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Poverty Series: A series of four publications profiling poverty and how it affects the well-being of Idaho children

Series 4 Impact on Crime and the Correctional System



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Foreword

What follows is a very important report. I urge anyone who cares about their community to take time to study it. This treatise, the fourth and last of a series entitled “Growing Up Poor in Idaho,” makes compelling connections between poverty and juvenile crime in our country and in our state. Assets are fewer and risks are greater when a family is poor. The lack of those assets and presence of those risks are issues for every one of us.

Poverty is not someone else’s problem, nor is it so pervasive and insurmountable a problem that there is nothing we can do about it. We all pay a high price for poverty and its impact. We pay higher taxes when those in poverty have little or no taxable income and are more likely to raise children ill-prepared for the demands of today’s world of work. We pay for health care for those who cannot afford it – often at the highest rate. Our schools struggle to provide for the increased costs associated with impoverished kids, and we pay for it. Poverty causes us to pay more for our law enforcement, courts, jails, prisons and our juvenile justice system. The human costs are equally high, and without our intervention, are likely to be perpetuated across generations.

There are actions we can take that will address poverty directly and there are actions we can take that will reduce risks and build assets to minimize the devastation caused by poverty.

Most of the young people served by Idaho’s juvenile justice system in general and the Idaho Youth Ranch in particular, are poor and subject to many of the risks described in this report. Seventeen percent of these young people live in homes where neither parent worked, and 33 percent of their parents are on some form of public assistance. Forty-eight percent have at least one parent with a substance abuse problem, and 49 percent have a parent with a criminal record.

These young people have the capacity to change the course of their lives. They can become responsible, productive and caring adults. They can break the cycle of poverty and contribute to our communities. I know they can. I can introduce you to many who have done so. These same young people can also break the law and fill our prisons. They are at risk to continue to live in poverty and produce children of their own who will be “growing up poor in Idaho.” Let us resolve today, you and I, to not let that happen. There are cost-effective programs that have proven themselves with positive outcomes that we can expand and replicate. There are public policies worthy of our advocacy that will give people a fighting chance to break out of poverty. Idaho’s kids deserve our best efforts.

Mike Jones, President and CEO, Idaho Youth Ranch

The Idaho Youth Ranch has generously contributed to the development of this publication.



The Idaho Youth Ranch has, for nearly 50 years, provided “troubled children and their families a bridge to a valued, responsible and productive future.” This award-winning, accredited agency offers residential treatment, group homes, emergency shelter, independent living skill training, day treatment, intensive family counseling and adoption services woven together in a seamless continuum. All services are strength-based, family focused and built on the principles of balance and restorative justice.

Idaho KIDS COUNT is a program of Mountain States Group, Inc., and part of the national KIDS COUNT network, created to promote the well-being of children.

Idaho KIDS COUNT is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Idaho KIDS COUNT tracks the well-being of children in Idaho utilizing the following strategies:

- **Research** - collecting the best available data on child well-being at national, state, and county levels
- **Educate** - using data and research to inform the citizens and policy makers about the status of Idaho children and effective strategies to improve their well-being
- **Mobilize** - catalyzing action to secure better futures for all Idaho children



The Idaho KIDS COUNT mission is based on the belief that the more people know about the needs of children, the more likely they are to find the will and means to address them.

Idaho KIDS COUNT endeavors to make Idaho the best place to be a child, striving to ensure that all Idaho children will grow up safe, healthy, well-educated, cherished and with hope for the future.

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Table

15 Idaho Counties with the Highest Average Crime and Arrest Rates for 1998 and 1999

	Crime Rate*	Arrest Rate*	1997 Child Poverty Rate	Persons per sq. mile 1998
Urban Counties				
Twin Falls	9761	5274	18.9	32.3
Bonneville	9288	6272	15.7	43.2
Canyon	8443	6197	21.6	203.9
Kootenai	8426	7107	16.6	81.4
Nez Perce	8395	6992	18.3	43.4
Ada	8345	6547	12.0	261.3
Bannock	7916	8232	17.1	67.3
Rural Counties				
Cassia	7908	5947	20.4	8.3
Jerome	7150	4894	20.5	29.9
Blaine	5931	6173	10.9	6.5
Payette	6787	5925	23.4	50.4
“Frontier” Counties				
Shoshone	8377	9151	29.5	5.3
Valley	7847	8249	20.6	2.2
Power	6645	5568	23.9	5.9
Adams	6019	7862	21.2	2.8

15 Idaho Counties with the Lowest Average Crime and Arrest Rates for 1998 and 1999

	Crime Rate*	Arrest Rate*	1997 Child Poverty Rate	Persons per sq. mile 1998
Rural Counties				
Bingham	4594	4215	18.1	20
Teton	4308	2221	11.7	12.2
Franklin	3650	3112	15.4	16.7
Madison	3508	3332	14.4	50.0
Jefferson	3433	2592	15.8	17.5
Washington	3200	3584	24.4	7.0
Fremont	2864	2490	17.9	6.4
Lewis	2449	3435	22.2	8.4
Bear Lake	1012	1552	15.8	6.7
“Frontier” Counties				
Idaho	4425	3936	25.2	1.8
Clearwater	3322	3214	20.8	3.8
Custer	2431	2317	14.9	.8
Butte	2039	2611	19.0	1.4
Camas	933	874	7.5	.8
Lincoln	828	466	18.7	3.1

Figures from 1999 Crime in Idaho report; U.S. Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates and Idaho Department of Commerce
 *Rate per 100,000 population; reports were not available for Lemhi county.

All 15 counties in the top table fell within the top 16 Idaho counties for both crime and arrest rates (averaged over 1998 and 1999).

All 15 counties in the bottom table fell within the bottom 19 Idaho counties for both crime and arrest rates (averaged over 1998 and 1998).

Growing Up Poor in Idaho: Impact on Crime and the Correctional System

Summative Brief

This report on crime and the correctional system begins with a summary of the diverse research approaches that have been used to demonstrate connections between crime and poverty. Consistent with this large body of research evidence, rural and frontier counties in Idaho with the highest arrest and crime rates also tend to have higher rates of childhood poverty. Poverty and population density were shown to be independent and reliable predictors of counties' arrest and crime rates.

This report focuses on the cumulative effects of multiple and diverse risk factors for increasing the chances of antisocial behavior, violence, delinquency, and crime. Sources of these multiple risk factors for poor children – as highlighted in this report – include the family and home environment (jeopardized by the chronic stresses of poverty), violence in families and neighborhoods, low-quality child care, and substance abuse. In focusing on risk factors for violence and crime, this report also addresses the lack of connections and social support often associated with poverty.

