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Youth violence : a comprehensive literature review

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Youth violence : a comprehensive literature review

Abstract

Over the last decade a great deal of literature has been focused on the subject of youth violence. For this paper, youth violence is defined as elementary and adolescent-aged boys and girls who commit violent acts. These include: the use of physical force to produce injury or death to others, gang fighting, hate crimes, sexual and/or physical assault, bringing and/or using weapons at school, and aggressive behavior used as a means to gain a certain outcome.

Many studies have been conducted focusing on several dynamics involved in this complicated issue. The focus of the present work was primarily to: review published literature, become more informed about the issue, and identify the prominent underlying themes. A secondary purpose was to find some possible explanations for the recent epidemic of school shootings, especially those involving youths who do not seem to fit the typical profile for committing violent behavior. This review covers topics such as: theoretical perspectives, gender and ethnic related differences, traditional and other hidden risk factors, and elements, which buffer the effects of violence. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are given for prevention and intervention strategies, based on the literature.

YOUTH VIOLENCE: A COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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Amy L. Licht

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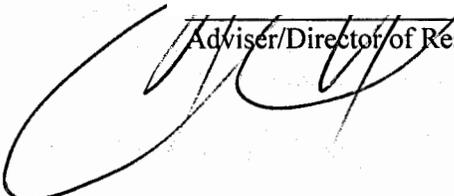
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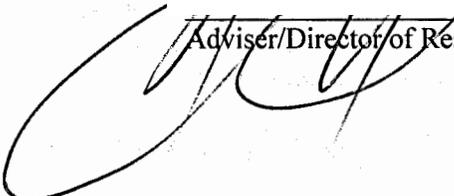
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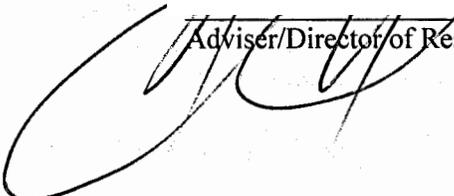
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Abstract

Over the last decade a great deal of literature has been focused on the subject of youth violence. For this paper, youth violence is defined as elementary and adolescent-aged boys and girls who commit violent acts. These include: the use of physical force to produce injury or death to others, gang fighting, hate crimes, sexual and/or physical assault, bringing and/or using weapons at school, and aggressive behavior used as a means to gain a certain outcome. Many studies have been conducted focusing on several dynamics involved in this complicated issue. The focus of the present work was primarily to: review published literature, become more informed about the issue, and identify the prominent underlying themes. A secondary purpose was to find some possible explanations for the recent epidemic of school shootings, especially those involving youths who do not seem to fit the typical profile for committing violent behavior. This review covers topics such as: theoretical perspectives, gender and ethnic related differences, traditional and other hidden risk factors, and elements, which buffer the effects of violence. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are given for prevention and intervention strategies, based on the literature.

Youth Violence: A Comprehensive Literature Review

Some of the literature reviewed was discussed from two distinct frameworks. The developmental-ecological perspective was explored in much of the research. This construct evaluates adolescent behavior as it develops in accordance with the corresponding social environments in the family, school, peer group and community. Addressing youth violence as a public health issue made up the second unique construct in much of the literature. This approach offered an array of interventive and preventive strategies and resources to address the problem of youth violence. It also sought to coordinate a multidisciplinary approach from a variety of professionals who would offer beneficial expertise from their perspective fields (Elliott, Hamburg & Williams, 1998).

Ecological Model

The ecological model demonstrated there is a relationship between living things and their environment. In this case, adolescents both affect and are affected by their environment which includes their home life, peers, school, community and the larger society they are exposed to through the media, news, internet, movies and other sources of entertainment, etc. One article by Melissa Jonson-Reid (1998) divided these aspects into an understandable three-system framework.

The first is the microsystem, which involves exposure to violence within the home. Second, the mesosystem includes violence within the community.

Finally, the exosystem refers to violence exposure through the media, war, or psychological violence due to racism, lower socioeconomic opportunities for certain people, and a cultural acceptance of violence as part of human nature (Jonson-Reid, 1998). She used this framework to look at the relationships children have between violence and the experiences of maltreatment, domestic and community violence.

