JUVENILE VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS


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Child Abuse and Juvenile Crime

Few topics generate as much public concern, comment and often outrage as crime, and juvenile crime in particular. Indeed, juvenile crime appears to be a metaphor for societal concern over issues of social change, social threat and social decay. The last twenty years have witnessed substantial legislative, policy and practice changes in relation to how society deals with young people who offend. There are continual changes in the criminal law and penalties for juveniles.

At the same time that these crime-focused changes have occurred, federal inquiries, such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s Inquiry into Youth Homelessness and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, have highlighted the difficult social circumstances of many young people. This recognition of the level of youth dislocation, youth disadvantage and youth marginalization has occurred at a time when there has been a substantial hardening of community attitudes towards youth crime. Youth are frequently characterised as offenders and predators. Their multiple identities as sometimes victim, sometimes offender, sometimes privileged, sometimes powerless, are ignored.

The over-involvement of juveniles in property related crime is well documented. But the development of the policy, practice and legislative framework and public debate occurs in the absence of the recognition of the reality that children and young people are frequently the victims of crime. The level of victimisation is starkly illustrated by the Queensland Police Services Statistical Review for 1995/96. Males and Females aged 15-19 are the most common victims of offences against the person. Ten to fourteen year old males have a higher rate of victimisation than persons 30 years and older. Ten to fourteen year old females have a higher rate of victimisation than females aged 24 and over. The teenage years are also the time at which children are at the highest risk of victimisation form child abuse. Figures released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Angus and Woodward, 1995) indicated that in 1993-94, 22,379 children or 5.7 per 1,000 children (0-16 years) Australia-wide were involved in substantiated cases of abuse and neglect. The rate of physical abuse was highest for young people aged 13 and 14 years (2.6 and 2.9 children per 1,000 respectively) as was the rate of sexual abuse (1.6 and 1.8 children per 1,000 respectively). The rates of emotional abuse and neglect were highest for children under one year (2.2 and 2.8 children per 1,000).

Despite the lack of consensus concerning the precise causes of child abuse and juvenile crime, grounds exist for examining possible links between these social problems. It is commonly observed that young people who engage in delinquent and criminal activities frequently have a history of child abuse. However, as Garbarino and Plantz (1986) asserted in their review of the links between child abuse and juvenile delinquency a decade ago:

It is not the existence of this coincidence that is so difficult to establish (although some researchers do doubt even this) but the magnitude, meaning, direction, and significance of the apparent association. (p. 28).

The concern of this paper is whether there is a relationship between childhood victimisation and later abuse. This paper reviews some theoretical and empirical evidence on this question and identifies the implications for juvenile justice policy.
Literature Review

Two extensive reviews of the literature on the child abuse-juvenile crime connection have previously been undertaken. A decade ago, Garbarino and Plantz (1986) examined the ‘links’ between child abuse and juvenile delinquency. More recently Widom’s (1989a) critical review focused particularly on research which examined the ‘cycle of violence’ theory, and assessed the research findings and methodology of these studies. The strength of the relationship between child abuse and juvenile crime has been examined through research based either on prospective or retrospective designs.

Prospective design

Prospective studies of abused children commence with the child who has been abused before they have come in contact with the justice system who are then followed to see if victims of abuse are involved in delinquency and crime at a higher rate than juveniles who have not been abused (Garbarino and Plantz, 1986). Whether or not prospective studies indicate an association between child abuse and juvenile crime depends on the base delinquency rates in the general population with which they are compared. The problem is that few prospective studies report these base rates.

