Youth Violence
Theory, Prevention, and Intervention

Kathryn Seifert, PhD

"Dr. Seifert's enlightening elaboration on youth violence issues in this book sheds refreshing light on an old discussion. By walking us through the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects of youth violence, we are able to gain an updated perspective on the underpinnings of violence, and what could and should be done to understand and indeed curb such difficulties in our communities. Informational, fact-filled, and with eye-opening...approaches to child development, this book deserves permanent placement on the desk...of every school principal, foster parent, child welfare worker, juvenile court judge, juvenile facility administrator, child advocate, mental health provider, psychologist, or psychiatrist, whether specializing in children or working with families in which crime or fear of crime is a presenting problem."

—Grady Dale, Jr., EdD
President, American Institute for Urban Psychological Studies, Baltimore, MD, (From the Foreword)

In the United States, youth violence is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24. This volume, authored by a noted psychotherapist with more than 30 years of experience in family violence, examines recent violent episodes perpetrated by young offenders in order to understand their root causes and to explore current prevention and treatment methods through a multidisciplinary lens.

The book addresses current evidence-based research regarding youth violence and disseminates promising strategies for assessment, prevention, and interventions for at-risk youth. Theoretical perspectives on the causes of violent behavior focus on interactions between biological, developmental, psychological, and environmental factors. Different types of violence are examined along with the latest research on "what works" in prevention and treatment. The text also examines the roles of substance abuse, familial and community violence, and school failure in promoting violence in adolescents. Additionally, the book addresses entrenched systemic issues that contribute to youth violence. Youth Violence is a comprehensive yet highly readable volume for mental health and social service professionals who work with youth and families for violence researchers.

KEY FEATURES:
• Examines the causes of youth violence and offers promising research-based strategies for assessment, prevention, and intervention
• Provides real-life case studies from Virginia Tech, Columbine, and other violent incidents perpetrated by young people
• Written by an author with over 30 years of experience in youth violence and creator of the CARE (Child and Adolescent Risk Evaluation) screening tool
• Explores the alarming trends in youth violence, and the demographic factors that affect them

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Youth Violence

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Kathryn Seifert received her PhD from the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus, in 1995. She is a Fellow and Past President for the Maryland Psychological Association and advocates for the highest quality services for all children needing mental health treatment.

Dr. Seifert has more than 30 years experience in mental health, addictions, and criminal justice work. In addition to creating the Juvenile CARE2 (Chronic Violent Behavior Risk and Needs Assessment, 2nd Edition), she has authored articles and lectured nationally and internationally on family violence and suicide prevention and trauma. She founded Eastern Shore Psychological Services, a multidisciplinary private practice that specializes in working with high-risk youth and their families. Her first book was How Children Become Violent: Keeping Your Kids Out of Gangs, Terrorist Organizations and Cults. You can find it at her Web site: www.DrKathySeifert.com

Dr. Seifert is a regular lecturer for PESI.com, an organization providing continuing education credits for professionals. She is a regular contributor to Americanchronicle.com, an online international news and opinion magazine. She has appeared on EBRU TV’s Bullying in America, Fox News Radio, CNN, and the Discovery Channel TV program Investigation Discovery.
Youth Violence

Theory, Prevention, and Intervention

Kathryn Seifert, PhD

With Chapters by

Karen Ray, PhD, Coordinator of Psychology Department, ESPS, LLC
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SPRINGER PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK
This book is dedicated with love to my parents,
Maurice and Jean Lewis, and grandparents,
Maurice and Mary Lewis, who made me who I am.
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Foreword

On April 20, 1999, two high school seniors, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, perpetrated what was to become one of the boldest and bloodiest assaults on a student body in American high school history. When the mayhem was over, 14 students, including the two perpetrators, along with a teacher were dead. That assault sparked much anger and soul searching as to how these adolescents could consider mass murder as an expression of whatever problems they had with anyone, including those at the school. There were subsequent events since that time that to this day highlight the difficulties of youth violence.

Mental health practitioners, health care professionals, the courts, and many questioning citizens continue to wonder how we got to this point, and whether the ongoing “war” to curb youth violence will ever be won. While there aren’t any easy answers, Dr. Seifert’s enlightening elaboration on youth violence issues in this book sheds refreshing light on an old discussion. By walking us through the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial aspects of youth violence, we are able to gain an updated perspective on the underpinnings of violence, and what could and should be done to understand and indeed curb such difficulties in our communities.

