

Running Head: JUVENILE

The Rising Tide of Juvenile
Violence in America.

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Abstract

This report covers the increase of juvenile violence, the causes of this increase, the effects this increase has had on society, and possible ways to stop the violence. Included in this report is statistical information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of Juvenile Justice, Pediatrics, and American Psychological Association's (APA) Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. The statistical information given in this report shows a dramatic increase in juvenile violence over the past fifteen years. Also stated are some of the potential causes for this increase, associated costs, and the different measures some states are taking to combat this issue.

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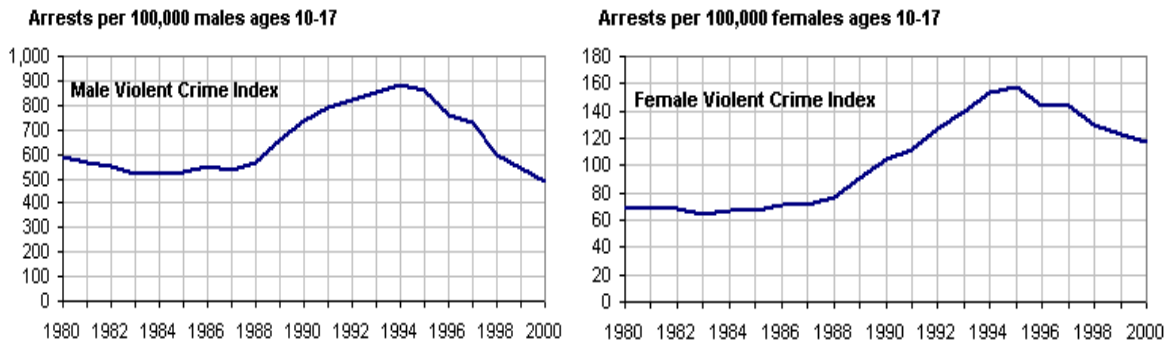
Over the past twenty years juvenile crime has risen at an alarming rate, much faster than adult crime. Prior to 1980, children and young adults spent much of their time playing baseball and tag. However today they are robbing convenience stores and breaking into homes. Have juveniles of today become more violent? What has caused this change in behavior? How has their violent behavior affected society, and what can be done to stop this spiraling trend? Have Juveniles become more violent?

Statistics show a 75 percent increase in juvenile arrest for violent crimes between 1984 and 1994 (Brown, 2000). Violent crimes are those crimes such as murder, rape, robbery, and assault. Not much attention was given to the rise in juvenile crime until the recent 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 (Peters & Peters, 1998). 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.

In 2000, the juvenile male arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses was 4.2 times the rate for females. 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 (117) remained 66% above the 1980 rate (70). The 2000 rate for males (492) was 16% below the 1980 rate (587). (Office of Juvenile Justice, 2000).



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On the positive side recent numbers seem to indicate a decrease in violent crimes. 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 (FBI,p.211).

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. Or perhaps being exposed to violent movies and video games can cause a juvenile to act out his/her fantasies.

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 learning environment. Perhaps the major element missing in those children who commit a violent act is their lack of sensitivity towards others (Brown, 2000). Often these children are exposed to influences like violent video games and movies that can desensitize them to death. Psychologist Craig Anderson (2000) said. "In the short run, playing a violent video game appears to affect aggression by priming

aggressive thoughts" (n.p). 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.

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. Juvenile crime comprised nearly \$5.4 billion or approximately 47 percent of the total cost (Miller, Fisher, Cohen). 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.

What is the Answer

So what is the answer to curbing this violent trend? No one has a silver bullet that will completely rid society of the problem of violence. However most states throughout the country are trying to come up with answers to stop the trend of violent behavior. California voters believe the answers lie in holding the offender responsible for his/her actions. They recently passed a referendum which requires all juveniles 14 years or older to be tried as adults, if they are charged with murder or certain sex offenses. In taking a different approach the Texas Legislature increased funding for the state agency that oversees juvenile crime programs (Rich, 2000). In July of 2000 the Indianapolis City-County Council passed an ordinance that would restrict minors from playing violent or sexually explicit video games in arcades (Indianapolis..., 2000).

Conclusion

Statistics have shown a drastic rise in juvenile violence over the past 15 years. The children of the past decade have been exposed to an ever-increasing amount of violence by way of television, video games and the world around them. It is estimated that the average child watches

about 3 ½ hours of television each day (Radio WBCL, March 2002). That is the equivalent of one day per week or nearly fifty-two days per year. In that time they are exposed to countless numbers of violent acts.

While no one knows for sure what causes a seemingly normal child to turn violent, or what programs can stop this cycle of violence, one thing is certain; this problem will not simply go away without a combined effort from the parents, government agencies, and the juvenile offenders.

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