One of the few studies which did include general population delinquency rates was completed by Alfaro (1981). Alfaro’s (1981) study comprised 4,465 children (representing 1,423 families) in eight New York State counties who were referred to protection agencies for suspected abuse or neglect during 1952-53, and were subsequently followed up in 1967. Alfaro reported that 768 (17.25%) of these youth had at least one subsequent contact with the juvenile court for juvenile delinquency or un ungovernability. Although this study had no control group, its strength lay in its prospective design, that is, the time order of the two variables - abuse and delinquency - was clear. Alfaro also reported that in one of the New York counties where almost 10% of the children who were abused or neglected were reported as delinquent or ungovernable, only 2% of all children in the county during the same time period were given the same status. (See also Bolton, Reich and Gutierres (1977) and McCord (1983).)

Research undertaken by Widom (1989b; 1989c; Widom, 1991; Widom and Ames, 1994) in the Midwest of the USA is particularly important because her research incorporated many improvements in the area of design, operationalisation and conceptualisation. This study examined a sample of 908 substantiated and validated cases of child abuse (physical and sexual) and neglect who were processed through the juvenile court for protective matters during the years 1967 through 1971. The sample group was then compared with a matched control group to determine the extent to which both groups had engaged in subsequent delinquency and adult criminal behaviour, both violent and nonviolent. The control group was matched on the basis of age, sex, race and approximate socioeconomic background. To avoid any ambiguity such as might arise in cases where delinquency preceded abuse or neglect, or might have caused it, the final sample of 908 abuse and neglect cases was restricted to those in which children were 11 years or less at the time the abuse or neglect was substantiated by the court. Widom's dependence on official records for childhood sexual abuse cases during this time period was problematic, however, because there were no laws requiring notification and, therefore, many cases were not reported and those that were reported were generally poor multi-problem families (Widom and Ames, 1994).

In general Widom's (Widom and Ames, 1994) results showed that being abused or neglected placed children at increased risk for an arrest as a juvenile, in comparison to controls (26.0% vs 16.8%). Abused and neglected children also had more serious delinquent and criminal careers than control group offenders, as measured by the mean number of offenses (2.43 vs 1.41), and were more likely to be arrested for violent crimes (11% vs 8%). In particular, juveniles who had been abused and neglected as children were significantly more likely to commit property offenses (14.3% vs 8.5%) and run away from home (5.8% vs 2.4%). Sexually abused children were not significantly more likely than the physically abused and neglected children to have an arrest as a juvenile (20.8% vs 26.0%). The physical abuse and neglect groups also did not differ across categories of offences, with one exception - children who experienced neglect only were more than twice as likely to run away as children who experienced physical abuse only (6.2% vs 2.6%). The Sexual Abuse Plus group (sexual abuse plus physical abuse or neglect) had the highest rate of arrest for running away (17.9%) compared to the other abuse and neglect groups and controls. Widom and Ames’ (1994) study also revealed that arrest rates increased once these juveniles had reached adulthood.
Zingraff, Leiter, Myers and Johnsen (1993) attempted to build upon Widom's work. Instead of using substantiated cases as Widom had done, these researchers randomly chose their child abuse sample from a population of 7,000 children who had been reported to the Carolina Central Registry of Child Abuse and Neglect between 1983 and 1989. These researchers reported that approximately 14% of the abused children had at least one delinquency complaint brought to the attention of the court, compared with rates of 5% and 9% for a general school and poverty sample, respectively. The results indicated a slightly higher risk for delinquent behaviour for abused children, but this relationship disappeared when variables were controlled for status offenses. The researchers believed that the paramount reason for their finding of a considerably lower rate of offending was that they had not restricted themselves to the most serious cases of maltreatment as Widom had done. These researchers also concluded that the relationship between delinquency and maltreatment had been overstated due to the inadequate methodology and poor design of previous research. Some researchers have since stated that this is probably the most accurate statement that can currently be made about the relationship between child abuse and juvenile crime (Schwartz, Rendon, and Hsieh, 1994).

**Retrospective design**

The majority of retrospective studies have identified samples of delinquent youths and used a reverse records check to determine the incidence of abuse and neglect in the delinquent youth's backgrounds. Retrospective studies have generally found that juvenile offenders report child abuse and neglect at disproportionally higher rates than the prevalence rate for the general population which in the United States is approximately 5% of all children and young people under 18 years of age (Garbarino and Plantz, 1986).

