

## The Rising Tide of Juvenile

### Violence in America.

Specific Purpose - To show the rise in juvenile violence in America.

Central Idea - Juvenile violence has been on the rise for the last twenty years.

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

Bang! Bang your dead were the words that echoed during my era as young boys played cops and robbers or imaginary games of war. In these games when a player was shot a quick count to twenty would bring him back to life with another chance to be victorious, however over the past twenty years our youth have become involved in a more serious activity - namely juvenile violence. These make believe games with toy guns have been replaced with real crimes using real guns and leaving real victims.

**Today I want to speak to you about the rising tide of juvenile violence in America over the past twenty years and why it matters to all of us; in doing so I will cover four main points.**

1. First of all what is the definition of a juvenile?
2. Secondly have juveniles become more violent over the past twenty years?
3. What has caused this change in behavior?
4. Finally how has their violent behavior affected society?

To cover this topic we must define who makes up this juvenile class, which brings me to my first point.

#### **BODY:**

##### **--- What is the definition of a juvenile?**

According Indiana law **31-9-2-13 found at Access Indiana** a juvenile is defined as

- (1) A person who is less than eighteen (18) years of age.
- (2) A person who is eighteen (18), nineteen (19), or twenty (20) years of age; and who either is charged with a delinquent act committed before the person's eighteenth

birthday; or has been adjudicated a child in need of services before the person's eighteenth birthday.

- (3) A person who is alleged to have committed an act that would have been murder if committed by an adult and who was less than eighteen (18) years of age at the time of the alleged act.

----- So take away all the legal jargon and in most cases a juvenile is someone under the age of eighteen who commits an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult. Now that we know who makes up this classification we can move to the second point.

**---- Have Juveniles of today become more violent?**

-----Over the past twenty years juvenile crime has risen at an alarming rate, much faster than adult crime. Prior to 1980, children and young adults spent much of their time playing baseball, tag, and make believe war games. However today they are robbing convenience stores, breaking into homes, and committing murder at an alarming rate.

-----Statistics show a 75 percent increase in juvenile arrest for violent crimes which include murder, rape, robbery, and assault, between 1984 and 1994 according to **E. Brown who wrote the book entitled Playground or Battleground?**

-----Not much attention was given to the rise in juvenile crime until the high profile school shootings in Paducah, Kentucky and Littleton, Colorado however most of the school related violence occurred between 1996 and 1999, while the rise in violent juvenile crime began in 1984.

-----While these numbers are startling, even more incredible is the fact that female offenders committed a large number of these violent crimes. Between 1985 and 1994, there was a 125 percent increase in the number of female juveniles arrested for violent crimes according to **Peters & Peters who wrote the article in Corrections Today entitled Violent Adolescent Females.**

----- These violent crimes are not just occurring in other places. In Marion, Indiana on January 5, 2003 police officers were called to a homicide scene where a defenseless grandmother had been brutally stabbed and murdered. The investigation showed the grandmother's 13 year old

granddaughter had convinced her 18 year old friend to kill her grandmother because she was mad at her for reading her diary. The investigation also showed that this same granddaughter had in the past tried to unsuccessfully poison her grandmother.

----- Not only are females committing these heinous crimes but also they are taking a more active role in criminal gang activity and in many cases assuming leadership roles.

----- Information from the **Office of Juvenile Justice** shows that between 1987 and 1994 the Violent Crime Index arrest rate more than doubled for females while increasing 64% for males. However, declines since the mid-1990's have brought the rate in 2000 below the 1980 rate for males, but not for females. The 2000 arrest rate for females remained 66% above the 1980 rate.

----- On the positive side recent numbers seem to indicate a small decrease in violent crimes involving juveniles. According to the **Federal Bureau of Investigations** between 1995 and 1999, the overall number of arrests for violent crimes decreased by 3 percent, with the number of juvenile arrest down by 9 percent. But even with this in mind the arrest rates for juvenile offenders are much higher than they were twenty years ago which should make us ask the question what has happened to cause such violent behavior in our youth.

**----This brings me to my third point what has caused this change in behavior.**

-----Most likely there is not a single reason why a child turns violent. It could be a combination of poor parenting skills, little or no supervision, and improper peer pressure.

----- Probably the single greatest reason can be found in the absence of one or both parents. According to the **Bureau of Justice Statistics** in 1999 an estimated 721,500 State and Federal prisoners were parents to 1,498,800 children under the age of 18. That number of children is nearly one and half times the size of the population of the city of Indianapolis. Twenty (22%) percent of those minor children were under the age of 5.

