

Effects of Community Environment on Juvenile Crime Rates

Research Synthesis Paper: [The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and Community](#)

Criminal youth tend to live in high-crime neighborhoods. Each reinforces the other in a destructive relationship, spiraling downward into violence and social chaos.

1. Single-Parent Neighborhoods

Tragically for these communities, single-parent neighborhoods tend to be high-crime neighborhoods. Researchers long ago observed that violent crime, among both teenagers and adults, is concentrated most heavily in urban neighborhoods characterized by a very high proportion of single-parent families,¹⁾ and this remains true today.²⁾ Even homicide rates are higher in counties with more single-parent families.³⁾ On the contrary, neighborhoods with more fathers report fewer crimes.⁴⁾ More recent figures indicate the nonmarital birth rate in many urban neighborhoods is a staggering 80 percent. And today's researchers, like those before them, find that a neighborhood composed mainly of single-parent families invariably is a chaotic, crime-ridden community⁵⁾ in which assaults are high⁶⁾ and the gang – “the delinquent sub-community” – assumes control.⁷⁾ In these chaotic conditions, parental supervision of adolescent and pre-adolescent children is almost impossible.⁸⁾ In turn, children living in these neighborhoods are more likely to learn, accept, and use physical violence to satisfy their wants and needs.⁹⁾

While serious crime is highest in these socially disorganized, largely urban neighborhoods, however, its frequency is not a function of race. The determining factor is absence of marriage. Among broken families, with their chaotic, “dysfunctional” relationships, whether white or black, the crime rate is very high. Among married two-parent families, whether white or black, the crime rate is very low. The capacity and determination to maintain stable married relationships, not race, is the pivotal factor.¹⁰⁾ The chaotic, broken community stems from these chaotic, broken families. The reason race appears to be an important factor in crime is the wide differences in marriage rates among ethnic groups.

While the crime rate among blacks has risen sharply, so has the disappearance of marriage. The same holds true for whites. A recent report from the state of Wisconsin further illustrates the same relationship. A high concentration of broken families without husbands and fathers is the danger signal for future crime.

2. Violent Families in Violent Neighborhoods

According to the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, in 2011 22 percent of children had witnessed violence in their homes, schools, and communities in the past year, and one in twelve children saw one family member assault another in the past year.¹¹⁾ Children exposed to family violence are also the most likely to commit serious violent crime and to become “versatile” criminals – those engaged in a variety of crimes, including, theft, fraud, and drugs.¹²⁾ Among these youths,

victims of violent crime are more likely to be perpetrators of violent crimes.¹³⁾ Physically or sexually abused boys commit the most violent offenses.¹⁴⁾

Internal family violence is only one major contributor to adolescent violence in these socially disorganized neighborhoods. The neighborhood itself (which includes the youth's violent peers, also rooted in their own broken families) is the other powerful contributor,¹⁵⁾ especially to violent delinquency.¹⁶⁾ This culture of aggression and violence is imported into the school. Consider these facts from the Centers for Disease Control:¹⁷⁾

- In 2011, 5.9% of youth in grades 9-12 report not going to school one or more days in the past month because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to/ from school.¹⁸⁾
- In 2011, 16.6% of males in grades 9-12 reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife, or club) in the past thirty days.¹⁹⁾
- In 2010, 784 juveniles (<18 years) were arrested for murder, 2,198 for forcible rape, and 35,001 for aggravated assault.²⁰⁾
- During the 2009-2010 school year, 17 homicides of school-age youths ages 5 to 18 years occurred at school.²¹⁾

Children exposed to violence are much more likely to experience physical, mental, and emotional problems as a result.²²⁾ Given the level of violence in their neighborhoods, for young people to carry guns for self-defense is perhaps understandable.²³⁾ And the youth most likely to feel the need for defense is the member of a street gang in a violent neighborhood. After he has committed his first violent crime, the evidence shows that he is likely to commit further crimes and more than twice as likely as other criminal youths to commit more violence.²⁴⁾

3. Gang Involvement

Commenting on the work of all parents as their children enter adolescence, Travis Hirschi of the University of Arizona writes:

Affection and monitoring had better have done the job already, because the “child-rearing” days are over. It is time to hope for the best.... [A] major feature of recent times is the increasing independence of adolescents from the family.... This independence from the family results in increasing dependence of the adolescent on other adolescents. But adolescents cannot take the place of parents as socializing agents because they have little or no investment in the outcome, and are less likely to recognize deviant behavior.²⁵⁾

All children, especially during their teenage years, gravitate toward the influence of their peers.²⁶⁾ Not surprisingly, as the professional literature shows, delinquent peers move a boy in the direction of delinquency and crime.²⁷⁾ The same is true for girls.