Retrospective studies report widely varying results due to methodological differences. For example, several studies have compared juvenile court and medical records (which probably reflect the more serious cases of abuse) and have found that from 9% (Lewis and Shanok, 1977) to 15% (Shanok and Lewis, 1981) of delinquents studied have been abused. Other less reliable studies which used case files reporting clear-cut descriptions of physical abuse, identified an abuse rate of 26% amongst 863 incarcerated juveniles in Ohio (Kratcoski, 1982), 84% in a study of 100 juvenile offenders in a Denver detention centre (Steele, 1976), 29% in a study by Wick (1981) of the case files of 50 ‘troubled youth’, and Lewis and colleagues (Lewis, Shanok, Pincus, and Glaser, 1979) reported that 75% of violent incarcerated male delinquents, and 33% of less violent incarcerated male delinquents, had histories of severe abuse. Two other studies relying on self-reports of prior abuse have found rates of 51% (Mouzakitis, 1981) and 69% (Rhoades and Parker, 1981). A study by Odyssey House - a private residential treatment program in New Hampshire, USA, for court-referred juveniles, reported that 61% of the boys and 75% of the girls had been abused in a sample group of 150 residents (Sandberg, 1989). Another study by Alfaro (1981) identified 1,963 children reported as delinquent or ungovernable in 1971-72 across eight counties in New York state and then examined earlier records for a history of abuse. Considering the time period of these historical records (i.e., they were made prior to mandatory reporting laws), it is noteworthy that 21% of the boys and 29% of the girls had been reported, when younger, as abused or neglected children.

Two other studies by Brown (1984) and Doerner (1987) attempted to correct some of the shortcomings of earlier studies which had not distinguished either different maltreatment experiences and different offending behaviours. Brown explored the relationship between social class, maltreatment, and delinquent behaviour using anonymous self-report measures with a sample group of 110 grade nine respondents. Brown divided the maltreatment group into distinct subcategories of physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect and attempted to control extemporaneous variables by utilising a control group. The study found a correlation between delinquent behaviour and emotional abuse and neglect but not physical abuse. Brown also reported that maltreatment and delinquency appeared to be correlated independently of social class.

Doerner (1987) studied the relationship between the seriousness of types of maltreatment and the seriousness of juvenile crime. The generalisability of the results of this study were limited by the sampling method and the use of self-report measures on maltreatment and delinquency although these were more detailed than in earlier studies. The sample group consisted of 221 students enrolled in introductory criminology classes at an American university. Doerner reported that both general delinquency and serious crime correlated with emotional abuse and physical abuse but not sexual abuse in this study.
A number of studies have also examined the relationship between child abuse, youth homelessness and juvenile crime. Farber and Kinast (1984), for instance, reported that three-quarters of the runaways in their study had been subjected to maltreatment in the year prior to running away. Seventeen of the 27 adolescent incest victims studied by Lindberg and Distad (1985) were runaways. Another American in-depth study of missing children (Finkelhor, Hotaling and Sedlak, 1990 cited in Schmalleger, 1993) also reported that a sizable proportion (approximately 8%) were not runaways but “thrown away” (i.e., rejected) children who were no longer wanted by their parents. Official American statistics reported by Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (cited in Schmalleger, 1993) state that one-third of runaways leave home because of sexual abuse, while half leave because of beatings. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention also estimated that the vast majority of these young people ‘who remain at large for a few weeks will resort to theft or prostitution as a method of self-support’ and that, of all young people who do run away, only approximately 20% will ever come into official contact with the police or social services. (For a Canadian study see (McCormack, Janus, and Burgess, 1986) and an Australian study see O’Connor (1989).)