Promising Practices include: supporting restorative justice in our juvenile justice system; embracing functional family therapy when juvenile behavior problems occur; expanding mentoring programs for poor and homeless children; increasing the availability of quality child care for the poor; and implementing or continuing nurse home visitation for low-income parents during pregnancy and early child development. Finally, our *Policy Considerations* emphasize the importance of reducing family poverty as a viable approach to reducing crime and a multitude of effective strategies that could be targeted toward poor children and/or their families.

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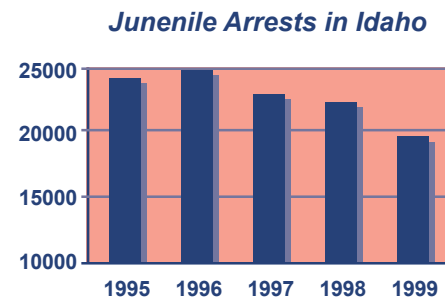
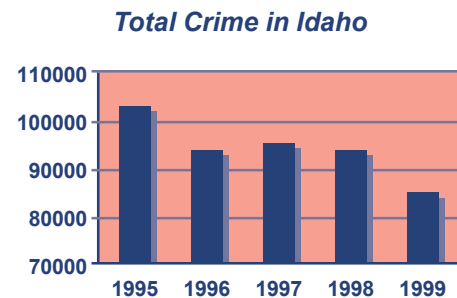
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Storyline: Growing up Poor in Idaho

About one in five children in Idaho lives in poverty. Idaho's rate of childhood poverty has fluctuated somewhat – with increases between 1995 and 1997 – but has been fairly stable across recent years. In contrast, delinquency and crime rates in Idaho decreased over the late 1990's, as shown in the following graphs (Idaho State Police, *Crime in Idaho-1999*):

The National Academy of Sciences found that “data from the Centers for Disease Control indicate that personal and neighborhood income are the strongest predictors of violent crime.”
(Sherman, 1994)



A complex array of factors – influences rates of both juvenile and adult crime. This report does not attempt to address this entire complex array, but instead, will focus on the role of childhood poverty as it relates to increasing the risks of violence, delinquency, and crime.

Using a diversity of approaches, researchers have demonstrated clear connections between poverty and crime. One approach has been to demonstrate that crime rates are generally higher in poor areas relative to more affluent areas or communities. For example, in Los Angeles, researchers demonstrated that the murder rate was three times higher and the robbery rate four times higher in the poorest relative to the most affluent of the city's six planning areas (Sherman, 1994). Similarly, Hsieh and Pugh (1993) analyzed data from 34 past studies and concluded that both poverty and income equality are associated with violent crime.

In analyzing the fear and concern about teenage violence in the 1990's – especially as it was promoted in media stories of teenage violence — Males (1996) contends that most people overlook the role of poverty in influencing crime rates. Using national statistics (Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 1994*; U.S. Census Bureau, *Poverty in the United States*, 1993), Males demonstrated that the phenomenon of “teenage violence” disappeared if poverty rates were taken into account. With adjustments for poverty, teenagers (13-19 years of age) had crime rates similar to adults in their 40's and considerably lower than adults in their 20's and 30's. According to Males, **“teen violence is poverty violence in disguise.”**

“The average American adult believes that youths commit 43% of all violent crime in the U.S., three times the true figure of 13% — and, as a result, a large majority is eager to harshly punish juveniles.” (Males, 1996)

Americans have exaggerated fears of both youth and minorities ... **“Despite sharp declines in youth crime, the public expresses great fear of its young people ... Americans are also more likely to exaggerate the threat of victimization by minorities. Twice as many White Americans believe they are more likely to be victimized by a minority than a White, despite the fact that Whites are three times more likely to be victimized by Whites than by minorities.”**
(Building Blocks for Youth, 2001)

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Connections between crime and poverty in Idaho Sources of risk: Urban versus rural differences

Do the same connections between poverty and crime exist in Idaho? At first glance, it might appear that the same connections between poverty and crime do **not** exist in Idaho. As found in *Profile of Rural Idaho* (Idaho Department of Commerce), poverty rates are higher but crime rates are generally **lower** in rural than urban Idaho. This pattern is apparent in the Table on page 23 of this report. Using guidelines recommended by the Idaho Department of Commerce, we designated urban counties as those with at least one city with a population of at least 20,000. The "Crime and Arrest Rates" table on page 23, shows that 88 percent of Idaho's urban counties fell in the group of Idaho counties with the highest average crime and arrest rates. "Frontier" counties were defined as those having fewer than six people per square mile. Four rural and four frontier counties fell into the group with the highest arrest rates.

This means that 88 percent of Idaho's urban counties were among the highest in crime and arrest rates along with 20 percent of Idaho rural counties and 25 percent of Idaho's frontier counties. While it is clear that violence and crime are more likely to occur in urban than rural areas of Idaho, population density (as reflected in urban versus rural distinctions) and economic deprivation are separate and powerful predictors of crime rate (Agnew 2001), and both should be considered when assessing crime demographics.

The same pattern of differences between urban and rural areas of Idaho was apparent in the *Idaho Crime Victimization Study* (Stohr & Vazquez, 2000). Based on 2,489 random surveys of Idaho households, the following conclusions emerged:

Compared to rural living areas, persons living in more urbanized areas:

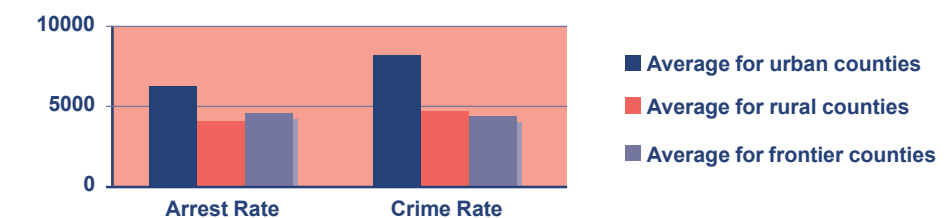
Experienced 3.6 times more property crime

Were 3.7 times more likely to be victims of violent crime

Were slightly more susceptible to domestic violence victimization

Clearly, living in rural areas does not protect children from the adverse effects of poverty. Within rural and frontier counties, those with the highest rates of childhood poverty tend to have higher crime rates (see Table on page 23). Besides poverty, there are other risk factors in rural areas that can make those areas vulnerable to increased levels of criminal activity (e.g., substance abuse).