Kathryn Seifert has followed all protocols in this book, *Youth Violence: Theory, Prevention, and Intervention*, but the reality of her research is nonetheless dramatic, alarming, and an insistent “emergency alert” to professionals and lay citizens alike who must respond if our nation is to avoid a social meltdown, not from terrorists abroad but from our own hurting and desperate children who see violence as the only escape from their miserable, cornered, nothing-to-lose existence.

As her research indicates, youth violence is systemic to and predominant in our American culture. From infancy we idolize “action”
in comic books, electronic games, Wild West movies, girl gangs, contact sports, and confrontational domestic relationships. Our language exudes, exalts, and glorifies violent phrases “smash the opposition,” “take down,” “wipe out,” and “floored.” For generations our folklore heroes were those who took no prisoners, slammed the opponents, and cheered those who won by any means necessary. “The Avengers” and “Girl Bratz” are role models. Our children get the message. Violence is respected. Violence works, until it gets out of hand.

As it has, all across America, here, now, with tragic frequency and heartbreak, youth violence has reached epidemic proportions among all segments of our society. The time has long passed for us to recognize and begin to address this danger to our children and our country.

Nearly two decades ago, The American Institute for Urban Psychological Studies, Inc., of which I am founder, hosted two conferences on “Grief and Loss” and “Young People and Violence.” Our speakers included first responders, child advocates, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. One of the most poignant observations by the then Baltimore City Prosecutor was that more children had been victims of violent murders in the first months of that year in Baltimore than the total of war victims of the just-concluded military action in Iraq.

“Our children are living in a state of emergency,” she stated, referring to the street violence that resulted in children attending more funerals for their peers than for their grandparents.

Among other jurisdictions within Maryland and indeed throughout the country during that same period, there were documented growing problems of junior repeat offenders, which alerted law enforcement agencies of the growing trend toward “bubble-gum criminals” as the challenge for the courts and our society. Few seemed to listen.

Today, child criminals have become so commonplace that many have become bored or fatigued with the issue, until an incident in an unexpected (nice) community awakens them to the reality that youth violence knows no boundaries, no class, and no gender. It is a prevalent, pervasive fact of life, or death, in our 21st-century landscape.

This work by Dr. Seifert is not an exposé of parents, educators, social workers, politicians, or any one group or culture. Rather than seeking villains responsible for the culture in which youth violence gestates, she charts the genesis for and subsequent interlocking forces
that lead to teachers being afraid of students in their classrooms, motorists being intimidated by squeegee kids, bicyclists hesitant to venture on unfamiliar trails, elderly shoppers fearful of carrying their groceries to the car, students having bullying experiences in school bathrooms, and even juvenile facilities staff squeamish that they may be “gang banged” as they go about their duties. She provides the information and recommendations to understand and come to grips with where we are.

This book is about a time bomb that already has, and, unless we find and utilize methods to defuse, contain, and redirect its energy, will continue to explode within our homes, schools, workplaces, institutions, and self-denying culture.

Dr. Seifert painstakingly provides the statistics to support what the newspapers and police reports have already enumerated in cities and towns across our nation: More and more American children are increasingly violent at alarmingly younger ages and with greater severity than in any other developed nation and devoid of the survival urgency found among so-called “child soldiers” in war-ravaged third-world countries.

Informational, fact-filled, and with eye-opening, albeit familiar approaches to child development, this book deserves permanent placement on the office desk or nearby reachable reference library of every school principal, foster parent, child welfare worker, juvenile court judge, juvenile facility administrator, child advocate, mental health provider, psychologist, or psychiatrist, whether specializing in children or working with families in which crime or fear of crime is a presenting problem. This book probably will not answer all your questions about why so many of our young people are involved in or victims of violent behaviors. It may simply lead you to further research or to a new, more enlightened frame of reference. It may influence your conversations and your management of children under your guidance. However it affects you, I am sure it will be a positive addition to your library. In short, I recommend it to you and your associates as a valuable tool to enrich your perspective on youth violence in today's society.

