

LITERATURE REVIEW

CRIME PREVENTION FOR CHILDREN 0 TO 6 YEARS

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Crime rates and related issues have long been a source of concern for Aboriginal communities. Very few measures have had significant impact. In fact, while Aboriginals represent only 3% of the general Canadian population, they occupy 17% of federal penitentiary cells. (Wilson, 2002). It can be asserted that such a failure is the result of a lack of programs that take Aboriginal communities' socio-economic, legal, cultural and resource needs into account. (Benson, 1991).

This literature review on crime prevention among young children leads us to believe that as First Nations, we need to assert and define our priorities in terms of the necessary knowledge to achieve harmony within communities, a more peaceful future for all our fellow community members. It should not be surprising for anyone that aggressive behaviours are learned through direct experience or observation during early childhood. (Connors, 2004). Also, the risk factors identified as contributing to delinquent behaviours such as child abuse, alcohol or drug abuse within the family, inadequate parenting skills and poverty are common experiences for First Nations communities. Aggressive behaviour prevention in preschool children, the promotion of parenting skills and the development of day-care staff are effective ways of achieving socio-environmental objectives in First Nations.

This literature review reports on the major risk and protective factors for delinquent behaviours relating to the realities experienced by First Nations community members. In addition, this literature review addresses the importance of prevention programs for children aged 0 to 6 years and the various factors contributing to the success of such programs in Aboriginal communities. The document provides a set of factors that need to be considered before developing effective crime prevention programs for First Nations, specific information regarding the importance of adapting day-care staff training and a few examples of proven programs.

In order to write this literature review, thirty-six (36) articles from various scientific publications were consulted: *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *Crime Prevention and Digest II*, *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, *Child and Youth Services Review*, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Development Psychology*, *American Psychology*, *Science*, *Psychology*, *Crime and Law*. In addition, eighteen (18) reference documents were used. These references came from *Health Canada*, *the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women*, *the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence*, *de Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada*, *the International Centre for Crime Prevention*, *the Ontario Native Women's Association*, *the Strategy for Aboriginal Family Healing*, *the Canadian Council on Social Development*, *Statistics Canada*, *the National Crime Prevention Centre*, *the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs*, *the Canadian Criminal Justice Association*, *Correctional Service Canada*, *the Canadian Child Care Federation*, *the Institut de la statistique du Québec*, *the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec* and *Health Canada's First Nations and Inuit Health Branch*.

RISK FACTORS GENERALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOURS

A risk factor is a behavioural or personal lifestyle aspect, environmental exposure or an inherited characteristic which, based on epidemiological evidence, is known to be associated with a health status and is considered as important in terms of prevention. (Richman, Fraser, 2001). In the light of this definition, the following statements identify the various risk factors leading children to develop criminal or delinquent behaviours.

❖ *Child abuse*

According to the scientific literature on risk factors associated with crime, child abuse victims are more likely to develop delinquent behaviours. Furthermore, children placed in foster care are more than twice as likely as other children to develop criminal behaviours. (Ryan & Testa, 2004)

Child abuse affect children's self respect and sense of security, thus teaching them to resort to violence to solve their problems. A clinical study showed that child abuse and criminal behaviours in young adults were strongly associated. The literature points to the fact that physical abuse and neglect are risk factors that predispose children to violence, (Maxfield & Spatz Widom, 1996) and that child abuse is a major cause of juvenile delinquency and criminal behaviours in adults. (Briere & Runtz, 1990; Cavaiola & Schiff, 1988; Lewis, Shanok, Pincus & Glaser, 1979; Pollock et al., 1990). Children who grew up in a family where there was domestic violence between parents are more likely to experience maladjustment and to develop mental health difficulties, alcohol and substance abuse problems and criminal behaviours. (Fergusson & Harwood, 1997).

❖ *The media*

Research on the causes of violent and aggressive behaviours also looks into socialization through the media, imitation, violence in schools and violence on TV. (Ferris & Grisso, 1996; Fesbach & Fesbach, 1998; Huesman et al., 2003).