Average Arrest and Crime Rates for Idaho Counties (source for raw data on individual counties: Idaho State Police, 1999 Crime in Idaho)



Substance abuse among youth has traditionally been higher in urban than in rural areas, but the gap has closed in the past ten years. In fact, a recent study by Columbia University's Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2000) shows that rural young people are now considerably more likely to be involved in substance abuse than their city counterparts.

Compared to urban eighth graders, those living in rural areas were:

- 34 percent more likely to smoke marijuana**
- 83 percent more likely to use crack cocaine**
- 29 percent more likely to drink alcohol**
- 70 percent more likely to have been drunk**



For tenth and twelfth graders, use rates were also generally higher for rural compared to urban youth. The expansion in methamphetamine production in low population areas may be a factor in the growth of rural drug use.

Overall, although crime rates are lower in rural compared to urban Idaho, there are clear risk factors for youth living in rural areas. Rural youth experiencing the most poverty and/or those involved in substance abuse are likely at greatest risk for delinquency and adult criminal activity.

Other approaches to demonstrating crime-poverty connections

Research on juvenile delinquency has documented clear connections between income levels and arrest rates. It is possible, however, that low-income youth do not commit more crimes but are more likely to be caught and apprehended than more affluent youth. To avoid this potential problem, other researchers collected data from juveniles' self-reports of delinquent activity. Overall findings from self-report studies indicate that there is no association between socioeconomic class and the incidence of **minor** delinquent acts. However, juveniles from lower classes commit more **serious** crimes. For example, lower-class juveniles commit about four times as many violent crimes as middle-class juveniles (Agnew, 2001). Other researchers have demonstrated escalating crime rates following economic downturns or increased unemployment.

Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a representative sample of 16,478 high school students, revealed the following conclusions about connections between poverty and juvenile crime:

- *“An increase in local unemployment increased the propensity to commit crimes, as did local poverty.”*
- *“Similarly, family poverty increased the probability to commit robbery, burglary and theft among males, and assault and burglary among females.” (Mocan & Rees, 1999)*

A story of shame, fear, and anger *(Sherman, 1994)*

“Susan” was raised in poverty and I am still learning the many ways it hurt her. I am her mother. Susan was born two weeks after my eighteenth birthday and by the time she was 12 we had moved more than 30 times, always one step ahead of or behind the eviction notices, gas and light disconnect notices, and various other bills haunting our mailbox. We laughed a lot and tried to make it an adventure, like the time she was six and the two of us had to move our bed across town on a bus.

But then I would cry and cry and cry for days at a time. Being poor made me crazy, and Susan learned to be my support, caretaker, and defender before she could read. She made herself into a model child so that people would say I was a good mother and let us stay together.

A few times I tried to kill myself out of fear and shame at not being able to keep a roof over our heads, out of anger over not being able to keep a job and needing to return over and over again to welfare, out of desperation whenever the welfare department would cut off my eligibility by mistake. When I would be put into

a mental hospital, Susan would stay with my mother and father. What I didn't know until she was grown was that my brother was forcing sex upon her each time she stayed with them. She was so afraid of what would happen to our little family that she hid her pain.

Poverty was more than not having enough. It was about not having any control over the most intimate parts of our lives, and, for me, about feeling shame, fear, and anger all the time. After more than 20 low-wage jobs, I enrolled in college when Susan was eight. A few years later we received a rent subsidy which allowed us to stay in one place. Things got a bit better. For the first time in either of our lives, we had community, permanent friends, and a sense of belonging. Today, Susan and I are successful professionals, and the best friends. It didn't take much: a rent subsidy, a generous state university admissions policy, and access to mental health services. The rest we did on our own.



Conclusion

There are few phenomena that arouse as much fear and shock as high rates of crime, particularly among our youth. This fear and shock is often intensified by feelings of confusion and helplessness about clear solutions to the perceived problem. On the positive side, evidence outlined in this report shows that juvenile crime rates are significantly lower than most adults perceive, and in Idaho, as well as other parts of the country, crime rates are declining. This report offers a number of specific ways to understand the causes or risk factors associated with youth violence and delinquency. Most of these risk factors are shared by youth from families across all income levels. The vast majority of children from poor families do not grow up to be violent or criminal. Nevertheless, childhood poverty significantly increases the likelihood of exposure to multiple and cumulative risk factors. Overall, this report offers a number of constructive routes for addressing problems of violence and crime in the context of childhood poverty.

The diverse and disturbing associations among childhood poverty, delinquency and crime, and problematic aspects of the correctional system have been highlighted in this report. While Idaho has continued to spend increasing amounts of its state budget on building and maintaining prisons, addressing problems of children and families in poverty represents a viable approach to reducing such costs in the future. Hence, “saving” at-risk youth can yield significant benefits to Idaho, its communities and its families.

“A recent study has estimated that the discounted monetary value of ‘saving’ one average high-risk youth lies between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million. Given potential benefits of this magnitude, the need to identify effective intervention techniques becomes clear.”

(Robertson et al., 2001)



Moments for Idaho Children in 2000

Children Defense Fund: “2000 Children in the States Data”

Every 9 minutes a public school student was suspended from school.

Every hour a child was reported abused or neglected.

Every 4 hours a baby was born to a teenage mother.

Every 34 days a child or youth was murdered.

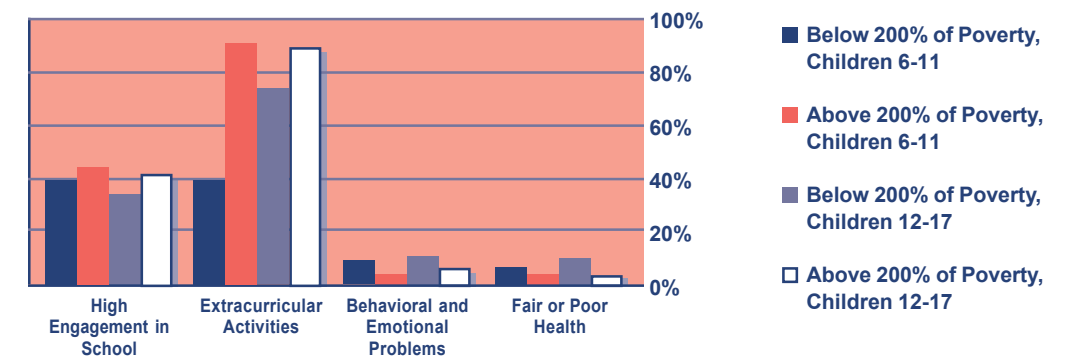
“The links between extreme deprivation, delinquency, and violence, then, are strong, consistent, and compelling. There is little question that growing up in extreme poverty exerts powerful pressures toward crime. The fact that those pressures are overcome by some individuals is testimony to human strength and resiliency, but does not diminish the importance of the link between social exclusion and violence.”