Grady Dale, Jr., EdD
President
American Institute for Urban Psychological Studies
Baltimore, MD
Preface

This book investigates the existing evidence-based and promising practices for assessment, prevention, and intervention with youth at risk for violent behaviors and shows ways that programs for such youth can improve.

I have worked with these youth for over 30 years and I have cheered at their successes and cried when they fell down. Some succeeded after a lot of hard work and some are still a work in progress. My motto is, “Never give up on a kid.” I have seen youth so damaged by horrible abuse and neglect that it hurts to hear their stories. “There but for the grace of God, go I.” However, the hopeful news is that in my experience, many if not all youth can rise above their beginnings. I have written this book to share the stories and insights that will help show violence as a public health problem and treat it as such.

Chapter 1 describes the prevalence and trends in youth violence. Some of the statistics are staggering: The estimated cost of gun violence in the United States is $100 billion per year. In addition, the United States has one of the highest violence rates in non-third world countries and incarcerates more people than most industrialized nations. The rate of serious violent crimes in schools is 4 per thousand, while the rate away from school is twice that. The United States has approximately 1 million gang members and gangs are found in every state. A third of students report being bullied in school.

In Chapter 2, I describe some of the demographic factors that impact youth violence, including gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Chapter 3 describes the different classifications of violence. Hot violence is reactive and situational. It can result from an extreme or ongoing stressor. Relationship violence happens between people who know each other, such as romantic partners, schoolmates, siblings, and
parents. Predatory or psychopathic violence is “cold” violence and fortunately rare. Instrumental violence is to gain an object, position, sex, or power. Youth who engage in this behavior believe that the violent means justifies the end.

Chapter 4 offers various theoretical perspectives on the causes of violent behavior. One theory proposes that there are two life courses for violent youth. Youngsters that show severe aggressive traits between the ages of 3 and 12 are more likely, without effective treatment, to have a lifelong course of violence that may decrease around age 60. Youth who show no aggressive traits until their teen years are often not violent past age 25. That tells us that if we want to pull the roots of violence, we must start our prevention efforts between the ages of 0 and 10.

The other theories of violence presented here include social learning, intergenerational transmission of violence, social exchange, subculture, and social structure theories. Drawing from these one- and two-dimensional theories, one can derive a more complex theory that looks at the interactions among a person’s biology, development, psychological makeup, social environment, physical environment, strengths, and stressors.

There are individual and environmental factors that influence the course of youth violence. Chapter 5 will describe the individual factors associated with youth violence, such as physiology, cognition, and psychological makeup. Every factor can be further broken down into risk and resiliency items. For example, being psychologically healthy can be a resiliency factor, while past trauma can be a risk factor. However, overcoming and healing from trauma can become a resiliency factor if a youth gains strengths and skills in the process of prevailing over adversity. Both risk and resiliency factors can have an impact on individual development.

There are also environmental risk and resiliency factors: family, peers, school, community, and media. These are discussed in Chapter 6. It is ultimately the unique combination of risk and resiliency factors that determines whether a young person will become violent or nonviolent.

Bullying is universal; yet only recently have we begun to realize that bullying is not a normal part of growing up, but a behavior that harms others. The estimates of the extent of bullying in the United States have a wide range (17–77% of samples tested). Being the victim
of bullying can be associated with internalizing symptoms, such as depression, and externalizing behaviors, such as bullying others, as well as school problems and suicide. It appears that many bullies lack empathy and that is a potential area for working with bullies. This is discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 deals with violence turned inward: suicide. The risk and resiliency factors and warning signs for suicide are discussed, as well as effective programs, such as “Yellow Ribbon.”

Research has identified programs that work and are promising and those that don’t work. Chapters 9 to 11 describe evidence-based assessment, prevention, and interventions. Some assessments are more effective than others for particular reasons. It is important to use the assessment and intervention that matches the needs of the youth and his family.

Finally, there are many system issues in working with violent youth (Chapter 12). Most, if not all, violent youth have been abused, neglected, or exposed to home or community violence. Agencies that serve children, youth, and families must certainly coordinate their efforts better than is presently being done. Finally, we must find ways to make neighborhoods safer and provide young people with pro-social avenues to success. Mental health services must also be readily available.