-----Prior to being admitted to prison less than half of the parents in State prison reported living with their

children - 44% of the fathers and 64% of the mothers. As a police officer today I am arresting or dealing with the children of those parents that I placed in jail when I first began my career eighteen years ago.

-----It is easy to see why some children choose a life of crime when you consider a child's life is like clay that has yet to be molded into a beautiful vessel. Just like in the process used to create the final product, many instruments are used to mold a child's behavior such as strong parental guidance, positive peer influence, and a healthy living and learning environment. Many of these children lack this molding and nurturing in their lives.

-----Perhaps another cause of the rise in juvenile violence is the over exposure to violent movies and video games that may cause a child that already has violent tendencies to act out his/her fantasies.

-----Such may have been the case in Marion on September 24, 2004 when one 18 year old male and one 17 year old male decided to rob a local business by gunpoint. During this crime the suspects duct taped one employee while holding a loaded shotgun on him. The suspects admitted that they are avid players of violent video games involving both murder and robbery. That in fact some of the techniques they used to commit the robbery were from a game they had recently played.

----- According to **Psychologist Craig Anderson** often these children are exposed to influences like violent video games and movies that can desensitize them to death. Quoting Mr. Anderson he said "In the short run, playing a violent video game appears to affect aggression by priming aggressive thoughts". Both Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the students who terrorized Columbine High School on April 20, 1999, were avid players of violent video games.

----- Although it is impossible to determine if these games played a part in their actions, Anderson's study showed a strong correlation between playing violent games and aggressive behavior.

----- **Lt. Col. David Grossman**, author of the book ON KILLING and former West Point psychology professor worked with the communities of Paducah, Kentucky and Springfield, Oregon after the school shooting there. He was also on the scene after the shooting in Jonesboro, Arkansas where two

boys, 11 and 13 killed four students and a teacher. He was quoted in the **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette** as comparing the effects of video games to the military's efforts to reduce a young recruit's reluctance to kill. In interactive point and shoot video games, children are taught the motor skills of killing in a process that makes killing a reflexive response according to Grossman.

----- Most likely there is no single reason for this change in behavior, and in reality it may be a combination of things already mentioned; whatever the reason/s it causing a high toll on our children and society which brings me to my final point.

#### The Cost of Juvenile Violence

----- It is impossible to estimate the emotional cost juvenile violence has on the victim and his/her family; however the financial cost is just as overwhelming.

-----In 1994 the estimated cost of all violent crimes in Pennsylvania exceeded \$11.6 billion. To give you an idea of just how much money this is, according to **Access Indiana** the General Fund for the State of Indiana for the fiscal year 2004 is \$11.4 billion. Juvenile crime comprised nearly \$5.4 billion or approximately 47% of the \$11.6 billion spent in Pennsylvania according to **Miller, Fisher and Cohen authors of the Costs of Juvenile Violence an article in the Pediatrics journal.**

-----A 1998 study by Mark Cohen (1999) stated that the average cost to society for a juvenile offender who spends ten years of his/her life in crime is more than \$1.5 million. This study was based on four years as a juvenile offender and six years as an adult offender. These costs included the damages incurred by the victim and the cost to handle the cases in the juvenile justice system. Not included in the total is the loss of future doctors, lawyers, factory workers and other skilled laborers who, because of one violent act, never realized their potential.

In conclusion

---- I have given you the definition of a juvenile?

-----I have given you information showing the increase in juvenile violence over the past twenty years.

-----I have listed some possible reasons for the change in behavior.

-----And finally I have showed you how their violent behavior has affected society?

But before I close I want to leave you with one final thought for those of you who may still be asking how this affects me.

----- In early 1992 I was assigned to the Detective Division of the Marion Police Department. I can remember getting a call late in the evening and hearing the voice on the other end of the phone say we need you to report to work there has been a shooting. You can not imagine the horror I felt to find out the victim was a 19 month old baby and the suspect was a 17 year old young man.

----- Unfortunately I do not have the time to give you all the details but I can give you a brief snapshot of what happened.

----- The baby was standing in the bathroom with his mother when a bullet came tearing through the wall and into his tiny head. The suspect and his two friends were target practicing with a gun that they had in their possession to protect them from rival gang members.

----- Unfortunately the target that was hit was a 19 month old innocent baby. Today somewhere there is a mother that does not have a child because he became a victim of a senseless act. There was also a mother that loss her child who spent the next 7 years in jail and then there is the young suspect that must live the rest of his life knowing that he took the life of a child.

----- I don't know about you but it is my hope some day the only sound of Bang! Bang! That we hear are those of our children playing make believe games of Cops and Robbers!