(Currie, 1998, as quoted in Kramer, 2000)

Growing Up Poor: The cumulative effects of diverse risk factors.

For poor children, the increased likelihood of antisocial and delinquent behavior reflects the cumulative influence of multiple and diverse risk factors. The pathways to delinquency – as reflected in specific sets of risk factors – may be different for some children than others. But research findings are clear and compelling regarding the existence of multiple and diverse risk factors experienced by children who grow up in poverty. For example, the Urban Institute reported effects of family poverty on children’s engagement in school, extracurricular activities, behavioral and emotional problems, and health (Vandivere, Moore, & Zaslow, 2000), as shown in the graph below.

Percentage of Children Experiencing Various Child Outcomes,
by Family Income



“Being raised in poverty has been found to contribute to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence. Self-reported felony assault and robbery have been found to be twice as common among youth living in poverty as among middle-class youth. Low family income predicted self-reported teen violence and convictions for violent offenses in several studies.”

(Hawkins et al., 2000)

“The correlation between antisocial behavior and poor academic performance is clear.”

(McWhirter et al., 1998)

The first Idaho KIDS COUNT report on school readiness and educational performance documented how low income is associated with such measures as grades, achievement test scores, attendance, dropping out, expulsion from school, learning disabilities, and need for special education. Academic failure is an identified risk factor for delinquent behavior (McWhirter et al, 1998).

Multiple Risk Factors for Delinquency and Violence

Summary of conclusions from previous Idaho KIDS COUNT Reports in the context of identified risk factors (from Sherman, 1994)

Childhood behavior problems

Children from poor families have higher rates of internalizing and externalizing problems as well as antisocial behavior than do children from nonpoor families.

Learning difficulties and need for remedial education by age 10

Children from poor families are 1.3 times more likely to have learning disabilities than children from more affluent families.

Disability at an early age or pronounced mental health problems at age 10

In the first few years of life, family poverty has been associated with lower infant developmental test scores. Childhood poverty has been associated with different mental health problems including depression and loneliness, low self-esteem, and both internalizing and externalizing problems.

Difficult relationships with parents

Poverty researchers have consistently recognized that the stresses of poverty lead to stressful and problematic relationships between children and their parents.

Childhood abuse and neglect

Recorded rates of child abuse and neglect are significantly higher for poor than more affluent families. Despite evidence that child maltreatment is more likely to be reported and

scrutinized for poor than nonpoor families, it is likely that the chronic stresses of poverty increase the chances of maltreatment.

Family disruption and discord

In the National Survey of American Families, researchers found that half of poor families experienced significant family stresses. High levels of family stress were associated with significant emotional and behavioral problems for children.

Living in a high-crime neighborhood

Children from poor families are also more likely to live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty— neighborhoods most likely to suffer from high crime rates.

A crowded home

Thirty-eight percent of renters in Idaho can't afford Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit; substandard or crowded housing often accompanies poverty.

Lead poisoning

Children from poor and low-income families are more likely to suffer the consequences of lead poisoning than are children from families with higher incomes. Lead poisoning has been associated with other warning signs for delinquency and/or crime, including learning disabilities developmental delays, and behavioral problems.

Policy Consideration:

Increase support and investment in after-school programs, particularly in areas with high rates of childhood poverty.

Policy Consideration:

State investments in mental health and substance abuse programs for parents would eliminate significant risk factors for Idaho's children.

Policy Consideration:

Policies and programs should be designed to eliminate the risks for poor children that come with low-quality child care. Income eligibility for subsidized child care should be increased to 200% of the federal poverty level for parents who are working full-time.

Policy Consideration:

Resource centers within poor neighborhoods and communities should include programs for building peer relationships, mentoring programs, computer facilities, parental support programs, and other resources designed to remove educational barriers for poor children.

Policy Consideration:

Encourage government, community, faith-based or other organizations to develop additional programs or offer incentives to expand existing programs that offer treatment, shelter, and counseling services for troubled youth and their families.

The ratio of risk factors to developmental youth assets

The third Idaho KIDS COUNT report, which focussed on developmental youth assets in the context of economic and workforce development – summarized extensive research evidence that diverse developmental youth assets (from family support to school engagement) were jeopardized by childhood poverty. These same assets appear to protect children from unhealthy choices and risky behavior, indicating that the percentage of children involved in high-risk behavior drops dramatically as the number of youth assets increases (Search Institute). Hence, fewer developmental youth assets increases the risks for delinquent activity, and more risk factors increase the likelihood of later violent and delinquent behavior. Other research compared the odds for later violence (at 18 years of age) for children who had been exposed to more than five risk factors, compared with the same odds for violence when children were exposed to fewer than two risk factors. When measured



Researchers have identified academic failure and social rejection (in school) as important risk factors for delinquency. Hence, several policy considerations from the Idaho KIDS COUNT report on school readiness and educational performances take on further significance in the context of delinquency and crime:

- Research evidence indicates that state support for both HeadStart and nutritional programs (for example, for WIC – Women, Infants, and Children) would improve the school readiness of Idaho’s poor children. Additional expenditures should also be directed at programs that help build transitions and follow-up for poor children as they move from HeadStart programs to public schools.
- Programs, resources, and services should be strengthened in Idaho schools serving large numbers of children from poor families. Other prevention recommendations include increasing funding for schools that implement social, recreational and enrichment activities for school-aged children outside school hours.
- Educational programs for teachers and staff throughout Idaho’s schools should include information about the causes and consequences of poverty for school-age children as well as recommended approaches for improving children’s school successes.

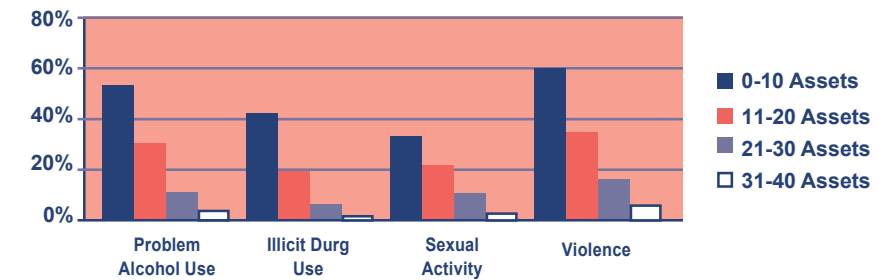


As a way to curb or eliminate violence in the schools, educators and legislative leaders should focus on policies that recommend early child care options, and increase access to services within schools that would prevent further violent acts. Some examples would include: implement or expand anger/stress management, peer mediation and anti-bullying programs; reduce class sizes; promote mentoring programs; link classrooms directly to emergency personnel; continue funding for school violence hotline for anonymous reporting by students; allow for alternatives to high school diploma requirements; and require increased parental involvement in truancy and violent acts at school.



at 10 years of age, the odds of later violence were seven times higher for those with more risk factors. For risk factors measured at 14 and 16 years of age, odds for later violence were ten times higher for youths with more risk factors (Herrenkohl et al., 2000).