❖ *Single parent families*

Studies have shown that parents with high stress and single parent families are important factors in the development of antisocial behaviours and behaviour disorders. (Webster-Stratton, 1995).

❖ *Teenage pregnancy*

Research showed that teenage pregnancy is a risk factor for delinquent behaviours. A review by Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998) showed that teenage pregnancy has negative impacts on children. Children of teenage mothers also tend to show behaviour problems including higher levels of aggression and lower impulse control than their peers born to older mothers.

❖ *Biological factors*

Other studies have clearly shown that genetic factors play a significant role in the development of antisocial and aggressive behaviours. (Mednick et al. 1984). In fact, from birth, risk factors include exposure to alcohol, tobacco, drugs, pregnancy and delivery complications as well as malnutrition. Foetal alcohol syndrome has long been recognized as a leading cause of intellectual deficiency and physical abnormalities



affecting, among other things, a part of the brain related to the development of violent behaviours. (Liu, Wuerker, 2004). Furthermore, cocaine use during pregnancy is a risk factor for the development of behaviour disorders in children. (Roebuck et al., 1999). These prenatal factors directly and indirectly affect the brain structure and brain dysfunctions were associated with aggressive and delinquent behaviours. (Mednick et al., 1987; Moffitt, 1990; Raine & Liu, 1998).

❖ *Victimization of parents*

Finally, it was showed that higher levels of abuse in childhood predicted higher levels of abuse towards the next generation. A history of abuse as a child, consistency of discipline, depression and post traumatic stress disorders predict child abuse. (Pears & Capaldi, 2001). It is therefore of prime importance to break the intergenerational cycle of violence and to develop prevention programs intended for pregnant women and young children. Obviously, it is necessary to take a global approach and fight on several fronts at once. (Sanfacon, Walsh, 1999).

❖ *Interaction of several factors*

Sanfacon & Walsh (1999), showed that children are more at risk of developing criminal behaviours when:

- ❖ there is a history of domestic violence in the family;
- ❖ there is alcohol and substance abuse in the family;
- ❖ the child has a behaviour disorder;
- ❖ parents have inadequate parenting skills;
- ❖ the child is socially and culturally disadvantaged;
- ❖ the child is raised in poverty.

Not only do the cumulative effects of these factors increase the risk of developing criminal behaviours, their consequences are also more serious. (Small, 2003).

Children who are both rejected and aggressive are most at risk of developing behaviour disorders as teenagers (Coie, Underwood & Lochman, 1991). Besides, an estimated 3 to 15% of preschool children display aggressive and antisocial behaviours. (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2004). As behaviour disorders in children are identified as a crime risk factor, prevention in the family and at school is crucial to mitigate these risks.



RISK FACTORS SPECIFIC TO FIRST NATIONS

A relationship exists between the various general risk factors above. Associated with socio-economic factors specific to First Nations, it may be inferred that these conditions currently lead to crime related issues.

Historical factors related to parenting skills

Inter-generational impacts of Indian residential schools can still be felt in communities. The children and grandchildren of residential school survivors are suffering from the effects of having parents that were unable to develop parenting skills due to long periods of time spent in residential schools. (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2003). The lack of parenting skills is a risk factor linked to crime as children become adults. The lack of parenting skills in Aboriginal communities is an obvious and widespread problem because of the aftermath of the Indian residential schools, which has created an even larger risk factor. It was also showed that domestic violence during childhood is an important risk factor for developing criminal behaviours during adolescence and adulthood. (Sanfacon, Walsh, 1999).

❖ Domestic violence

A number of studies have been conducted on the incidence of domestic violence in Canadian First Nations. As a matter of fact, in certain Northern Aboriginal communities, it is believed that between 75% and 90% of women are battered. A study showed that 40% of the children had been mistreated by a member of the family. (Dumont-Smith, Sioui-Labelle, 1991). First Nations children who have been the victims of domestic violence or who have witnessed domestic violence towards their mother suffer from long term emotional and behavioural problems. (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993). Exposure to violence in Aboriginal communities is of enormous proportions, which largely contributes to the development of future criminal behaviours in First Nations' children.

