real sanctions should be meted out against parents when juveniles violate youth curfews in those cities where they exist. The very first step in any effort to control juvenile delinquency must be to make negligent parents exert some control over their charges.

Next, we must take strong steps to improve safety and order in our public schools. The schools are the primary public

institution in the lives of our children, and if disorder is allowed to root there children get a powerfully negative impression of society's interest in protecting them. Schools must be safe harbors, where bodily integrity if nothing else is guaranteed. This will require strong support for teachers and principals exerting discipline at the schoolhouse level, it will require making suspensions and expulsions of miscreant students stick, in some places it will require institution of metal detectors, more guards, student ID cards, suspension of lunch time building-leaving privileges, occasional random searches, and so forth. Squeamishness about taking such measures often reflects the public relations worries of administrators more than anything else. Violence has already entered our schools. To pretend otherwise for appearances' sake is unconscionable.

More generally, we need to proceed with a full-fledged, society-wide, crackdown on personal crime. There are those who will tell you we are currently in the midst of just such a clean-up. They are wrong. The excellent figures produced by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics show that only 18 percent of individuals arrested for violent felonies are presently convicted and sentenced to at least a year in prison. The figure is just 10 percent of those individuals arrested for drug felonies. Amazingly, even among persons arrested for homicide, only 49 percent are sentenced to a year or more behind bars. For rapists it's only 29 percent.

Overall, the average inmate getting out of jail these days has spent 17 months behind bars. That is just 45 percent of the original court-ordered sentence. In other words, you have



relatively little chance of going to jail even if you are arrested, and if you do, you'll probably spend less than a year and a half locked up. That's our war on crime?

It's no wonder, then, that for many criminals a short prison term has become just part of the business. Our failure to discourage crime can perhaps best be seen in this fact: four out of five state prison inmates today are repeat offenders. In fact, 45 percent of them are on at least their fourth sentence! These people are making crime a lucrative career, and why not, when these are the only penalties? Along the way, many of them are recruiting the young as criminal accomplices.

Our prisons are crowded today because there is little motive for criminals---particularly juveniles, who experience especially light treatment---to avoid illegal activity. The only long-run solution is to bite the bullet and build adequate new prisons, then make sentences stick. If we're going to give young people an incentive to stay out of prison, we've got to make sure they know they're going to be there a while if they commit serious crimes against their neighbors.

This will of course take some money. But the fact is, the Federal government has been slighting criminal justice spending for some time. From 1979 to 1985, total Federal spending for all purposes rose by 92 percent (unadjusted for inflation). Federal spending for justice activities, meanwhile, rose at the much slower rate of 68 percent. Nationally, only 2.9 percent of all government spending in 1985 was for criminal and civil justice. That compares to 20.8 percent for social insurance payments, 13.0

percent for education, 6.8 percent for housing and the environment, 6.0 percent for public welfare, 4.0 percent for hospitals and health. We are not overspending in our battle against social disorder and personal violence.

But of course spending is the least of our problem in the arena of crime prevention. To see just how pitiful our efforts against interpersonal violence have been, let's look back briefly at events here in Washington, our capital city. They are representative of developments in many other places across the country. I would begin by reminding you that behind the lipservice being paid to crime fighting now that we are in the midst of an emergency, as recently as early 1987 our D.C. Council and Mayor passed new legislation that cut the sentences served by prison inmates to levels well below the minimum period ordered by the presiding judge. Under the new law, which is the regimen currently in place, a prisoner serving, for instance, a court-ordered minimum sentence of 5 years for robbery can have his term reduced 60 percent for "good behavior" and be released after serving two years and one month. (Nearly all inmates are currently being qualified for "good behavior.")

At about this same time that it was trivializing criminal sentencing the city government staged a day-long drug summit that involved 2,000 persons and cost \$93,000. This conclave generated 151 official recommendations for how the District should combat drug abuse. Among them were a call for urine testing for school age children, a limitation of the use of sugar (which was described as a "dangerous drug" because of its effect on the human body), a call for recognition that racism is a "fundamental

cause" of drug abuse and establishment of more childhood education on racism's effects, and a novel call for city payments of \$20,000 to every black man in the District on the grounds that it would be less costly to pay black men to avoid drugs than it is to incarcerate them.

Today, the dithering is somewhat less tragi-comic, but we still have not put forth a serious, clear-eyed response to the city's drug and murder epidemic. The strongest measures instituted so far are a temporary extension of the police work week to 6 days (which will expire shortly for lack of funding); a weak, temporary (90 day) curfew for youth; an unworkable anti-loitering measure, also temporary; and a temporary pretrial detention bill which makes it somewhat easier for the city to hold accused persons charged with firearms violations in the commission of a felony (due to lapse at the end of the year). And even these lukewarm measures have been resisted by some local officials, by a variety of special interests, by the American Civil Liberties Union, and others. Secretary William J. Bennett recently pointed out the sad bottom line for our bloodied and frightened city: of the 43,000 people arrested in the District in recent months, only 1,400 are now in jail. The rest are out there doing their thing.

#### "KIDS NEED ORDER"---CRIME AS A PRE-EMINENT CHILDREN'S ISSUE

Crime does not wash over all Americans equally. It particularly terrorizes the weakest and most vulnerable among us. America's 64 million children---half of them living in cities, one-quarter of them coming home after school to a house

containing no parent, a fifth living in low income households, all of them physically frail and incompletely formed in character---these are the individuals who suffer most when law and order decays. Children need order. Aside from love there is nothing they need more than order.

Yet, somehow, we have failed miserably to insulate our children from even the grossest criminal activity. It seems especially incongruous to me that none---not one---of the self-styled children's defense organizations have identified public order as an issue of preeminent importance to the young. Why no outcry for tougher laws, tougher sentencing, more police and prison space, safer schools, and fewer drugs from those who claim to speak on behalf of children?

Law and order is often presented as a "conservative" issue, but today there is a powerful "bleeding heart" justification for getting tough on crime---on child welfare grounds. Physical safety and psychological security are the essential foundations for a child's health, education and overall development. A good school, an accessible doctor, a rich library, a 15 percent increase in the Head Start budget are of little use to a child sharing an apartment with his mother's abusive, violent, drug-selling boyfriend. Millions of American children are now haunted by mean streets. It is time to compile a new list of "the children's issues," and to put crime reduction at the top.