Jonson-Reid concluded that there were distinct relationships between child maltreatment and delinquent behavior. She found a similar relationship between community violence and the development of violent behavior in adolescence. There was a smaller relationship between media violence and aggressive behaviors among children (Jonson-Reid, 1998). Another author, Mark Fraser studied this ecological perspective with specific emphasis placed on the family's role, the microsystem.

According to Fraser (1986), the microsystem involved several important familial processes, which if they occur, have a critical effect on children's early development. He stated that aggression was reinforced in some families where there was: inconsistent parental supervision, harsh punishment, a failure to set limits, neglect in praising positive behavior, and a coercive style of parent-child interaction. This reinforcement of aggression was transferred from minor opposition in the child to increasingly serious noncompliance and aggressive behavior if interventions were not implemented. This may also generalize from

home to school Fraser explained (1996). Considering the fact that these aggressive, non-compliant behaviors are transferred outside the home to other environments, along with many other influential forces such as the media industry, youth violence should be considered a public health issue.

Public Health Model

Elliott et al. (1998) explained the public health model which involved the following steps to reach its prevention goals: (a) a community-based approach to identify the problem and develop a set of solutions for a variety of populations; (b) health-event surveillance in gathering descriptive data to establish the nature of the problem and to track the trends of its incidence and prevalence; also to track the risk factors; (c) an analysis of the epidemic to assess the magnitude, characteristics, and impact of the health problems on communities and the different populations groups; (d) based on the data, interventions are designed to address the specific problems in the differing populations as well as evaluate the efficacy of them; (e) disseminating information to the public about the problem and interventions. This model offers a practical, goal-oriented approach to come up with a set of answers to address different groups on different contexts as Elliot and his associates explained (1998).

Elliot et al. (1998) stated this approach has been positively effective in addressing smoking and lung cancer as well as other important health issues. Incidentally, there has been a decrease in the amount of lung cancer deaths and

heart disease credited to the successful public health approach. The anti-smoking campaign has been credited with reducing an estimated 1.6 million smoking-related deaths between the years of 1964-1992. Therefore, the approach seems appropriate for addressing deaths and violence related to the youth of our country.

Incidentally, this literature review brought to light a steady rise in numbers of violent crime committed by youths, which illustrates the crucial need for a comprehensive societal approach. In 1991, people between the ages of 10-24 years represented 55% of all the arrests for murder in the United States (Lowery et al., as cited in Elliott, et al., 1998). The growth of this violence challenges society to a large-scale recognition of the problem. Incidentally, violence is not just occurring in low-income, inner city communities; it has spread to communities and school systems of higher socioeconomic status as illustrated in the Columbine episode. Gender and ethnic dynamics are an important element to consider in the scope of the youth violence epidemic.

Gender and Ethnic Dynamics

Many research studies have analyzed how gender and ethnicity factor into youth violence. The studies called for more specialized and individualized prevention efforts with respect to the differences between males, females and several ethnic populations who are committing violent acts. The inherent differences between these groups warrant special attention and consideration before implementing prevention and intervention programs.

Gender Dynamics

Literature revealed several factors that pertain to gender differences in attitudes toward and experiencing violence. Sibylle Artz and Ted Riecken (1997) collected data from surveys of students and their families, their educators, and many community members. They concluded that as a part of one's life experiences, the nature of violence that one encounters is affected largely by one's gender. For example, boys experience more violence than girls do, and many girls' experiences with violence are more sexually based in nature and occur in their homes. The authors also found that boys seemed to accept violence more readily than girls. This tolerance may be a result of the modeling of violent behavior they see so often in their immediate environment. Boys see violence as less of a problem due to the aggression they encounter in sports and recreational activities. There is an emphasis placed on physically aggressive behavior being more acceptable for boys than for girls, as the Artz and Reicken explained. They are also less likely to be involved in violence prevention and are more resistant to changing their attitudes and beliefs compared to girls.

Theorists such as Gilligan (1990, as cited in Artz & Reicken, 1997), argue that females seem to have a greater willingness to participate in prevention programs than boys, possibly because of their higher level of unselfishness and desire to promote positive interpersonal relationships. The findings of this article suggest that practitioners need to consider the very different ways in which males

and females usually experience violence, and the different treatment approaches this might call for (Artz & Riecken, 1997).