I end this introduction with a personal story. Several people in my family have been abused, neglected, and/or exposed to domestic violence. I, fortunately, was not. I have seen the struggles of one relative, in particular, as she worked to overcome the influence of abuse, neglect, and the criminal behavior of her adult caregivers. I have tried to help her and ours has not been an easy path. When I thought I could not stand her behaviors another minute, she gained a significant insight. When I went to the jail to pick her up one more time and she swore it was a mistake, I wanted to believe her, but I knew I could not. When I wanted to hug her and cry, she was too angry to listen. But that was the past. Our young heroine is in college, working, and going to church. Hallelujah! She went to Capitol Hill with me to advocate for mental health services and told her story to congressmen’s aides. Much of what I learned, I learned from her. It was wonderful. It can happen for others, but it is a lot of work. I will share what I have learned in this book.
I have lots of people to thank. The list is long and I am sure I will miss someone. I am grateful to everyone who helped me along my path. I thank Dr. Grady Dale for his friendship and kind listening ear for the struggles and triumphs of “my kids.” His thoughtful foreword touched my heart. As for Judy Howell, my “BFF,” I am grateful for her eagle eye and finding all my typos and dangling participles. Judy, and her family, the Richardsons, were very important to my development in my formative years and I thank them all. I am in debt forever to Sarah Hooper, also my “BFF,” whose thousands of hours making ESPS run smoothly can never be fully repaid. Her mother, Peg Phillips, is an ongoing proofreader for all my work and someone I cannot do without. Lynn Gavigan, who is a great friend and I am appreciative for her dedication and commitment to ESPS and the many tasks I have put before her. I want to thank my husband, Rick, for his enormous patience while I spent endless hours on this book. I am grateful to Jordan Wright, my granddaughter and my sunshine, for her joy, support, love, and valuable lessons. Ken Maton has been my academic support since college, for which I am grateful. I thank the ESPS staff for infinite hours of hard work and what they have taught me about the mental health field. I especially thank clients who have taught me so much and without whom this book could not be written. You know who you are. I also thank colleagues who encouraged and supported me through this seemingly endless process. I am indebted to Dr. Karen Ray and Rob Schmidt for writing chapters of this book as a labor of love in addition to their day jobs.

I am forever grateful for my son, John Wright, and his family, Melissa, Jordan, Max, and Grace, whom I love with all my heart, for their patience while I worked such long hours and spent little time
with them. There are teachers galore that shaped my identity and
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ents, and “aunts and uncles” from my youth shaped my character and
gave me a work ethic along with a mix of creativity, rebel, and rule
boundedness. I know I will forget someone, but they were Bill and
Nancy Spicer, who sat up all night when I had my tonsils out; Teddy
and Ann Malkus, who would pile us in the back of a farm truck to go
to Ocean City; and Barton and Becky Spicer, who sang “You are My
Sunshine” when we cooked a big pot of crabs. Thanks to everyone who
helped shape my life.
SECTION ONE

Introduction
Youth Violence: Prevalence and Trends

...the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.

—Hubert H. Humphrey

The World Health Organization (2002, p. 5) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) broadly defines the issue of youth violence as: “harmful behaviors that can start early and continue into young adulthood. The young person can be a victim, an offender, or a witness to the violence” (2010a, p. 1). This is the framework that will be used within this book. It will examine the impact of violence on victims, the motives of perpetrators, and the impact on bystanders who witness it.

Violence can be categorized in terms of chronicity, severity, and type. Violence can occur in a single act, or it may repeat intermittently or chronically over a lifetime. Many children are victims of multiple forms of violence. The term polyvictimization is used to include a wide variety of violent acts against children: “violent and property crimes (e.g., assault, sexual assault, theft, burglary), (2) child welfare violations (child abuse, family abduction), (3) the violence of warfare and civil disturbances, and (4) bullying victimization. It includes
acts that would be considered crimes if committed between adults, although not necessarily considered criminal when occurring among children (e.g., hitting by peers and siblings)” (Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2007, p. 11). The complicated interplay of these various forms of violence—and their cumulative effect upon children—is still being studied. However, it is becoming clear that children need to be assessed for multiple forms of violence.

The physical impact of violence can range from little to none (as in the case of emotional or psychological bullying) all the way to severe injury and/or death.

