

# Effects of Community Environment on Child Abuse

Some communities have much higher rates of child abuse than others. In these communities, marriage is less common, individual families are more isolated, alcohol abuse is widespread,<sup>1)</sup> and drug trafficking is high.<sup>2)</sup> Although men who are abusive tend to be so whether drunk or sober, the abuse is more predictable when they are drunk.<sup>3)</sup> There is an acceptance among men in high-abuse communities that abusing women is normal, even condoned.<sup>4)</sup> [Family income](#) in these communities generally is less than \$15,000 per year. In addition, vacant housing<sup>5)</sup> and transience are high.<sup>6)</sup>

Within these communities, stable marriages are being replaced by unstable “families” characterized by frequent changes of partners. For a mother, this results in greater stress and isolation from family and neighbors.<sup>7)</sup> Frequent family changes also result in frequent role changes for adults in the household, leading to more confusion and more stress for the entire family.<sup>8)</sup> The neighborhood has an increasing number of third- and fourth-generation [out-of-wedlock children](#) who are in poorer health, have lower levels of education and intelligence, achieve less success in school and on the job, and exhibit rising rates of drug addiction, [crime](#), [welfare dependence](#), and [out-of-wedlock teen births](#).<sup>9)</sup> There is evidence in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, conducted by the U.S. Departments of Labor and HHS that these patterns are compounding from generation to generation.<sup>10)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> , <sup>3)</sup> Beth Gorney, “Domestic Violence and Chemical Dependency: Dual Problems, Dual Interventions,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 21, no. 2 (1989): 229-238.

<sup>2)</sup> Almost all the children in news stories in this paper were born with drugs in their blood. See Vicky N. Albert and Richard P. Barth, “Predicting Growth in Child Abuse and Neglect Reports in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Counties,” *Social Service Review* 70, no. 1 (1996): 58-82.

<sup>4)</sup> Michael D. Smith, “Male Peer Support of Wife Abuse: An Exploratory Study,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 6, no. 4 (1991): 512-519.

<sup>5)</sup> , <sup>6)</sup> S.J. Zuravin, “The Ecology of Child Abuse and Neglect: Review of the Literature and Presentation of Data,” *Violence and Victims* 4, no. 2 (1989): 101-120.

<sup>7)</sup> Debra Kalmuss and Judith Seltzer, “A Framework for Studying Family Socialization Over the Life Cycle,” *Journal of Family Issues* 10, no. 3 (1989): 339-358.

<sup>8)</sup> Bonnie L. Yegidis, “Family Violence: Contemporary Research Findings and Practice Issues,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 28, no. 6 (1992): 519-530.

<sup>9)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan: “Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe,” *Heritage Foundation F.Y.I.* no. 19 (1994)

<sup>10)</sup> From preliminary analysis by Heritage Foundation staff of intergenerational verbal scores in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C., 1992.

This entry draws heavily from [The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family, and the American Community](#).

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