In the company of their peers, future criminals gradually learn to exploit the people of their own community, a community to which they feel no responsibility or obligation.²⁸⁾ For these boys, increasingly involved with delinquent companions, their lives tend to become insulated from the weakening influence of their families. Continued weakness in parental supervision, monitoring, and control invariably escalates the conflict at home, and this increasing conflict and related family problems cause these children to deepen their affiliation with delinquent groups, the only class of people likely to welcome them “with a place to belong to.” While the children continue their

aggressive, hostile, and violent ways, their behavior also increasingly repels normal, non-aggressive people. They grow more familiar and at ease with their delinquent peers.²⁹⁾ Dropping out of school is a natural development.³⁰⁾ Gang membership also tends to attract youth from non-intact families.³¹⁾

¹⁾ National Center for Health Statistics, *Vital Statistics of the United States 1990, 1994*, Vol. 1: Natality, pp. 194-236. Tables 185 and 186.

²⁾ Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie, "Community Context, Social Integration into Family, and Youth Violence," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, No 3. (August 2005): 767-780.

³⁾ Jennifer Schwartz, "Effects of Diverse Forms of Family Structure on Female and Male Homicide," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (December 2006), pp. 1291-1312.

⁴⁾ Knoester, C., & Hayne, D.A., "Community context, social integration into family, and youth violence." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 (2005), 767-780.

⁵⁾ Douglas Smith and G. Roger Jarjoura, "Social Structure and Criminal Victimization," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (February 1988), pp. 27-52; Hill and O'Neill, *Underclass Behaviors in the United States: Measurements and Analysis of Determinants*.

⁶⁾ Robert B. Sylvies et al., "Medical, Family, and Scholastic Conditions in Urban Delinquents," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (May 1991), pp. 448-449.

⁷⁾ Jeffrey Fagan and Sandra Wexler, "Family Origins of Violent Delinquents," *Criminology*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1987), pp. 643-669.

⁸⁾ A.J. Reis, Jr. "Why Are Communities Important in Understanding Crime?" in *Communities and Crime* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), pp. 1-33.

⁹⁾ Elton Jackson, Charles Tittle, and M.J. Burke, "Offense-Specific Models of Differential Association," paper presented at annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, 1984, cited in Fagan and Wexler, "Family Origins of Violent Delinquents"; Rodney Stark, "Deviant Places: A Theory of the Ecology of Crime," *Criminology*, Vol. 25 (1987), pp. 893-909.

¹⁰⁾ Sampson, "Urban Black Violence: The Effect of Male Joblessness and Family Disruption"; Fagan, "Rising Illegitimacy: America's Social Catastrophe"; Smith and Jarjoura, "Social Structure and Criminal Victimization."

¹¹⁾ Child Trends, "Children's exposure to violence" (2013). Available at <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=childrens-exposure-to-violence>.

¹²⁾ Margolin, G., & Elana B. G., "Children's exposure to violence in the family and community," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13, no. 4 (2004), 152-155.

Finkelhor, D., Turner, H. A., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., & Kracke, K., "Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey," U.S. Department of Justice (2009). Available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf>.

¹³⁾ Madeline Wordes and Michell Nunez, "Out vulnerable teenagers: Their victimization, its consequences, and directions for prevention and intervention," National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2002).

Scott W. Menard, *Short and Long-Term Consequences of Adolescent Victimization*, US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2002).

¹⁴⁾ Cathy Spatz Widom, "Child Abuse, Neglect, and Violent Criminal Behavior," *Criminology*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1989), pp. 251-271.

Dorothy Lewis et al. "Toward a Theory of the Genesis of Violence: A Follow-up Study of Delinquents," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1989), pp. 431-436.

Jeffrey Fagan and Sandra Wexler "Family Origins of Violent Delinquents," *Criminology* 25, no. 3 (1987): 643-670.

Lisabeth Fisher DiLalla, Christina M. Mitchell, Michael W. Arthur, and Pauline M. Pagliocca, "Aggression and delinquency: Family and environmental factors," *Journal of youth and adolescence* 17, no. 3 (1988): 233-246.

¹⁵⁾ Patrick F. Fagan, "The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family, and

Community," The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder #1026 on Crime. Available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/1995/03/bg1026nbsp-the-real-root-causes-of-violent-crime>
Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie, "Community Context, Social Integration into Family, and Youth Violence," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, No 3. (August 2005): 767-780.

¹⁶⁾ D. Wayne Osgood and Jeff M. Chambers, "Social Disorganization Outside the Metropolis: An Analysis of Rural Youth Violence," *Criminology* 38, No. 1 (2000): 81-115.

