Causes Of Juvenile Violence Essay, Research Paper

Children and Violence

In Lost Boys, a study of race and youth violence, author James Garbarino says, “The 1997-1998 school year will go down in American history as the turning point in our country’s experience and understanding of lethal youth violence.

- October 1, 1997, Pearl, Mississippi: after killing his mother, sixteen-year-old Luke Woodham opens fire at his high school, killing tress and wounding seven.

- December 1, 1997, West Paducah, Kentucky: fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal kills three students at a high school prayer meeting.

- March 24, 1998, Jonesboro, Arkansas: thirteen-year-old Mitchell Johnson and eleven-year-old Andrew Golden open fire on their schoolmates, killing four of them and a teacher

- April 24, 1998, Edinboro, Pennsylvania: fourteen-year-old Andrew Wurst kills a teacher at a school dance.

- May 21, 1998, Springfield, Oregon: after killing his parents, fifteen-year-old Kip Kinkel walks into the school cafeteria and shoots twenty-four classmates, two fatally” (Garbarino, Prologue).

These horrific events shocked the nation and made Americans ask the question: what leads a child to turn to violence?

Studies point a finger at the parents and the home life of these delinquents. Children often receive mixed messages from parents and other adults about what is right and what is wrong. Such things as fighting between the parents and physical or mental abuse aimed at the child contribute to a violent outbreak in the child. Parenting that indulges, neglect, abuses, or ignores children, and that fails to provide strong, positive guidance, discipline, and nurturance, contributes to the spread of violence in children. Such parenting is seen in families plagued by chronic unemployment and poverty, especially when parents are concentrating more on the economic survival of the family than on the attitudes and behavior of the children. Since one way that children learn is through observation, if the children see physical and mental abuse towards them or anyone else in the home, they might think that this is an accepted thing for them to participate in also. In one study, entitled “The Bobo Doll Study” (Gray 151), children who witnessed adults acting violently towards a doll acted violently towards the doll as well. These children were also more likely to act violently towards other objects in the room. Gray argued that this also holds true for children who experience the violence themselves. They, in turn, act the violence out on another person, most often upon siblings, peers, parents, or own children.

Experts also connect violence in the media. Hundreds of studies for aggressive behavior have shown that there is a positive correlation between television violence and aggressive and antisocial behavior in individuals, although it is impossible to predict the precise effects on individuals at any given time and place. The final report of a three-year National Television Violence Study finds television violence continues to pose a serious risk of harm to children. The researchers determined that the manner in which television programs portray violence encourages children to learn aggressive behavior, among other risks. Because most violent acts on television remain unpunished, children assume that they will be able to get away with them too. Another source of the media influencing violence is through popular video games. Certain games such as Mortal Kombat, James Bond, and Grand Theft Auto provide the goals of killing as many people as possible in order to win. This gives children the message that killing and committing crimes are positive goals because they were rewarded for doing them in the games.

Yet another cause could be the neighborhood environment that the child is exposed to as he or she grows up. Although socio-economic class does not limit violence among children, the environmental factors affecting poorer children may be more difficult to resolve. If the children grow up in a world where violent behavior occurs daily, they logically expect violence as a part of everyday life and therefore see no problems with participating in it. Marian Wright Edelman, a researcher and professor at the University of Missouri explains, “Statistics indicate that increases in community violence and increases in juvenile victimization often overlap” (Edelman). It has been shown that juveniles, who grow up in poverty-stricken neighborhoods where violence is more prevalent and visible, are more likely to emulate this behavior in the future.

While determining causes are the first step in reducing the incidence of youth violence, additional steps must be taken in order to bring these changes about. Some suggestions for preventing violence are: building awareness through public speaking, organizing student contests dealing with violence prevention, making a youth seminar, and media recognition awards for children who demonstrate positive attitudes towards prevention. Other efforts could be concentrated in the schools, since all children are required to attend. Schools should establish counseling programs for students, and assure that students have access to their counselors. Schools could provide recreational, enrichment, or leisure activities for students when the school day is over. Prevention curriculum, including conflict resolution training could be taught. It has been shown that schools that have adopted conflict resolution strategies have taught young people new ways of channeling their anger into constructive, nonviolent responses to conflict, which therefore decrease the incidence of juvenile crime. (DeJong, 8-14).

There is no one specific reason why a child might choose to commit a crime. It could be the combination of several factors, or there may not be an identifiable reason at all. However, studies have found evidence that home life, media, and neighborhood violence are prevalent factors in these situations. Efforts by the individual and the community must be put forth in order to help curb this problem.

Works Cited

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