Ellickson, Saner and McGuigan (1997) looked at the differences between male and female violent behavior in general. In this study, violent behavior, substance use, school status, academic orientation and mental health and delinquency were measured. They concluded that boys were found to be more likely to commit violent acts. However, girls were just as likely to strike out at family members as boys were. Teenage girls also showed different patterns of coexisting problems such as poor mental health, becoming pregnant, and dropping out of school, according to the authors. These conclusions were consistent with the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders' (1994) features of conduct disorder as it is much more common in males than females. The types of conduct disorder symptoms exhibited by males, which were different than female symptoms was substantiated in the DSM-IV. Females with conduct disorder tend to lie, run away, exhibit truancy and prostitution whereas, males are more likely to steal, vandalize, and display confrontational aggressive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Ellickson et al. (1997) estimated that many of the youth in their sample population could be described as "multiple-problem youth," as violent boys exhibited problems such as selling drugs and committing felony crimes. The

authors provided profiles of this particular sample of violent teenagers, which included characteristics such as the following:

They were 10 times as likely to sell drugs, 8 times as likely to commit nonviolent felonies, between 2 and 3 times as likely to be weekly users of alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana; to have tried cocaine; or to be polydrug users, about 2 times as likely to be dropouts and to have low academic orientation, and about 1.5 times as likely to have poor mental health or to be problem drug users 9 (Ellickson et al., 1997, p. 987).

This particular profile is similar to the criteria listed for antisocial personality disorder in the DSM-IV. When one considers the sample population in this study, it is very likely that the behaviors they exhibited could continue over the age of 18 years. If this happened, they would then, be considered antisocial individuals in nature.

The authors advocated for more individualized programming and prevention efforts with respect to the gender of the offender. Ellickson et al. (1997) called for more programs to address specific issues for females including unplanned pregnancy and poor mental health. For males, programs would concentrate more on the need to intervene and prevent in areas of drug selling, use and abuse of drugs, and felony crimes. They also concluded that future programming should consider the broader public health context in which violence

occurs. Another study by Christine Jackson and Vangie Foshee (1998) looked at differences in between males and females relating violence with parenting styles.

Jackson and Foshee (1998) looked for a relationship between two elements of parenting styles (demandingness and responding), and violence-related behaviors in 9th and 10th grade adolescent males and females. These behaviors included: hitting with a fist, beating up someone of the same gender and age, bringing a gun to school, and threatening to use a weapon against someone of the same gender and age. "Parental responding," referred to being affectionate and accepting, providing support and comfort, and being involved in children's social and academic development. "Demandingness" referred to setting and enforcing clear rules for behavior, monitoring and supervising a child's activities and providing structure in a child's daily life.

Jackson and Foshee conducted a survey with students from several middle schools and high schools in North Carolina. The results supported one hypothesis measuring for behavior differences between males and females. The style of "parental responding" and level of "demandingness" a parent displayed was associated more strongly with the violence-related behaviors of their female children than male children, according to authors (Jackson & Foshee, 1998). The researchers concluded that there might be significant gender differences in how family socialization processes influence whether and in what way adolescents engage in violence-related behaviors (1998).

The authors noted limitations of this study, which included needing a more thorough assessment to include the frequency and duration of violence-related behaviors. They also only focused on adolescents from two-parent households which, neglected African American adolescents from single-parent households (Jackson & Foshee, 1998). The following article did try to incorporate more ethnic diversity in its study.

Ethnic Dynamics

Paschall, Ennett, and Flewelling (1996) looked at both African American and White adolescent males and the relationship between family characteristics and violent behavior. The purpose of their study was to understand why violence occurred more so among black male adolescents than their white male peers. The subjects were 7th and 8th graders who filled out questionnaires on fighting behavior in the past year and the past month. Paschall et al. focused on the differences in family structure (single-parent or broken homes), family stress and conflict, attachment to parents (level of communication, supervision and parental control), and how these are all related to violent behavior for these particular subjects.

The results suggested that family stress and conflict was associated with fighting behavior among black and white male adolescents. Black males seemed to have been exposed to more risk factors for violent behavior including living in a single-parent household that had higher levels of family stress and conflict

(Paschall et al., 1996). Both groups reported similar instances of fighting during the past year. However, the black adolescents were more likely than their white peers to report attacking someone or being attacked by someone at school during the prior month. Living in a broken home or single parent family put black males at a higher risk for committing violent behavior, while the level of attachment a white male had with his parents seemed to deter the amount of violent behavior he engaged in, according to the authors.