Tolan and Guerra (1994) identify four types of violence: situational, relationship, predatory, and psychopathological. *Situational violence* refers to violence that occurs in response to certain situational factors, such as (but not limited to) the availability of weapons, use of alcohol or other drugs, or other setting or occasion-specific incidents. *Relationship violence* arises from interpersonal disputes between individuals. *Predatory violence* includes acts that are perpetrated for gain (i.e., violence that occurs during a robbery). *Psychopathological violence*, a relatively rare form, arises from an underlying pathological condition in the offender. Cornell et al. (1996) define *instrumental violence* as violence used to achieve a goal; as opposed to *reactive violence*, which arises in response to a situation or provocation. Violence can be perpetrated against an individual, a group or community, or (in the case of self-injury or suicide) the self. Chapter 3 will examine various types of youth violence in more detail.

What causes a child or adolescent to be violent, under what circumstances, and for what reasons? Can youth violence be predicted and/or prevented? These are questions that this book will address to the extent of what is presently known.

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**PREVALENCE OF YOUTH VIOLENCE**

The CDC (2010a) characterizes youth violence as a public health crisis. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2009), teens and young adults experience the highest rates of violent crime out of all age groups (see Figure 1.1).
Chapter 1  Youth Violence: Prevalence and Trends

Over the next sections I will present a small sampling of statistics regarding homicides, sexual assault, other violent crimes, school violence, gang violence, dating violence, bullying, and suicide among youth in the United States. (These data show overall rates; trends by age, sex, race/ethnicity, and other factors will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.)

Youth as Victims of Homicide

In September, 2009, Derrion Albert, 16, a high school honor roll student from the South Side of Chicago, was brutally beaten and killed after he accidentally walked into the middle of a fight between two rival groups of adolescents. The incident, which was videotaped by a bystander, led to a public outcry over the level of violence in Chicago schools. (Fitzsimmons, 2009)

According to the CDC (2010a), in 2007, 5,764 young people aged 10 to 24 years were murdered—an average of 16 each day. That same year, homicide was the fourth leading cause of death among children aged 1 to 14 years and the second leading cause of death among adults aged 15 to 24 years (CDC, 2010b).

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Puzzanchera (2009) reports the following:

- In 2008, 11% of all murder victims were younger than 18 years.
- More than one-third (38%) of all juvenile murder victims were younger than 5 years (this proportion varied widely across demographic groups; see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of demographic variables).

Figure 1.2 shows the rise and fall in rates of juvenile homicide victims over nearly three decades.

Youth as Perpetrators of Homicide

On January 27, 2001, two popular professors from Dartmouth College were found stabbed to death in their home in Hanover, New Hampshire. The killers, Robert Tulloch, 18, and James Parker, 17, admitted that they killed their victims for money; they were bored with their hometown and wanted $10,000 for a trip to Australia. (Butterfield, 2002)

In 2008, the juvenile murder arrest rate was 3.8 arrests per 100,000 juveniles aged 10 to 17 years. The proportion of homicides attributed to juveniles has held relatively constant in recent years, ranging between 5% and 6% (Puzzanchera, 2009).

The juvenile arrest rate for murder increased sharply beginning in the mid-1980s, hitting a peak in 1993. It then began to decline and continued to drop through the mid-2000s. In 2004, it began to grow
again; however, that increase was interrupted in 2008 (Puzzanchera, 2009). Figure 1.3 graphically represents arrest rates during this period. However, it is important to note that arrest rates may not present a comprehensive picture, since many offenses by juveniles go unreported, and/or do not involve arrest.

Experts suggest several reasons for the overall decline, including decreasing gang violence, more effective community-oriented law enforcement efforts, and evidence-based school and community-based violence prevention programs.

How do youth homicide rates in the United States compare with other countries? According to the World Report on Violence and Health (World Health Organization, 2002), the rate stands at roughly 11.0 per 100,000 in the United States. The countries/territories with highest rates include Colombia (84.4 per 100,000), Puerto Rico (41.8 per 100,000), the Russian Federation (18 per 100,000), and Albania (28.2 per 100,000). Most of the other countries with rates above 10.0 per 100,000 are either developing countries or those experiencing rapid social and economic changes. At the other end of the spectrum, countries with low rates of youth homicide include France (0.6 per 100,000), Germany (0.8 per 100,000), the UK (0.9 per 100,000), and Japan (0.4 per 100,000).