Percentage of Youth with Differing Assets Engaging in Specific High-Risk Behaviors



“The percentage of youth convicted for violent crimes increased from only 3 percent for those with no risk factors to 31 percent for those with four risk factors.”

(Hawkins et al., 2000)

Developmental models:

The accumulation of risk factors over the course of child development

The earlier that children show aggressive or antisocial behaviors, the more likely they will become chronic offenders. Developmental perspectives on delinquency and crime emphasize the risk factors that accumulate throughout the course of child development.

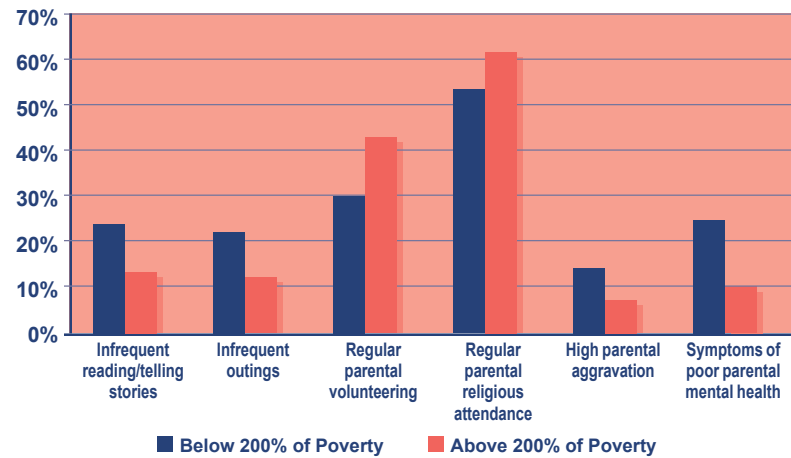
“A consistent finding ... has been the relation between low socioeconomic status (SES) and early-onset conduct problems in childhood ...”
(Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994)

According to the developmental perspective, “antisocial behavior is a developmental phenomenon that begins early in life and continues through childhood and adolescence into adulthood. Chronic delinquency emerges in a series of predictable steps that place young people at increasingly greater risk for long-term criminal behavior.”
(McWhirter et al., 1998)

Sources of Risk for Poor Children: Family and home environment

The chronic stresses of poverty often disrupt families and jeopardize the quality of parent-child relationships. The Urban Institute's *Snapshots of America's Families II* shows how diverse aspects of the family environment are influenced by the level of family income:

Children with Various Family Environments by Family Income, 1999



Many researchers have concluded that parenting practices mediate the effects of poverty on children. Stressful experiences increase the likelihood of psychological distress, which in turn leads to changes in parent-child management practices contributing to the development of antisocial behavior in children. (Sampson & Laub, 1994)

Risk factors for delinquency – emerging from the family and home environment – include the following:

RISK FACTOR FOR DELINQUENCY

(McWhirter et al., 1998)

- Parents use aggressive (punitive) and inconsistent discipline.
- One or both parents are antisocial or have a history of delinquent and violent behavior.
- The parents are uneducated and work in unskilled occupations, live in a poor neighborhood, and earn little money.
- The child is subjected to family stressors, such as family violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, marital problems, or divorce.

ASSOCIATION WITH CHILDHOOD POVERTY

- Punitive and inconsistent parenting styles are more frequent among poor than nonpoor families (Hashima & Amato, 1994), probably as a consequence of the family stress associated with poverty.
- Researchers have shown that poor and homeless mothers experience significant violence. (Anooshian, 1999; Bassuk et al., 1996).
- Poverty is often associated with low levels of education, unskilled occupations, and living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty.
- Substance abuse (by some poor parents) is a likely mediator of the effects of poverty on children. The stresses of poverty increase the chances of separation or divorce.

“Poor children start out with higher levels of antisocial behavior than nonpoor children, and children whose poverty increases over time have increasing levels of antisocial behavior.” (Samaan, 2000)

“About one-half of antisocial children become adolescent delinquents, and about one-half to three-fourths of adolescent delinquents become chronic adult offenders.” (McWhirter et al., 1998)

“While many factors need to be considered ... social and economic forces such as poverty, inequality, and social exclusion shape most of the problem of youth violence in America.” (Kramer, 2000, p. 123)

“Substantial reductions in national rates of serious crime can only be achieved by prevention in areas of concentrated poverty, where the majority of all homicides in the nation occur, and where homicide rates are 20 times the national average.” (Sherman, 2001)



Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Idaho will see the elimination of family poverty in the near future. In the interim, there are numerous programs that can be helpful to children growing up in poverty and, hence, helpful to reducing delinquency and crime rates. Poor and low-income children and families should be targeted when implementing or expanding promising practices.

There appears to be no shortage of cost-effective programs that could be implemented for poor children and families. In addition to Functional Family Therapy, Restorative Justice, mentoring (through Big Brothers and Big Sisters), quality child care and nurse home visitation, *Blueprints for Violence Prevention* (Mihalic et al., 2001) includes nine other programs that have “demonstrated their effectiveness in reducing adolescent violent crime, aggressive delinquency, substance abuse, and preadolescent aggression and conduct disorders.” Other approaches to reducing crime, with demonstrated cost effectiveness include:

- Training and therapy for parents and families of young school-age children who have shown aggressive or acting-out behaviors.
- Cash and other incentives to disadvantaged high school students to induce them to graduate.
- Monitoring and supervision of high-school-age youth who have been involved in delinquency (see Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Chiesa, 2001).

There is compelling evidence that after-school programs reduce juvenile crime. One study found a 75 percent **decrease** in the arrest rate for youths residing in a public housing complex that implemented after-school recreation programs for low-income children. This contrasted with a 67 percent **increase** in arrest rates for youths residing in a comparable (control) housing complex without after-school programs (Catalano, Arthur, Hawkins, Berglund, & Olson, 1998).