These results, the authors concluded, supported the important part the family plays in understanding violent behavior between young black and white males (Paschall et al., 1996). The results give support to aiming violence prevention programs toward black males who experience father absences and family stress and conflict. Adult male mentors may be helpful in preventing and/or reducing violent behavior among black males the authors suggested. This study demonstrated clear differences in violent behavior between black and white males as related to family characteristics.

Another study by Deborah Gorman-Smith and Patrick Tolan (1998), sampled a group of 245 fifth and seventh grade African American and Latino males. Their caregivers were also included in the sample and all were from economically disadvantaged, inner city, Chicago neighborhoods. Gorman-Smith and Tolan studied the relationship between exposure to violence, family relationship characteristics, parenting practices, and aggressive and depressive

symptoms. This longitudinal data was collected through interviews one year apart from each other (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998). The results showed that being exposed to community violence was related to increases in aggressive behavior and depression over the one-year period. This confirmed the concern that exposure to high rates of violence can promote or foster aggression, anxiety and depression in inner-city youth. The sample size was small for this study so generalizing it to other populations such as females and other ethnic groups may be questionable (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998). However, it does give preliminary results, which should be expanded and researched in the future.

Traditional and Hidden Risk Factors Linked to Violence

When young people commit crimes, such as the school shootings that have occurred over the past several years, the first source that is looked to for an explanation is the family. Although this area usually impacts children negatively if the family unit is chaotic and unstable, there are exceptions. Why do some children who grow up in homes with high levels of conflict refrain from becoming violent in their lives? What is more intriguing is the question of why do children who grow up in seemingly stable, well-to do-families become violent? One reason may be the existence of hidden risk factors. Professionals need to look at all the potential risk factors, traditional and newly evolving ones to begin to explain the causal factors. Deborah Capaldi and Gerald Patterson (1996) considered some of the traditional factors that put children at risk for committing

violence and some of the newly emerging “hidden” factors relating to parental influences and the home environment.

Parenting Styles

Family background, parenting styles and childhood development and characteristics were areas of study for many researchers. Capaldi and Patterson’s study (1996) in particular compared violent and nonviolent adolescents who had histories of arrests. These authors hypothesized that there would be no difference in family background and management styles. This data was confirmed according to Capaldi and Patterson. Nonviolent and violent offenders came from the same background. The results of this study were consistent with prior research findings stating, “the causes of aggression and violence must be essentially the same as the causes of persistent and extreme antisocial, delinquent, and criminal behavior” (Farrington, 1991 p. 25, as cited in Capaldi & Patterson, 1996, p. 227).

A model that is referred to as the “coercion model” was also confirmed from this study. It stated that family members inadvertently reinforce a child’s coercive and antisocial behavior. Negative reinforcement occurs when a parent makes a request, the child responds negatively, and the parent backs down and gives in to the child. Effective discipline is not used to weaken these behaviors (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996). Coercive or power-assertive discipline strategies include yelling, scolding, threatening, restricting privileges and physical punishment (Gecas, 1979; Gecas & Nye, 1974; Kohn, 1977; Sears, Macoby &

Levin, 1957, as cited in Heimer, 1997). Ervin Staub (1996) also examined coercive family styles and the socialization experiences children have which generate youth violence.

Staub (1996) stated that the pattern of parental practices and the totality of the child's experiences in the home and the surrounding world forms the child and shapes his/her aggressiveness in general. Previous research indicates that a lack of nurturance, neglect, rejection, abuse, harsh treatment, lack of structure and guidance, observation of violence, and coercive family styles all can contribute to a child's development of aggressive behavior and violence (Staub, 1996; Capaldi & Patterson, 1996; Jackson & Foshee, 1998).

The condition of parents' lives also affects their styles of parenting, which indirectly affects the child. Staub (1996) indicated that the level of attachment to mothers by infants and economic and employment problems by fathers all dictate the parenting practices employed by parents. Parenting is also affected by the conception of maleness in society, the author explained. In the United States men have always been expected to be strong, tough and powerful. In addition, Staub made clear that stressors such as feelings of helplessness related to difficult life conditions, changes in sex roles and gender relations, may all ultimately affect male identity and patterns of parenting.

Parents whose needs are not fulfilled successfully show different and more negative parenting styles. They exhibit reduced patience and tolerance,

harshness, which leads to a negative socialization of their children (Staub, 1996).