Summary

There are many methodological problems with research in this field which limits the conclusions which may be drawn from many studies. These deficiencies can be grouped into six broad areas of concern: the conceptualisation of child abuse, the measurement of child abuse, the measurement of delinquency, the composition or derivation of study groups, the lack of control groups and an absence of attempts to control for other forms of family distress. (See Smith and O’Connor (1997) for a detailed review.) Despite these methodological issues which affect research results, the literature review suggests that between one seventh (14%) and one third (29%) of young people who offend have been maltreated as a child (e.g., Bolton, Reich and Gutierres, 1977; Widom and Ames, 1994; Zingraff et al., 1993). Thus it is clear that there is an association between child abuse and juvenile delinquency.

However it is also important to recognise that the proportions of abused children convicted of juvenile criminal behaviour in the more recent studies are substantially smaller than the 50% to 70% rate reported in earlier studies characterised by a greater number of methodological problems. However, while research evidence does not indicate that the majority of children who have been abused will become juvenile offenders, a high proportion of juvenile offenders, particularly violent offenders, would appear to have been severely abused. Indeed, many violent adult criminals have histories of extraordinary abuse in their childhood. Thus, it would seem logical to hypothesize that there may be a stronger relationship between the intensity of parental brutality toward a child and the severity of that child's subsequent violent criminal behaviours (Lewis, Mallouh and Webb, 1989).

Conceptualising the relationship between abuse and juvenile offending

There is no one theoretical model which completely explains the relationship between abuse and offending behaviour. Probably the most commonly cited ‘causal’ hypothesis for the link between child abuse and juvenile delinquency is the association between child abuse and childhood aggression. Research indicates that children who have experienced harsh parental discipline styles, whether termed abuse or not, tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviours than neglected children and their nonabused peers (Cicchetti, 1989; Widom, 1989a). Abused children have been noted to develop hyper vigilance and paranoia, to misinterpret their surroundings, and to lash out when they perceive ambiguous situations as threatening. Social learning theorists suggest that a violent family environment (which includes either child abuse or spouse abuse) interferes with the attainment of social competencies, such as negotiation and conflict-resolution strategies and impulse control (Mueller and Silverman, 1989). Children learn by observation, modelling and reinforcement to use violence as a method of coping with stress. Through observation of abusive parental behaviours (including both child abuse and spousal abuse in many violent families) they learn that aggression is an appropriate form of communication and develop a set of rules that support its use (Kaufman and Zigler, 1989). Research further supports that aggression in early childhood is, unfortunately, likely to be maintained over time rather than ‘unlearned’ as children become older and that abused children carry this proclivity for aggressive responses out of the home and into their social environment (Bandura, 1973; White, Moffitt, Earls, Robins and Silva, 1990).

Another explanation suggests that the combination of individual child characteristics and family characteristics, such as unskilled parents, predispose a child to act in antisocial ways in adolescence and
adulthood. This view considers that, rather than seeing aggression and juvenile crime as resulting from abuse, it may be more accurate to conceptualise both as products of the reciprocal interactions among the child's emerging personality, parental inadequacies, and a broad range of family and environmental events (Howing et al., 1990).

Patterson (1982) is one researcher who has conducted one of the most exhaustive analysis of coercive family processes. After more than a decade of work with aggressive children and their families, he concluded that the most influential factors leading to childhood aggression are the child's temperament and the parent's child management and child socialisation skills, with external family stress serving as a mediator. He suggests that when a child with a difficult temperament is coupled with an unskilled, irritable parent, the attachment process may be disrupted and a course of mutually reinforcing negative and aggressive interactions may become established. Patterson suggests that, in this context, the parents continually scolds the child (even when they are being honest) but does not carry through on scolds or threats. These extended aversive interchanges, he suggests, may escalate into physically abusive episodes, particularly when external pressures are present. These abusive episodes may stop the child's behaviour temporarily but, ultimately, the pattern of aversive child behaviour and parental scolding reoccurs. Patterson suggests that, as the child grows, these family coercive interaction styles may generalise into socially aggressive behaviour outside the home.