Sexual Assault

Nineteen boys and men, ranging in age from 14 to 27 years, were charged in connection with the gang rape of an 11-year-old girl in
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Cleveland, Texas. According to police, the girl was raped on six separate occasions between September and December, 2010, before it was finally reported to the authorities. The crime has shaken and disgusted community members, family, and friends, who wonder how it could have gone unnoticed and unreported for so long. (McKinley & Goode, 2011)

A significant portion of sexual violence in the United States is perpetrated by juveniles. According to the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (2001), in 2000, 16.4% of arrests for forcible rape and 18.6% of arrests for other sexual offenses were of individuals under the age of 18 years. Furthermore, 6.4% of arrests for forcible rape and 9.7% of arrests for other sexual offenses were of individuals under the age of 15 years. Despite fluctuating rates of sexual violence, juveniles consistently account for almost 20% of arrests for rape and other sex offenses. (Becker & Hicks, 2003, p. 398)

Other Violent Crimes

In a shocking attack in a Baltimore area McDonald’s, a transgender woman was beaten by two teenage girls; one was 14 years old, the other 18 years old. One McDonald’s employee videotaped the assault; others could be heard laughing and encouraging the attackers. “They just seemed like they wanted to pick a fight that night, they really did. And come to find out that girl was only 14 years old. I was shocked,” the victim said. “They kicked me in my face; they really hurt me really bad and I’m just afraid to go outside now because of stuff like this.” (Martinez, 2011)

According to Puzzanchera (2009), juveniles accounted for 16% of all violent crime arrests in 2008. In that year, 3,340 juveniles were arrested for forcible rape and 56,000 for aggravated assault. Between 1999 and 2008, the number of arrests in most offense categories declined for juveniles: forcible rape declined 27%, aggravated assault declined 21%, weapons law violations decreased 2%, and drug abuse violations decreased 7%. Robbery increased 25% and the arrest rate for simple assault was unchanged (Puzzanchera, 2009).

In 2008, more than 656,000 young people aged 10 to 24 years were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from violence (CDC, 2010a).

Child Maltreatment

A recent tragedy in which three young children died highlights the issues facing mothers who cannot cope with parenthood, and the sometimes
heartbreaking results. In April 2011, 25-year-old LaShanda Armstrong drove her minivan containing her four children into the Hudson River in upstate New York. Three of her children—ages 5 years, 2 years, and 11 months—perished, as did Armstrong. Only her 10-year-old son was able to escape the car, swim to safety, and survive. No one is certain of her motives, but the surviving son says that LaShanda was fighting with his stepfather shortly before the incident, and reports say the two had a rocky relationship made more difficult by the stresses of trying to care for four children on meager means. (Barron, 2011)

Tragically, a significant portion of all crimes against children are committed by their parents or caregivers. Child maltreatment is broadly defined as physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect that is committed by a parent or caretaker. Many children are victims of more than one kind of abuse.

In 2009, an estimated 700,000 children were victims of some form of maltreatment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009); this number has been decreasing over recent years (see Figure 1.4).

Of all the outcomes of maltreatment, child fatalities are the most tragic and often the most widely publicized in the media. It is estimated that 1,770 children died from abuse and neglect in 2009 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Of the reported fatalities:

- 80.8% involved children who were younger than 4 years
- 35.8% were attributed to neglect exclusively

![Figure 1.4](http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/)

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- 36.7% were caused by multiple maltreatment types (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009)

The assessment, treatment, and (above all) prevention of child abuse and neglect are incredibly important in ending the cycle of violence. Research suggests that children who are abused or neglected have a much higher risk of becoming offenders themselves. “Being abused or neglected as a child increased the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent, as an adult by 28 percent, and for a violent crime by 30 percent” (Widom & Maxfield, 2001).