❖ Alcoholism and drug abuse

Addiction to alcohol and substance abuse in First Nations communities is higher than in any other cultural group in Canada. (Nelson, Prilleltensky, Peirson, 2001). Few recent studies investigated the incidence of substance use in First Nations, although according to Health Canada (1998), alcohol and substance abuse rates in First Nations are five (5) times higher than in the general Canadian population. The presence of alcohol and drug abuse is considered a risk factor for developing delinquent behaviours. Therefore, the risks associated with drug and alcohol abuse in the family are significantly higher in First Nations, contributing to the rise in criminal behaviour.

In some First Nations and Inuit communities, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome rates are much higher than the national average. (Health Canada, 2002) As discussed above, foetal exposure to alcohol is an important risk factor for developing delinquent behaviours since it affects a part of the brain related to the development of violent behaviours. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome rates being much higher in First Nations communities, it is reasonable to believe that the risk of developing violent behaviours is also higher.

❖ Poverty



Given that economic problems are considered as risk factors and considering that 52.1% of Aboriginal children in Canada live in poverty compared to 16% of Canadian children (Ross, Scott, Smith, 2000), the risk of developing criminal behaviours is probably higher for First Nations children.

❖ Housing

Children's health is dependent on the physical environment in which they live. The physical environment includes housing, the air that they breathe, the water that they drink and the safety of their communities. (Health Canada, 1994). Housing is a major issue for First Nations communities. In fact, in 1999-2000, only 56.9% of aboriginal houses were considered adequate (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002). Overcrowded apartments in poor condition have negative impacts on children's health and are directly linked to their socio-economic status. Children in low income families are more likely to live in houses where the walls and the ceiling are damp, where the foundations are crumbling, where the porch and the stairs are falling into decay and where the plumbing is corroded. (Ross, Scott, Kelly, 1996). Aboriginals are more likely to live in overcrowded or inadequate housing. In 1989, 29% of Aboriginals living on reserves and 31% of Inuit lived in overcrowded dwellings, compared with 2% for the rest of the Canadian population. (Hanvey, Avar, Graham, Underwood, Campbell, Kelly, 1994). Because economic poverty has a direct impact on the quality of the home, young First Nations' children living in these conditions consequently are at greater risk of developing health and social problems.

❖ Child placements

Aboriginal children represent 8% of Canadian children, but 35% of the children that are placed in foster homes. (Blackstock, 2003). If, as Ryan and Testa (2004) pointed out in their study, placement is a risk factor, the emergence of delinquent behaviours in Aboriginal communities takes on a new dimension due to overrepresentation of First Nations children in foster homes. Parenting skills are therefore essential to the healthy and safe development of children.

❖ Single-parent families

Based on the 2001 Statistics Canada census, twice as many Aboriginal children live with only one parent compared to non-Aboriginals. 32% of children on reserves live in single parent-families compared with 46% for Aboriginal children off reserves. Only 17% of non-Aboriginal children live in single-parent families. The scientific literature has identified living in a single-parent family as a risk factor and therefore the risk is higher for Aboriginal children to develop delinquent behaviours.

❖ Dropping out of school

Academic failures are linked to delinquency. (Public Safety and Public Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004). Based on the preliminary results of the 2002-2003 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, 51% of First Nations adults 20 years and older did not finish high school, compared to 27.9% of adults from the rest of the Canadian population. In the light of such data, it is safe to say that there are higher risks of delinquency in First Nations communities.



PROTECTION FACTORS

Protection factors are defined as being individual characteristics or environmental conditions that help a person resist or offset the risks he/she is exposed to. (Richman & Fraser, 2001).

❖ The family

Families where cohesiveness and positive relationships between parents and children exist have a shielding effect on the children and allows them to grow in a healthy way. (Coughlin & Vichinish, 1996 & Dumas, 1996).

❖ Early childhood and the school environment

As a lack of interest in school and academic failures are associated with delinquent behaviours, a school environment must be welcoming and safe, it must encourage success and mutual cooperation, promote the use of non-aggressive strategies to resolve conflicts and problems. The same conditions apply to early childhood environments. Relationships between children of the same age are important for all children. The child will have a healthy social and emotional development by participating in learning and recreational activities with his/her peers. (Public Safety and Public Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).