These elements have been connected to aggressive development in children.

June Chisholm (1998) discussed the link between parental child abuse and its long-lasting effects. Although research has not established a definitive link between children with a history of child abuse who commit violent acts later in life, there is a considerable amount of evidence that suggests the effects are severe and last indefinitely Chisholm explained. Abused children tend to be more aggressive than their peers do and have more behavior problems and psychopathology, the author explained. The presence or absence of emotional neglect, family criminality, a support system, and the sex of the abusing parent, and parental style of conflict resolution, are all important for understanding the relationship between child abuse and subsequent violent criminal behavior (Kruttschnitt, Ward, & Sheble, 1987, as cited in Chisholm, 1998).

Hidden Risk Factors

Chisholm (1998) also described a unique nontraditional perspective on parenting that implicates every family and every parent as being responsible for transmitting violence to their children, not just dysfunctional families or parents known to have abused their children. An illustration of this may be child-rearing practices that do not classify as abuse, but are detrimental to the development of the child. For example, Chisholm explained that certain parental attitudes and customs stifle the child's expression of anger, hurt, humiliation, frustration and

other negative emotions. These are often powerful implicitly stated family rules that allow only certain feelings to be expressed and inhibit the expression of others.

Other Traditional and Predisposing Risk Factors to Violence

Research has varied somewhat when discussing what predicts delinquent behavior in youths. There are many factors that put children at risk for committing violence. These and the other less well-known factors can be categorized into individual, family, peer/school and environment/neighborhood groups. Research by Jo Webber (1997), Tony Crespi (1996), and Jennifer Friday (1995) all described their respective ideas of predisposing risk factors.

According to Webber (1997), the chance of youths becoming violent depends largely on a combination of social and personal factors. The family factors he included were economic status, parental drug abuse, divorce and family conflict, abuse of family members, and unskilled parents. Tony Crespi (1996) also echoed the role family conflict, dysfunction and parental attitudes play in the epidemic of youth violence. The individual factors Webber stated consisted of the person exhibiting: a difficult temperament, early antisocial behavior, failure in school, depression and other mental disorders, and drug abuse. Discriminatory educational opportunities, media coverage of violence and easy access to firearms were the society, associated factors (Webber, 1997).

In her article (1995), Jennifer Friday examined substance abuse committed by both parents and their children. This occurred especially in neighborhoods where selling drugs was pervasive. Substance abuse can result in the early onset of antisocial behavior and aggression, she explained. Other elements she included as risk factors were children who are placed outside the home in foster care, and families who move frequently from neighborhood to neighborhood. Inappropriate friendships between peers can also foster the development of violent behavior in children, Friday explained.

When children associate with other delinquent drug-dealing people, get involved in gangs, or maybe are rejected by non-delinquent peers, they often are at high risk for committing crimes. This is especially true in poor communities where gang activity is present Friday stated. Additionally, in cases where children are victims themselves of abuse or violent crimes they are often more prone to behaving violently.

Linda Dahlberg (1998) identified in her study, other individual factors that contribute to violent behavior in youths. She explained that children who develop belief systems, which support aggressive behavior and a deficit in the area of information-processing and social problem solving skills, also contribute to aggressive violent behavior. She also pointed out the fact that an early pattern of aggressive behavior seems to be stable over time and across generations. Other risk factors she described which have yet to be mentioned included parents who

fail to monitor their children and give appropriate supervision. Dahlberg described certain school practices, which have been implicated in fostering poor peer group interactions. An example of this is known as “ability tracking” which puts academically poor students and those with disruptive behavioral patterns together in classrooms, allowing them to socialize and increasing negative peer interactions. Incidentally, placing children in these ability groups Dahlberg described, only reinforces feelings of anger, rejection and alienation, which can lead to academic failure and even more of a predisposition to behaving aggressively or violently. Finally, Dahlberg named community disorganization as another important part contributing to violent behavior in youths. These types of neighborhoods lack effective social controls, which are based on positive common values and norms. Hence, there is little community collaboration and productive involvement in the battle against violence.