Recent research has shown that the frequency of violent juvenile crime is greatest between three and four in the afternoon and declines throughout the evening hours. In communities where this is true, after-school programs seem to be a logical approach to juvenile crime reduction. (see Snyder, 1997)

Policy Considerations

As summarized throughout this report, diverse research findings are quite compelling in pointing to childhood poverty as the primary culprit for many precursors to delinquency and crime. Based on these research findings, the most important approach to reducing crime would appear to be reducing poverty, particularly family poverty. In fact, all four Idaho KIDS COUNT reports have emphasized the importance of policies directed toward reducing family poverty in Idaho, including the following policy considerations:

Policies that provide working parents with additional grants or subsidies for the costs of transportation and child care would benefit Idaho's children.

Further investments in the development of low-income or affordable housing for families would increase the chances of educational success for Idaho's children.

Idaho should raise the eligibility level for CHIP (the Children's Health Insurance Program) to at least 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and expand coverage to parents.

Idaho should consider policies to support poor parents in pursuing education plans designed to enable them to earn living wages. This might include allowing student-parents pursuing an approved plan of study to receive welfare cash assistance benefits exempt from work requirements.

Idaho businesses should increasingly become involved in providing family-friendly programs and benefits for workers making wages insufficient to meet their families' needs. Obvious possibilities include child care programs and health insurance benefits.

Research evidence indicates that programs/policies directed at increasing income or providing assistance with expenses will improve developmental outcomes for children. Increased financial help with child care expenses, an increase in the state minimum wage, and a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would benefit Idaho's working parents and their children.



Violence in families and neighborhoods

When children grow up in violent homes or violent neighborhoods, they are likely to acquire antisocial behaviors themselves. This behavior is associated with childhood poverty, and delinquency and crime later in life. The chances of experiencing violent crime are estimated to be 2.2 times higher for children living in poverty than for children from more affluent families (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). These trends are apparent in Idaho as well.

In violent families, children often learn to be violent and antisocial themselves. Violence and abuse are common in the past and present experiences of low-income and homeless women. Bassuk et al. (1996) reported that 82 percent of very poor housed mothers and 92 percent of homeless mothers – interviewed in the Worcester Family Research Project – had experienced severe abuse or assault. Living conditions for the homeless (shelters, living with others) include a lack of privacy. Regardless of whether or not poor or homeless children are themselves victims of violence, the public nature of their lives – living in crowded and/or shared spaces, in shelters, etc. – makes it likely that children will witness much of the violence experienced by their mothers.

In Idaho...

"More than half (56.4%) of violent crime involved victims whose household income is under \$40,000. People in the lower income categories appear more likely to be victimized by violent crime."
(Stohr & Vasquez, 2000)

"The highest rates of domestic violence were experienced by people in the lowest income category (under \$10,000). The rate of domestic violence is inversely proportional to the level of income; as the level of income increases, incidents of domestic violence decrease."
(Stohr & Vasquez, 2000, p. 4)

In contrast to declines in both juvenile and adult crime rates between 1998 and 1999, violence against children in Idaho increased 6.5%.
(Idaho State Police, Crime in Idaho-1999)

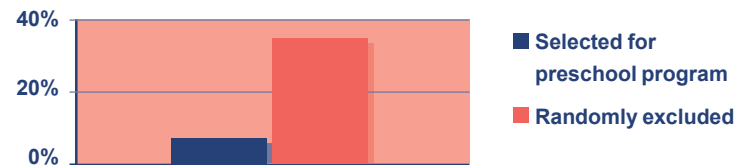
In interviews with poor and homeless families in Boise, mothers reported the frequency with which they had been victims of specific violent acts (e.g., punched, threatened with a gun). A total of 88 percent of the parents reported being the victim of violence as adults; **63 percent reported having been the victim of 20 or more specific acts of violence** (Anooshian, 1999). Further findings from this research indicated that when mothers reported extensive experiences with violence, their children (in independent interviews) were more likely to report problematic patterns of aggression and violence in their relationships with peers. Consistent with past research, maternal reports of violence – a rough indicator of violence experienced or witnessed by children – were predictive of behavior problems for children.

In families with violence, children learn to use aversive and violent behaviors to counteract the hostile and violent behaviors of other family members. Learned aggressiveness, in such an environment, is functional for survival. Hitting and other aggressive behaviors are sometimes accepted as normal early in life.
(McWhirter et al., 1998)

Low-quality child care

Recently, low-quality or unavailable child care has emerged as a significant risk factor associated with both childhood poverty and later delinquency and crime. Quality child care has often been identified as an important mediator of the effects of poverty on children. Recently, researchers have identified clear connections between low-quality child care and crime. For example, at-risk children (3 and 4 year olds) who were randomly excluded from the High/Scope Perry Preschool (a preschool recognized for high quality) were five times more likely to become chronic offenders (arrested more than four times) than children who attended the preschool program (*Fight Crime: Invest in Kids*, 2000):

Percentage of Children — Selected or Excluded from Preschool — Who Were Chronic Lawbreakers at Age 27



Poor working parents cannot afford most high-quality child care. Only 20-25% of eligible children in Idaho attend HeadStart programs (high-quality programs for low-income children).

Other research findings from *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* (2000)

“New research tracked 989 children for 14 years. These 3- and 4-year olds had been enrolled in government-funded Child-Parent Centers. Compared to similar children not in the program, only half as many of these kids had two or more arrests in their teens.”

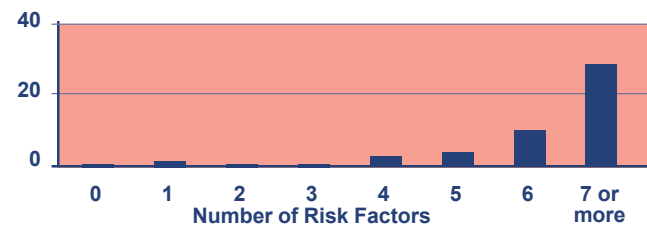
“Large national studies show that at-risk kids who attended quality child care programs had no more behavior problems at age eight than children of college-educated moms. But those at-risk kids who received poor quality care had significantly more problem behaviors.”

Substance abuse

Risk factors for delinquency overlap with risk factors for substance abuse. Common risk factors for delinquency and substance abuse include “school and family problems, negative peer groups, lack of neighborhood social controls, and a history of physical or sexual abuse” (*Juvenile Delinquency and Substance Abuse*). As is the case for violence and delinquency, researchers have found that substance abuse problems increase with the number of risk factors (Newcomb, Maddahian, & Bentler, 1986).