**Family Environment Factors**

Empirical findings indicate that delinquent behaviour is not just associated with characteristics of the individual adolescent but with family structure and family relationships, as well as family demographic variables such as race, socioeconomic status and general neighbourhood poverty (Henggeler, 1989; Patterson, DeBaryshe and Ramsey, 1989). In fact, families where abuse occurs are often characterised by many problems. The general effects of other family stress variables (such as poverty, unemployment, parental substance abuse, spousal violence, divorce or other inadequate social and family functioning) need to be disentangled from the specific effects of abuse in childhood. For instance, recent studies which have attempted to distinguish between those children and young people raised in households where there was spousal violence and those who were themselves physically abused, have revealed that exposure to other family violence tended to go hand in hand, making it difficult to assess the relative importance of each to the development of anti-social and aggressive behaviours (Lewis, Lovely, Yeager and Della Femina, 1989; Smith, 1994; Stratton, 1985). It may well be that the presence of multiple forms of family violence increases the likelihood of children and young people exhibiting aggressive and antisocial behaviours. McCord (1979) for instance, found that the home atmosphere, including parental aggression and conflict, was related to later criminal behaviour in terms of the numbers and types of crimes committed.

Hirschi’s (1969) theory of delinquency causation, also suggests some possible links between child abuse and juvenile crime. Rather than examining the factors that motivate children to engage in delinquent behaviour, Hirschi focused on those conditions that restrain children from such acts. In brief, Hirschi concludes that young people are deterred not so much by the threat of criminal penalties as by their attachments to traditional figures (parents, relatives, friends, teachers), their bonds with conventional society (jobs, social organisations, religious groups), and by their involvement in and preference for conventional
pursuits (school, work, and time spent in non-criminal activities). Friedlander (1989) suggests that reading in a broad way the implications of Hirschi’s theory of delinquency causation, one can identify a special vulnerability of abused children to antisocial behaviour, often due to the social isolation of their families which limits the child’s exposure to, and inclination to become positively involved in, the social world of their communities. (p. 153)

System-Created Links

For some young people the path from being a victim of childhood abuse to committing offenses may also be mediated by the experience of becoming a ward of the State as a result of parental abuse or rejection (O’Connor, 1989). Maas and Hartley (1988) note that young people who were formerly inmates of protective institutions have been recognised as a significant group among the young homeless population since the 1970s. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1989) inquiry into youth homelessness concluded that, ‘A period of time spent in the child welfare system away from the natural family, seems to increase significantly a child’s chances of becoming homeless’ (p. 109). Carter (1990), in her forward to Taylor’s (1990) study, has estimated 50% of homeless young people are or have been wards of the State. For many homeless young people offending is necessary for survival. (They are also at increased risk of victimisation while homeless.)

An additional possibility is that the links between child abuse and delinquency have been created by the manner in which, historically, child welfare or child protection systems have labelled some child abuse victims as ‘uncontrollable’ and incarcerated homeless young people with more serious offenders, thus commencing the process of stigmatisation and net-widening. In this way Brown (1984) reported that many abused and neglected young people who historically were referred to the juvenile justice system because they were victims, left the system being defined as offenders.

Summary

A number of different explanations have been put forward to explore possible links between child abuse and juvenile crime. These varied theories range from describing the connection in unidirectional terms (i.e., abuse causes antisocial and aggressive tendencies which precipitate juvenile crime) to seeing the relationships as being bidirectional (i.e., some children are born to be more aggressive and prone to delinquency). Our purpose is not to propose or support any one model, but rather to examine some of their central tenets which are relevant to the questions under review. The remainder of this paper will address implications of the relation between these two phenomena for policy and practice.