Protective Features

The previously mentioned authors also discussed factors, which serve to buffer some of the effects of witnessing or committing violent acts. Jonson-Reid (1998) and Crespi (1996) stated that resiliency is a trait, which often helps children rebound from or rise above negative risk factors. This resiliency helps children resource internal or external protective factors that are available to them. Paschall (1996) stated that for white males, the level of attachment to parents is more protective for this population than it is for black males. The Group for the

Advancement of Psychiatry (1999), which is a professional establishment of psychiatrists who address the issue of youth violence, named several other features that serve to protect against these risk factors. These include: good intelligence; an easy disposition; the ability to get along well with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers; little family and/or parental discord; an ability to be successful in school and to have friends; to possess social skills; and having a good relationship with at least one parent or other significant adult. Additionally, if adults in the community show support and concern for all children, this too serves as a protective factor. Having good schools that emphasize academic success, responsibility, and self-discipline is also important (The Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1999). Finally, Jennifer Friday (1995) named several protective mechanisms that for some reason often keep children out of trouble. They include: a strong attachment to parents, parents who are profitably employed, safe neighborhoods, appropriate and consistent discipline and proper parental supervision, and lastly, children who have life goals that are supported by parents, teachers and friends.

Multiple Professionals and Intervention and Prevention Approaches

Based on the literature there were two key themes that emerged for future program recommendations. These included both preventive and interventive efforts for addressing violence behavior. One specific intervention theme was to begin to address youth violence through a collaborative effort from multiple

disciplines of professionals (Sheras, Cornell, & Bostain, 1996). Another fundamental theme was to aim programs and services at assisting not only the perpetrator or victim of violence, but at entire families, schools, and members of the community. These programs offered services to schools, teachers and administrators, to the youth directly involved with the violent act as well as his/her parents, and the community as a whole. To illustrate research supporting the first theme, there are many professionals who taken a more active role in addressing the problems of youth violence.

Multiple Profession Approach

The Virginia Youth Violence Project was created to disseminate psychological knowledge to those who deal directly with the problems of youth violence (Sheras, Cornell, & Bostain, 1996). The information was transmitted by a multidisciplinary team to participants from multiple professional backgrounds including social services, mental health, correctional settings, school teachers, administrators and other educators, public administrators, parents and local business leaders from the community. This project delivered outreach courses and training programs to over 1000 participants in Virginia and it generated many prevention programs throughout the state, according to the authors. The team was composed of law enforcement personnel, legal experts, high-level school administrators and specialists of various areas including psychologists. Communication was strengthened between professionals and collaboration in

addressing youth violence problems was established through programs and future research projects. It also proposed the inspiration of sharing resources and ideas to address the issues (Sheras et al., 1996). Thus, the project began a new useful approach in addressing youth violence from a multifaceted perspective.

Intervention and Prevention Approaches

Many prevention programs previously implemented address not just the youth as an individual, but also the ecological-developmental perspective where youths interact and are affected by the whole environment including peers, family, and local and national society. In the case of school violence, authors Laub and Lauritsen took an in-depth look at people in their contexts and asserted their behavior is the product of their individual development and social contexts including the family, school and neighborhood (as cited in Elliott, Hamburg & Williams, 1998). These authors also concluded from reviewing literature that school violence is largely dependent on neighborhood and family conditions. The organization and management of schools also affects school violence levels. Therefore, understanding and controlling school violence also necessitates a multilevel professional approach, which includes the community, family, and schools.

In terms of the broad perspective of youth violence, a particular group of psychiatric professionals gathered in 1999 to form a committee for the prevention of youth violence specifically addressing the relationship between firearms and

youth violence. A unique circle of psychiatric professionals, this group convened and took it upon themselves to investigate specific elements such as weaponry, in terms of areas to begin approaching the epidemic of youth violence.

According to the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (1999), the United States gives unparalleled access to firearms. A statistic was presented which stated that more U.S. teenagers die from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes combined. Guns also take on a special meaning for children and youth ranging from symbols of strength and manhood to protective elements against the fear of assault and death (1999). Although not for certain, this would seem to describe the youths in Littleton, Colorado, as they were longstanding victims of peer rejection and discrimination.

This psychiatric committee also named an organic base for some of the violent behavior of children. They listed disrupted attachments, family adversity, inconsistent parenting and problems in parent-child relationships can predict the early onset of disruptive behavior disorders (1999). "Violent adults, who were violent as juveniles, were described as 'intrinsically vulnerable children' with cognitive, psychiatric or neurological impairments" (Garbarino, 1995, as cited in Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1999).