❖ The community

The development of the community and the definition of its identity are protection factors for children and families. Through community events, activities and recreation areas, extracurricular programs, building teams of volunteers for different activities all help the children and families spend time together, promote family recreational activities and increase family cohesion. (Public Safety and Public Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).

• Prenatal care

Quality prenatal care and the presence of loving parents provide a healthy environment for babies and build strong bonds. This provides children with a positive start to life and the rudiments for future social, emotional and cognitive development. (Public Safety and Public Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004). Pre and post-natal visits by nurses significantly reduce juvenile delinquency 15 years later. Violence prevention during maternity show positive and effective results when the development of risk and protection factors are targeted. (Olds & al., 1998).

IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTION FOR CHILDREN AGES 0 TO 6

Studies from fields such as health, social services and crime prevention demonstrate the profound effects that foetal and early childhood development have on an individual's later physical and mental well-being and social behaviour. Other studies have shown what happens when a child's development is compromised. For example, longitudinal studies of children in Canada and other countries have traced the paths of antisocial behaviour -- including criminal behaviour -- back as far as the presence of risk factors during prenatal and early childhood stages. (Public Safety and Public Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).

❖ Benefits of prevention

Preventive measures create major benefits. Crime prevention can reduce the occurrence of teenage pregnancies, reduce drug and alcohol abuse, increase school retention rates, contribute to an increase in employment rates and housing rental rates, reduce requests for criminal judicial proceedings, reduce the number of welfare recipients, reduce healthcare needs and the number of crime victims. (Aos, Phipps, Barnoski, Lieb, 2001). **The development of social skills**

The development of social skills is vital in order to have non-aggressive behaviours. We know through research and practical experience that the future of a child is largely determined by the time he or she is five or six years old. Good pre-natal care, strong academic programs, parenting education, support for parents and stable, nurturing foster care have all been linked to effective crime prevention. (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004). Also, a precautionary response has a positive impact on the social development of kindergarten children that displayed disruptive behaviour. (Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, Vitaro & Pihl, 1995).

❖ Developing parenting skills

Family support, parent training and early intervention programs are estimated to reduce child abuse by as much as 50% and thereby reduce also the life-long consequences and costs of living with abuse. Similar programs can prevent the highly aggressive behaviour among young children that is often associated with failure in school and, later, with delinquency and criminality. (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).

If aggressive behaviour in young children is the best indicator of later delinquent, aggressive and violent behaviours (Farrington, 1991; Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 1984), early prevention programs are at least as, and often more, effective than any other treatment or repressive approach in reducing antisocial and violent behaviours. (Farrington, 1991; Offord, Boyle, & Racine, 1991).

❖ Skills and training related to early childhood

Children attending day-care full-time spend more time with their early childhood educators than with their parents, which points to the importance of helping children develop a positive image of themselves. In a survey conducted in 1999 with day-care educators as part of the Canadian Child Care Federation's "*Meet the challenge*" program, 94% of participants indicated having taken care of a difficult child in the past and 87% indicated they were currently taking care of a difficult child. The survey pointed out that a vast majority of day-care educators have to deal with "difficult" children. Given their difficult socio-economic situation, First Nations communities have a higher proportion of "difficult" children. Aboriginal day-care workers therefore have to deal with a higher number of "difficult" children. According to the 2002-2003 report of the Quebec Region First Nations Head Start Program, a 39% increase was reported in the number of children

with special needs in 2003-2004 compared to last year. Most of these children have “developmental” problems (developmental delay, FAS, autism) and communication problems. According to the Ministère de l’Éducation du Québec (1996), it is important to equip and raise the awareness of parents and day-care workers so they may diagnose developmental problems in children and provide the required follow-ups. To do this, they must receive supplementary training to improve their skills. Furthermore, in 2003, the “*Grandir en qualité*” survey assessed the quality of daycare services in Quebec within the context of the First Nations Head Start (FNHS) Program. The survey mentioned the various factors to assess day-care workers’ relational skills, including listening skills and the use of appropriate language. The report also mentioned personal qualities necessary to establish strong relationships with children, namely, warmth, attention, patience, availability, commitment, encouraging children to voice their feelings and needs, providing appropriate guidelines, being consistent and fair in applying the rules. Communication with parents was also mentioned as another quality factor. In the light of the 2003-2004 results, and due to the increasing number of children with special needs, it was recommended that the FNHS Program should develop appreciation trainings on special needs and related disabilities for day-care staff.