Future Policy and Practice Implications

As Farrington (1990) asserts, methods of preventing or treating juvenile offending should be based on theories about causes. Given that research has demonstrated the relative stability of aggressive behaviour and offending over time, Farrington (1990) suggests that potential offenders can now be identified at an early age with a reasonable degree of accuracy. Thus, in the case of young people who have been abused, those young people who exhibit antisocial and aggressive behaviours at an early age (either as a consequence or cause of abuse) can be considered ‘at risk’ for subsequent juvenile crime. While it could be argued that an early identification of delinquent-prone abused young people could have an undesirable labelling or stigmatization effects, Farrington suggests that there is no evidence that identification for preventative treatment is, in fact, damaging. The degree of stigmatization, if any, Farrington suggests, is likely to depend on the nature of the measures applied to the children and young people who are considered to be most at risk, and might be lessened by applying the same interventions to non-predicted children and young people.

While all young people who have experienced childhood abuse do not develop violent criminal tendencies, research indicates that many experience other emotional and behavioural problems that negatively impact on their interpersonal relationships, quality of life, school performance and ability to obtain employment. Hence, interventions targeted at poverty amelioration and parenting education and training would not only assist in the prevention of juvenile crime but may also help prevent child abuse and youth homelessness (and vice versa). Such an approach would seem even more justifiable when one considers that certain family structural variables (e.g., socioeconomic deprivation and large family size)
and family functioning variables (e.g., poor parenting) are common to both the problems of child abuse and juvenile crime.

If poor parenting practices such as poor supervision, erratic or harsh child-rearing behaviours are causes of offending, it seems likely that training to improve parenting might succeed in preventing both child abuse and juvenile crime. Friedlander, a children's court judge, suggests in the foreword to Sandberg's (1989) book on the child abuse-delinquency connection that a focus on parent-child relationships as the context for prevention initiatives may present the most promising prospects for achieving real improvement in the effectiveness of juvenile justice, and at the same time provide a greater measure of social fairness to children at risk for antisocial, criminal, or violent behaviour (p. xiii).

The behavioural parent training developed by Patterson (1982) has been often identified as one of the more hopeful approaches (Farrington, 1990). However, while Patterson's approach has been effective in reducing child stealing, his research has only been over short periods of time in small-scale studies. Patterson's parent training approach requires more extensive testing in larger-scale randomised experiments. Questions too have been raised about the likelihood of particularly seriously abusive parents 'volunteering' for treatment (Potas, Vining and Wilson, 1990).

Farrington (1990) also suggests that preschool intellectual enrichment programs are emerging as another strategy which appear to successfully decrease school failure and offending. Such programs warrant further larger-scale testing especially since they may also reduce the negative effects of growing up in an abusive or neglectful family environment. Friedlander (1989) too argues that the most important change in our current crime prevention theories must be to shift the emphasis from the adolescent who already displays anti-social behaviour, aggressive and criminal tendencies, to the child and his environment during the early critical development years. Studies of early childhood interventions suggest that an ecological approach may diminish future delinquency and criminality (Zigler, Taussig and Black, 1992). This approach reduces risk factors for juvenile crime by improving a child's social competence and is worthy of serious empirical study (Schwartz et al., 1994). Social ecologists such as Garbarino and Bronfenbrenner have been urging a shift in the emphasis on child abuse treatment programs from relying solely on instruction, direction and sanctions to modify parent's behaviour to changing the parents' social and human environment and, thus, to changing indirectly their attitudes and capacities for rearing and nurturing their children (Friedlander, 1989).

This move away from advice giving, counselling and institutionalisation of those young people who have 'incompetent parents' to more concrete service provision has also been recommended in Australia (Carrington, 1992; Wilson, 1988). Wilson (1988), for instance, has suggested that in dealing with youthful offenders 'we should change our emphasis and attempt, wherever possible, to support families by providing concrete services by way of improved accommodation, home maker services, cash payouts and nutritional supplements' (p. 14). Likewise, in terms of direct interventions with young people, Coventry, Munice and Walters (1992) argue that there is a need to take the focus of policy away from a narrow concern with 'crime prevention' to a 'social development' perspective that addresses more wide ranging 'quality of life' issues for young people such as poverty and homelessness.