School Violence

On April 16, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho—a student with a long history of mental health issues and a propensity to write about violence—killed 32 people on the Virginia Tech campus before killing himself. The massacre is considered one of the deadliest shooting incidents by a single gunman in U.S. history. (Urbina & Fernandez, 2007)

Terrifying, high-profile school shootings, such as those that occurred at Columbine and Virginia Tech, remain relatively rare. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010):

- Among youth aged 5 to 18 years, there were 38 school-associated violent deaths among students, staff, and nonschool personnel between 2008 and 2009 (24 were homicides and 14 were suicides).
- During the school year 2007–2008, there were 1,701 homicides among school-age youth aged 5 to 18 years.
- During the 2007 calendar year, there were 1,231 suicides of youth aged 5 to 18 years.

Interestingly, perpetrators of school-associated homicides were nine times as likely as victims to have exhibited some form of suicidal behavior before the event and were more than twice as likely as victims to have been bullied by their peers. Furthermore, more than half of the incidents during 1992–1999 were preceded by some signal, such as threats, notes, or journal entries, that indicated the potential for the coming event (Anderson et al., 2001). Such was the case with Seung-Hui Cho, whose violent plays and other writings concerned his teachers and classmates.
Incidents of nonfatal school violence are much more prevalent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010):

- In 2008, students aged 12 to 18 years were victims of about 1.2 million nonfatal crimes (theft plus violent crime) at school.
- The rates for serious violent crimes were lower at school than away from school in 2008; students aged 12 to 18 years were victims of four serious violent crimes per 1,000 students at school and eight serious violent crimes per 1,000 students away from school.
- Eight percent of students in grades 9 to 12 reported being threatened or injured by someone with a weapon, such as a gun, knife, or club, on school property in 2009.
- Twenty percent of public schools reported that gang activities had occurred within their schools during 2007–2008.

In a 2009 nationally representative sample of youth in grades 9 to 12 (CDC, 2010c):

- 31.5% reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- 17.5% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife, or club) on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey.
- 7.7% reported being threatened or injured by someone with a weapon on school property one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- 11.1% reported being in a physical fight on school property in the 12 months preceding the survey.
- 5% did not go to school on one or more days in the 30 days preceding the survey because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to or from school.

### Gang Violence

After his 17-year-old nephew, Emilio, was killed in a neighborhood dispute, Martin Torres was intent on revenge. Nicknamed “Pacman” because he always carried a gun, Torres, the head of a small gang, quickly identified his nephew’s murderer and planned to kill him after Emilio’s funeral. He received a phone call from a fellow former gang member, Zale Hoddenbach, and assumed Hoddenbach was going to help him. Instead, to his surprise, Hoddenbach successfully talked him...
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out of committing any further acts of violence. Hoddenbach was working on behalf of an organization called CeaseFire, which features “violence interrupters”—former gang members and offenders themselves—who now use their knowledge of the streets to attempt to defuse gang violence. (Kotlowitz, 2008)

Approximately 1 million gang members—belonging to more than 20,000 different gangs—were criminally active in the United States as of September 2008. Nearly 58% of state and local law enforcement agencies reported that criminal gangs were active in their jurisdictions in 2008, an increase of 13% over 2004 (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2009).

Gangs are no longer a strictly urban phenomenon. According to the National Gang Intelligence Center (2009), gangs are migrating to suburban and rural communities, and these communities are experiencing increasing gang-related crime and violence as a result.

Dating Violence

In 2009, when pop singer Rihanna was beaten by her then-boyfriend, singer Chris Brown, many teachers and parents seized upon the incident as a chance to discuss the issues of domestic violence with children. They were dismayed to hear many teenagers—including teenage girls—suggest that Rihanna must have done something to deserve her injuries, or express sympathy for Brown’s actions. (Hoffman, 2009)

Intimate partner violence is typically thought of as an adult concern, but adolescents also report experiencing violence within their dating relationships. Like its adult counterpart, teen dating violence can take physical, emotional, verbal, and/or sexual forms.

According to the CDC (2010d), one in four adolescents report some form of abuse from a dating partner each year, and approximately 10% of students nationwide report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.