Given overlapping risk factors, it is not surprising that substance abuse and criminal activity are so closely connected; substance use by youths represents (by itself) illegal activity. Most assume that substance

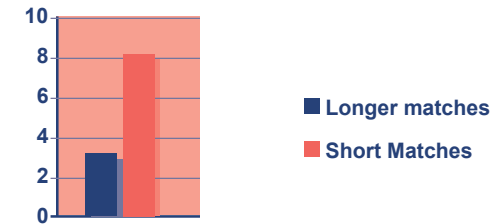
Percentage of Heavy Use of Hard Drugs during the Past Six Months (from Newcomb et al., 1986)



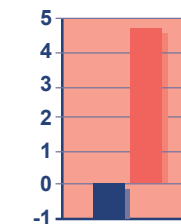
abuse leads to further crime. However, it is also true that delinquency leads adolescents to become involved in illegal substances. One research study, for example, found that delinquent behavior in the 10th grade was predictive of problem drug use in the 12th grade, suggesting that “curbing delinquent behavior might contribute to the prevention of problem drug use” (Bui, Ellickson, & Bell, 2000).

Some of the observed benefits of this mentor program were directly related to identified risk factors for violence and delinquency. For example, in reflecting commitment to school, attendance for the spring semester was better for children who had been matched with a mentor for most of the school year compared to children who had just started with a match (short matches):

Average days absent in the spring semester



Change in average days absent from the fall to the spring semester



Children who had been matched with a mentor for most of the school year showed greater improvement (relative to those who had been only recently matched) over the school year in teacher ratings of:

- Showing an interest in schoolwork
- Helping other children learn
- Being sought out as a playmate by other children
- Fighting with others (with less fighting at the end of the year)

For children living in poverty, connections with school as well as healthy relationships with peers, are important protective factors in diminishing chances for later delinquency.

“An 18-month study of eight BBBSA [Big Brothers Big Sisters of America] affiliates found that when compared with a control group on a waiting list for a match, youth in the mentoring program were 46% less likely to start using drugs, 27 percent less likely to start drinking, and 32 percent less likely to hit someone.” (Mihalic et al., 2001)

Early Childhood Interventions

Including child care as an important and early intervention to crime is an important promising practice. According to the “Fight Crime, Invest in Kids” report (Dr. T. Brazelton, April 2000), for every dollar we invest in child care, we save more than \$5 in crime costs down the line. This same report proves that at-risk children who receive quality child care today are much less likely to commit crimes tomorrow. They’re also less likely to enter school with serious behavioral problems. They are less likely to be arrested, or break the law again and again when they grow up to be adults. Another very promising practice is that of nurse home visitation during pregnancy and early child development for high-risk families. Home visitation includes positive health-related behaviors during pregnancy and the early years of the child’s life, competent care of their children, and maternal personal development (family planning, educational achievement, and participation in the workforce) (Olds et al., 1998). For single mothers from low socioeconomic homes, nurse home visitation resulted in significant benefits for their children 15 years later. Several of those benefits were directly related to violence and delinquency, including fewer instances of running away, fewer arrests, fewer convictions and violations of probation, and fewer “behavioral problems related to use of alcohol and other drugs” (Olds et al., 1998).

Restorative Justice

Through a cooperative effort by communities and government, offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and for the harm they have caused, by providing redress for victims and by promoting reintegration of both within the community. The community can build peace through strong, inclusive relationships; the government can bring order through fair, effective and limited use of force.

Restorative justice responds to specific crimes by emphasizing both recovery of the victim through redress, vindication and healing, and compensation by the offender through reparation, fair treatment and habilitation. It emphasizes the need to repair past harms in order to prepare for the future. It seeks to reconcile offenders with those they have harmed. And it calls on communities to reintegrate victims and offenders (Juvenile Justice, Juvenile Crime National Academy Press, 2001).

The differences between restorative justice and current practices in the juvenile justice system include:

- restorative justice views criminal acts as not only lawbreaking, but recognizes that offenders harm victims, communities and even themselves
- restorative justice involves more parties by including victims and communities rather than giving key roles only to government and the offender
- restorative justice measures success differently by measuring how much harm has been repaired or prevented rather than measuring how much punishment has been inflicted
- restorative justice recognizes the importance of community involvement and the initiative in responding to and reducing crime, rather than leaving the problem of crime to the government alone.

The Department of Juvenile Corrections was created by the Idaho Juvenile Corrections Act. Under the Juvenile Corrections Act, the Department is directed to incorporate The Balanced Approach into Juvenile Corrections. The Balanced Approach as part of the Restorative Justice model, requires that the juvenile correctional system: provide for the protection of our communities from juvenile offenders, hold juvenile offenders accountable for their actions, and provide offenders competency development opportunities.

Mentoring Poor and Homeless Children

Based on a partnership involving Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Idaho, Madison Elementary School, Boise State University, and the Idaho Department of Education (Homeless Education), a school-based mentor program for poor (“immanently homeless”) and homeless children has become well established at Madison Elementary School in Boise. As coordinated by Big Brother Big Sisters, “Bigs” meet with their matched “Littles” for about one hour per week, typically at lunch time. The program has been so successful that it has been expanded to include Whittier Elementary School (also in Boise).

Quotes from matched children quickly revealed just how well the program was working:

“Have you seen by Big Brother today? Could you tell him that I really need to see him right away? I want to tell him I miss him.”

“Did you see this necklace that I have? My Big Sister has one, too. I have one half of the heart and she wears the other half. This means we’re like real sisters now.”

“Persistent substance abuse among youth is often accompanied by an array of problems, including involvement with the juvenile justice system.” (Juvenile Delinquency and Substance Abuse)

In Idaho, about “one third of violent crime offenders were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at time of the offense.” For cases of domestic violence, about “42% of offenders were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense.” (Idaho Crime Victimization Study; Stohr & Vasquez, 2000)

Lack of connections and social support

Children living in poor families are more likely to be disconnected from other people as well as from opportunities and services than children from more affluent families. Poor children often lack computers (contributing to the “digital divide”), lack the transportation and/or resources to participate in extracurricular activities, have limited access to dental and medical services, live in fragmented and disconnected neighborhoods, and have strained interpersonal relationships at home and at school.

“When ties that bind an individual to key societal institutions (e.g., attachment to family, school, work) are loosened, the risk of crime and delinquency is heightened.” (Sampson & Laub, 1994)

Social support networks for poor families can serve as a protective factor in facing the adverse effects of economic distress (Hashima & Amato, 1994). Poor parents have a greater need and benefit more from social support than do more affluent families. Despite this greater need, poor and low-income parents often experience social isolation and lack of social support.