Delbert S. Elliott, David Huizinga, and Barbara J. Morse, "The dynamics of deviant behavior: A national survey progress report," 1985.

¹⁷⁾ "Youth Violence: Facts at a Glance," Center of Disease Control (2012) available at <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/YV-DataSheet-a.pdf> (accessed August 20, 2015).

¹⁸⁾, ¹⁹⁾, ²⁰⁾ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Youth risk behavior surveillance—United States, 2011," *MMWR, Surveillance Summaries* 2012;61(no. SS-4). Available from [ss6104.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6104a.htm).

²¹⁾ Robers S, Zhang J, Truman J, Synder TD, "Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2011," National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, and Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC; 2010. Available from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012002.pdf>.

²²⁾ Gayla Margolin and Elana B. Gordis, "Children's exposure to violence in the family and community," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13 (2004): 152-155.

David Finkelhor, Richard Ormrod, Heather Turner, and Sherry L. Hamby, "The victimization of children and youth: A comprehensive, national survey," *Child Maltreatment* 10 (2005): 5-25.

Naomi Duke, Sandra L. Pettingell, Barbara McMorris, and Iris W. Borowky, "Adolescent violence perpetration: association with multiple types of adverse childhood experiences," *Pediatrics* 125 (2010): e778-e786.

²³⁾ Alan J. Lizotte, James M. Tesoriero, Terence P. Thornberry, and Marvin D. Krohn, "Patterns of Adolescent Firearms Ownership and Use," *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 11 (1994), pp. 51-74.

²⁴⁾ Patricia Brennan, Sarnoff Mednick, and Richard John, "Specialization in Violence: Evidence of a Criminal Subgroup," *Criminology*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1989), pp. 437-453.

Magda Stouthamer-Loeber, "Persistence and Desistence in Offending," (unpublished report, Pittsburgh, Pa: Life History Research Program, University of Pittsburgh, 2010. As cited by the National Institute of Justice, "From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offending," available at <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/Pages/delinquency-to-adult-offending.aspx#note5>.

²⁵⁾ James Q. Wilson, *Crime and Public Policy*, Oxford University Press (2010) pp. 53-68.

²⁶⁾ Raymond Paternoster, "Examining Three Wave Deterrence Models: A Question of Temporal Order and Specification," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, Vol. 79 (1988), pp. 135-179.

²⁷⁾ LeGrande Gardner and Donald J. Shoemaker, "Social Bonding and Delinquency: A Comparative Analysis," *Sociological Quarterly* (1989): 481-499.

Gerald R. Patterson and Thomas J. Dishion, "Contributions of Families and Peers to Delinquency," *Criminology*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1985), pp. 63-79.

Ronald L. Simons and Joan F. Robertson, "The Impact of Parenting Factors, Deviant Peers and Coping Style Upon Adolescent Drug Use," *Family Relations* (1989): 273-281.

Cindy L. Hanson, Scott W. Henggeler, William F. Haefele, and J. Douglas Rodick, "The Demographic, Individual and Family Relationship Correlates of Serious and Repeated Crime Among Adolescents and Their Siblings," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 52, no. 4 (1984).

R.L. Matsueda and Karen Heimer, "Race, Family Structure and Delinquency: A Test of Differential Association and Social Control Theories," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 52 (1988), pp. 826-840.

²⁸⁾ D.S. Elliott, D. Huizinga, and B.J. Morse, *The Dynamics of Deviant Behavior: A National Survey Progress Report* (Boulder Col.: Behavioral Research Institute, 1985).

²⁹⁾ Gerald R. Patterson and Thomas J. Dishion, "Contributions of Families and Peers to Delinquency," *Criminology*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1985), pp. 63-79.

Lisabeth Fisher DiLalla, Christian M. Mitchell, Michael W. Arthur, and Pauline M. Pagliocca, "Aggression and Delinquency: Family and Environmental Factors," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 17, no. 3 (1988): 233-246.

Ronald L. Simons and Joan F. Robertson, "The Impact of Parenting Factors, Deviant Peers and Coping Style Upon Adolescent Drug Use," *Family Relations* (1989): 273-281.

³⁰⁾ Jeffrey Fagan and Edward Pabon, "Contributions of Delinquency and Substance Use to School Dropout Among Inner-City Youths," *Youth and Society* 21, no. 3 (1990): 306-54.

³¹⁾ Bill Muehlenberg, "The case for two-parent family Part II", *National Observer* (2002): 49-58.

From:

<http://marripedia.org/> - **Marripedia**

Permanent link:

http://marripedia.org/effects_of_community_environment_on_juvenile_crime_rates?rev=1442251261

Last update: **2015/09/14 10:21**