Bullying

Margarite, an eighth-grader in Olympia, Washington, texted a nude picture of herself to her boyfriend, Isaiah, also an eighth-grader. The two later broke up. Shortly thereafter, Isaiah forwarded the photo to another girl—who then forwarded it to all of her contacts with the
following message: “Ho Alert! If you think this girl is a whore, then text this to all your friends.” Within days, hundreds, and possibly thousands of students in Margarite’s school, as well as neighboring schools and communities, had received the text. (Hoffman, 2011)

Cases like Margarite’s have emphasized the extreme consequences of bullying and its newest variant, cyberbullying, which are increasingly impacting students of all ages:

- An estimated 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in 2009 (CDC, 2010a).
- During the 2007–2008 school year, 25% of public schools reported that bullying occurred among students on a daily or weekly basis (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).
- In 2007, 32% of students aged 12 to 18 years reported having been bullied at school during the school year. Twenty-one percent said that they had made fun of; 18% reported being the subject of rumors; 11% said that they were pushed, shoved, tripped, or spit on; 6% said they were threatened with harm; 5% said they were deliberately excluded from activities; 4% said that someone tried to make them do things they did not want to do; and 4% said that their property was destroyed on purpose (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Bullying is a particular concern with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) teens. According to a national survey of more than 7,000 LGBT youth:

- Nearly 9 out of 10 reported being verbally harassed at school.
- More than 60% said they felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation.
- Nearly 45% reported being physically harassed in school.
- Nearly one-third said they had missed a day of school in the past month because of feeling unsafe (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2010).

Cyberbullying is a relatively new and growing concern, as the case of Margarite illustrates. Some researchers suggest that between 9% and 33% of youth aged 10 to 18 years experience cyberbullying (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007; Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak,
According to “Cyberbullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us,” a study by the Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, 32% of teens surveyed experienced one of the following forms of online harassment:

- 15% had private material (such as texts) forwarded without their permission.
- 13% received threatening messages.
- 13% had rumors about themselves spread online.
- 6% had someone post an embarrassing picture of them online without permission (Lenhart, 2010).

**Suicide**

Phoebe Prince, 15, a freshman at South Hadley High School in western Massachusetts, hanged herself after enduring months of ridicule and harassment from fellow students. The resulting legal case, in which six teenagers were charged with various felony counts, also raised numerous issues about the roles of teachers and school staff in identifying and taking action against bullying. (Eckholm & Zezima, 2010)

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth; each year, approximately 2,000 adolescents in the United States aged 13 to 19 years commit suicide (Worhcel & Gearing, 2009). (Suicide in children younger than 10 years are extremely rare.) Some studies suggest that nearly 10% of adolescents report attempting suicide, and nearly 30% thought about committing suicide at some point (Worhcel & Gearing, 2009).

**COSTS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE**

Youth violence is expensive both financially and in terms of the immeasurable pain and suffering it causes youth, their families, peers, and communities. It was projected that violence in the United States costs $425 billion, both directly and indirectly, in 1998. Cook and Ludwig (2002) estimated the cost of gun violence in the United States to be $100 billion. Catalano (2006) estimated the average cost of violent crime per victim to be $221.

The direct cost of child abuse and neglect in the United States (including law enforcement, judicial system, child welfare, and health
care costs) totals more than $33 billion annually. When factoring in indirect costs (special education, mental health care, juvenile delinquency, lost productivity, and adult criminality), the figure rises to more than $103 billion annually (Wang & Holton, 2007).

Approximately 93,000 youth are held in residential juvenile justice facilities in the United States (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2008) at an average cost of $241 per day. Recidivism rates are higher (50%–90%) for these youth than for those who are treated in the community (30%) (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). Thirty-six percent of juvenile facilities are at or over capacity and thus overcrowded. Several states (California, Texas, and Maryland) have been sued for poor conditions in their facilities (Justice Policy Institute, 2009).

In contrast, community programs, such as Functional Family Therapy and Multisystemic Therapy, are highly effective and are known to yield $13 public safety dollars for every dollar spent (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). The key is to choose the correct level of care for the safety of the youth and the community. Millions of dollars could be saved if nondangerous youth were treated in the community. Missouri is the model for residential care for youth in conflict with the law. This state uses smaller facilities geared for education and rehabilitation. The recidivism rate is 8.7% (Justice Policy Institute, 2009). To the contrary, research over the past decade has shown that for states that increased the incarceration rates of youth, there has not been an equivalent drop in the crime rate (Justice Policy Institute, 2009).

REFERENCES


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