Others, however, are not as critical of counselling approaches. Sandberg (1989) asserts that because the juvenile justice system has rarely provided abused juvenile offenders with the full range of services that they need, we have no way of knowing the potential of therapeutic and other interventions. He suggests that

In building a stronger juvenile court system for delinquents, we might consider that the rehabilitation, just deserts, and rights models all have important contributions to make and that setting up these strategies as irreconcilable opposites and devoting great amounts of time debating their relative merits does not get us very far. Regardless of the approach taken, the task at hand is and will continue to be enabling young offenders to come to terms with forces within themselves that, if unresponded to, will lead to crime and dysfunction in adulthood. Foremost, abused delinquents need to be assisted in understanding their maltreatment and defusing its life-threatening components. (1989: 127).

In view of the link between child abuse and juvenile crime, Sandberg also suggests that there may be a need to reconsider the adequacy of our present theories about how to treat children already in the child welfare system.

Greene (1993) has reviewed the literature on interventions that work with at-risk youth who have been exposed to violence and poverty and suggests that successful programs for these youth include nine essential elements: street outreach and referral; needs and interest assessments; provisions for supportive
personal relationships with caring adults; availability of role models; peer group discussions; family interventions; neighbourhood projects; education and job preparedness training; and monitoring of program objectives. Greene also notes a number of other researchers’ recommendations about successful interventions. For example, Schorr (1989) suggests that programs which target at-risk youth must be comprehensive, intensive, flexible, and possess staff who are skilled in forming relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Palmer (1983) suggests that programs should be multi modal, intensive, and individualised. Garbarino and his colleague (Garbarino et al. 1991) suggest that programs must encourage active coping, cognitive competence, self-efficacy, and support positive stable relationships within and outside the family structure. Altschuler and Armstrong (1991) include provisions for facilitating progressively increased responsibility, positive youth-community interaction, building youth-community support systems, and monitoring adaptation by the young people. Greene (1993) suggests that program workers should engage young people in program planning and program operation. Last but not least, he suggests that success cannot be achieved without a deeply ingrained faith that young people themselves can be resourceful and energetic agents of constructive and productive change.

Given that research indicates that many young people who offend and especially those who are homeless have experienced childhood physical and sexual abuse, implications can also be identified for police relations with young people. Searching and name checking, for instance, are two areas where there is a need for police to exhibit care and sensitivity. Searching, for example, could be particularly traumatic for young people who have been sexually abused. It is also easy to see how young people who have mainly experienced hostility from authority figures such as parents can become defiant towards police who are continually approaching them to undertake name checks. Beresford (1993) points out that these situations can escalate rapidly to the point where the young person starts swearing at the police and is then charged with disorderly conduct. Since their behaviour becomes the primary legal concern, abuse is frequently overlooked or not detected (Paperny and Deisher, 1983).

Conclusion

The connections between childhood experiences of maltreatment and later developmental outcomes are the result of multiple factors that interact dynamically with each other. This chapter has illustrated that in spite of conflicting data and a need for further research there does appear to be an association, although not inevitable relationship, between child abuse and juvenile crime.

Despite the lack of consensus about the exact causation the implications for policy are clear. At the level of primary prevention they require a policy framework which is family supportive. That is policies which provide a supportive social environment, which assist families to cope with the impact of multiple stressors, including the detrimental impact of poverty and social isolation. This includes the development of an early education system which connects children and families to mainstream social supports and development institutions.”

At the tertiary level it requires a recognition that a significant number of juvenile offenders may also be victims. The policy and frameworks needs to address these multiple identities of victim and offender.

References

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