A School-Based Prevention Program

Another prevention program, which was school-based, also took a multidisciplinary approach. Nadel, Spellmann, Alvarez-Canino, Lausell-Bryant,

and Landsberg (1996) designed a program based on three theories. First, the authors focused on modifying beliefs, attitudes and norms of youths to help them develop behaviors that support nonviolence. Second, they also focused on enhancing peer and family relationships to help buffer the effects of exposure to violence. Third they believed that changing aspects of the environment and which contributed to violent behavior would help prevent violence. As the project was implemented and evaluated, the authors came to two conclusions. First, emphasis should be placed on fostering partnerships, not just delivery of services, within the community and school. Second, they also felt that addressing youth's reactions to victimization (i.e. post traumatic stress disorder symptoms), and the norms and beliefs they hold about aggression were important areas to focus on as well. Unpredictably, this school-based program was the only significant example found for this literature review.

Conclusions

The following are overall strategies for future consideration in addressing the problem of youth violence, along with several universal conclusions based on the literature. First, this author understands there is a fundamental call for an increased amount of parental involvement and supervision during their child's younger developmental years especially the adolescent years. Children's peer groups, their academic environment, and the level of community violence children are associated with are powerful sources of influence in their

impressionable developmental ages. Parents need to be involved in and fully aware of what is occurring in these areas to monitor and possibly limit their child's exposure if it is potentially psychologically damaging. Second, offering educational programs for parents, which focus on skill building, coping and stress management as well as others would increase parents' skills, offer them helpful parenting techniques, as well as knowledge about the rise in youth violence, its risk factors and methods of protecting their children. It would be ideal if these programs could be constructed and offered as part of prenatal care or at least as early as possible in the child's formative years. Third, there is a grave need to place more limits and restrictions on the production and accessibility of violent internet sites, video games and movies. This is especially necessary for those under the age of 18 who are vulnerable, impressionable, and still developing their social attitudes and beliefs. Hence, this indicates the need to also address and limit the extent to which the media and television portray violent scenes, stories, and illustrations. These portrayals have increased dramatically and gained in popularity on television over the last decade as well as in the motion picture industry. Finally, it is also necessary for society to reevaluate the approach it takes in socializing children today. Should aggression continue to be socialized as an acceptable behavior for boys and men as it is today? Have changes in society over the last two decades made this a more risky in this day and age? These are several areas for serious consideration and future research.

In retrospect, there were several fundamental themes discussed between the articles for this literature review. First, Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1996) echoed the sentiments of many other authors when they described the need to consider more seriously, family processes such as parenting practices, and family relationship characteristics. The amount of supervision and personal investment parents devote to their children are also very important elements. This is necessary in understanding their influences on child development and potential violent behavior. In addition, it facilitates the beginning of building a sound understanding of youth violence. The literature greatly highlighted the important responsibility parents share in lowering the epidemic of youth violence as well as how their particular parenting styles and life circumstances factor into shaping it.

Second, there was an underlying theme that called for an increase in awareness of the interconnectedness between the family, schools, adolescents' peers, the neighborhood and community (Elliott et al., 1998). Children are increasingly influenced as they mature by several social environments such as their workplaces and progressive school settings. Thus, the ecological-developmental model is highlighted as being valuable for consideration in developing prevention and intervention strategies.

Third, collaboration is necessary between a variety of professionals who can offer multiple perspectives in prevention and intervention methods. Professionals who work in mental health fields such as psychiatrists,

psychologists and mental health counselors, along with law enforcement officials and community members are only a few of those who offer beneficial expertise to strategize and combat youth violence.

The public health model encompasses this multiple professional approach and adds to include a scientific approach as well. This strategic, goal-oriented approach, offers targeted prevention for a variety of population groups. As the problem is studied intensely by gathering data and analyzing it, programming can be tailored according to the needs of the targeted populations. Hence, with more accurate and appropriately designed programs there is a better chance of decreasing incidents of violent deaths and injuries by young individuals. With the epidemic of school shootings continuing, it would be ideal for the public health model to be adopted as soon as possible to begin addressing the problem. Undoubtedly, strategically designed prevention and intervention programs are a necessary means to a reduction of violent attacks not only in schools but the community and family as well. As a result of taking into account the aforementioned considerations and constructs, the number of school shootings, violent community attacks, gang-related killings and overall teenage incidents of aggression will undoubtedly be impinged upon and hopefully addressed with more success.

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