Poor families are more likely to live in poor neighborhoods with disorganization – reflecting the lack of connections and social support – than more affluent families. Neighborhoods with high rates of poverty also tend to have high crime rates, increasing children’s exposure to violence. High rates of transience also make it difficult for residents to form close ties with neighbors. Hence, adults in poor neighborhoods are less likely to monitor and confront adolescents involved in delinquency than those in more affluent neighborhoods. Many residents of poor neighborhoods lack the resources or skills required to help others – “to help juveniles do well in school, secure adequate jobs, or deal with other life challenges” (Agnew, 2001). Low-income residents are often working multiple jobs while also struggling with child-care arrangements, leaving little time for the connection building that may be essential to strong and protective neighborhoods for youth.

Transience and change – extending beyond the neighborhood and interfering with social connections and friendships – characterize the lives of many poor children. The National Survey of American Families found that 13% of poor children experienced two or more significant changes in the preceding 12 months (moving to another state, moving to a different home, moving in with another family, changes in parent employment, two or more school changes; see Moore, Vandivere, & Erhe, 2000). Children who experienced significant changes were more likely to skip school multiple times and twice as likely to be suspended or drop out of school compared to children who experienced less change – clear risk factors for delinquency. In another study, researchers reported that “high elementary school mobility ... increased the likelihood that adolescents would become frequent perpetrators of overall violence five years later” (*RAND Health*). Social rejection – particularly at school – has been identified as a major risk factor for delinquency (McWhirter et al., 1998). Similarly, alienation from mainstream or middle-class society may lead adolescents to delinquency. Involvement with crime and other delinquents provides interpersonal relationships and a sense of being valued – restoring connections in adolescents’ lives. For example, involvement in gangs – a clear risk factor for criminal behavior – often follows alienation and isolation.

“Some lower-class boys realize that their opportunities to gain middle-class status are limited ... some lower-class adolescents become alienated, feeling apart from, rather than a part of, conventional society.” Delinquency provides a vehicle for gaining value and prestige through a different subculture. (Vowell & May, 2000)

The Correctional System

Though crime rates fell in the final years of the 20th Century, prison populations grew at a steady pace. Prison populations in state and federal facilities increased an average of 6.5% per year in the 1990's across the nation. In 1990, there were 292 prisoners serving one or more years for every 100,000 US residents. By the year 2000, 478 out of every 100,000 Americans were behind bars. Throughout the decade, Idaho has been a leader among the states in prison growth, with increases averaging over 10% per year from 1990 through 2000. Since incarceration is an expensive option for dealing with offenders, state corrections budgets have grown along with prison populations (Batt, 2000; Beck, 2000; Radelat, 2001).

Why would prison populations grow as crime rates are falling? Legislative campaigns in state-houses across the nation led to mandatory minimum sentencing for many crimes, reducing the discretion judges have in meting out punishment. Over the same years, states passed harsher laws for drug offenders, increasing prison terms and limiting alternative sentencing options. Offenders returning to prison for parole violations is increasing--up 54 percent between 1990 and 1998 in state prisons. Drug offenders accounted for more than half of this increase. Finally, “three strikes and you’re out” laws passed in many states (including Idaho) have resulted in a growing group of inmates, many of them young adults, who will be imprisoned for decades to come (Beck, 2000).

Other “get tough” trends during these same years include changes in how youth offenders were treated in court. Between 1992 and 1997, all but five of the states expanded laws for transferring youth offenders to criminal court. Idaho has been a central player in this trend. While the focus of the juvenile justice system is on rehabilitation, these changes increasingly subject youth to the punishment-orientation of the adult criminal system. National statistics show that the number of juvenile delinquents tried in criminal court grew from 7200 in 1985 to 12,300 in 1994, a 71 percent increase in just 10 years. Sentencing of youth to adult correctional facilities show comparable growth. In 1997, 9100 youth under 18 years of age were being held in adult jails, up more than 35 percent from 1994. In seven out of nine of those cases, the youth offenders were old enough to be considered adults in the criminal system (16 and 17 years of age in some states). In the remaining cases, they were juveniles who had been transferred to criminal court for trial (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999; Butts & Harrell, 1998; DeFrances & Strom, 1997; Strom & Smith, 1998).

A recent study of youth waived into Florida criminal courts raised questions about the effectiveness of treating youth in the adult corrections system. Authors compared youth prosecuted as adults with those prosecuted as juveniles, matching the two samples for age, race, gender, current charges and past criminal record. Over a two year period, 30 percent of youth prosecuted in adult criminal court were rearrested, compared to only 19 percent for the youth retained in the juvenile system. Those transferred to criminal court also tended to be arrested for more serious offenses and were arrested sooner than their juvenile system counterparts. (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999; Talbot, 2000).

Promising Practices

There are a number of specific programs that appear promising in protecting children from some of the harmful effects of poverty and crime.

Functional Family Therapy

Juvenile crime is becoming a serious problem in many communities today. Problems range from minor offenses (curfew violations and trespassing) to serious crimes such as drug abuse, theft and violence, which results in staggering personal, economic and social costs. While many communities incarcerate youth for crimes, this approach has been shown to be ineffective and costly. By removing adolescents from their families and communities, punitive programs inadvertently make adolescents' problems more difficult to solve in the long run. Thus, family-based interventions that adopt a multisystemic perspective are well suited to treating the broad range of problems found in juveniles who engage in delinquent and criminal behavior (The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2000).

As an outcome-driven prevention/intervention program for youth, Functional Family Therapy targets youth aged 11-18 who are at risk for delinquency, violence, substance use or a negative disorder. The program provides a skill building experience designed to keep families together, resolve crisis, or reunite families that have experienced out-of-home placement. Phases of the program include:

- Engagement – designed to emphasize within youth and family the factors that protect youth and families from early program dropout
- Motivation – designed to change maladaptive emotional reactions and beliefs, and increase alliance, trust, hope, and motivation for lasting change
- Assessment – designed to clarify individual, family system, and larger system relationships, especially the interpersonal functions of behavior and how they related to change techniques
- Behavior change – consists of communication training, specific tasks and technical aids, basic parenting skills, contracting and response-cost techniques
- Generalization – family case management is guided by individualized family functional needs, their interface with environmental constraints and resources, and the alliance with the therapist/family case manager

Programs outcomes have demonstrated that Functional Family Therapy is capable of:

- Effectively treating adolescents with alcohol and other drug abuse disorders, delinquent or violent conditions as well as behavior disorders
- Interrupting the matriculation of these adolescents into more restrictive, higher cost services
- Reducing the access and penetration of other social services by these adolescents
- Generating positive outcomes with the entire spectrum of interventional personnel
- Preventing further incidence of the presenting problem
- Preventing younger children in the family from penetrating the system of care
- Preventing adolescents from penetrating the adult criminal system
- Effectively transferring treatment effects across treatment systems

(Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Functional Family Therapy, Schulman, Waldron, & Sexton, 1998)