In order to deliver quality services focused on preschool intervention, it is important to provide workers with the necessary tools to supply the demand and address the needs of children with violent behaviours.



The following model provides examples of effective approaches to preventing delinquent behaviours.

Table 1: Crime Prevention Model: Prenatal to Six Years of Age

| Level | Goals | Means |
|--|--|--|
| Toddler/Preschool | Encourage cognitive and social development. Reduce aggressive behaviours. Promoting harmonious relationships between parents and children. | Early child care/education with family involvement for children whose families require assistance through parenting skills training: how to use problem resolution and negotiation techniques, ensuring equal and fair enforcement of rules, establishing a relationship between positive or negative consequences and the child's behaviour, rewarding children (congratulations, etc.), individual counseling. |
| School | Improve school outcomes and foster pro-social behaviour. | School-based initiatives such as anti-violence programs, conflict resolution workshops, supervised recreation, non-structured play, adequate monitoring of children, increased awareness of community resources. |
| Day-care workers, day-care centres and FNHS sites. | Improve intervention skills and promote better access to prevention resources. | Developing adapted and specific trainings (early identification of social needs). |



FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR FIRST NATIONS

Factors to consider in developing family violence prevention programs are the availability of the human resources, the values and politics of the community, and the ability to change community attitudes and behaviour. Not only must the attitudes of the general public be changed, but also those of the Chief and Council, program administrators and service providers. Prevention activities should be well planned and coordinated with specific short-term and long-term goals. (National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1994).

In order to develop a crime prevention program for Aboriginal children, it is essential to understand the importance of the following characteristics, which may vary from community to community:

- a) Spirituality and language as the foundations of culture;
- b) The influence of Elders and model people;
- c) Community vs. individual values.

Direct action by the community and its institutions (Band Council, health and social services, education, day-care centres, parents, children, Elders, etc.) may be one of the most effective means of resolving local problems. (Benson, 1991). The more community institutions and organizations are involved in addressing community issues, the greater the chance for success.

Also, it seems that Aboriginal spirituality and prevention programs promoting identity are important in developing intervention approaches to crime reduction in an Aboriginal community. (Benson, 1991).

❖ Main goals

There is a reasonable amount of evidence on which to focus crime prevention efforts concerning children in various settings. Community-based, prevention and early intervention approaches that are sensitive to the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and other key characteristics of families and communities, and to children's needs and abilities can yield significant benefits. This can include prevention measures such as prenatal care, at home support for parents of newborns and infants, infant cognitive stimulation and parent training to ensure that children get a healthy start. Early intervention measures such as school-based violence prevention and conflict resolution programs, as well as support and training for parents and teachers dealing with children who display disruptive or aggressive behaviour can help to reduce risk of subsequent conflict with the law. Support programs that help boys and girls who have been exposed to violence in the home also show promise. Programs that promote nurturing, safe and supportive environments -- in families, schools and other institutions, and communities -- can have significant influence in fostering healthy child development, caring relationships, pro-social interest and engagement, and responsible behaviour. (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).

Research is continually refining our understanding of the role and interplay of risk factors in crime and victimization. This interplay is complex and there are no clear lines of cause and effect. Consequently, many policy areas, such as health, social, housing, the economy and the justice system, have a bearing on crime prevention. To develop an integrated approach, strategies that address underlying societal factors such as poverty and unemployment, abuse and neglect, inadequate schooling and housing -- as well as strategies that address more immediate individual, family and community risk factors -- need to be linked to crime prevention policy. The primary task is to identify the changeable risk factors associated with crime



and victimization and support the development and implementation of crime prevention solutions that involve individuals, families and community.

Although effective prevention is usually large-scale and typically involves various resources and sectors, the current crime prevention project among children aged 0 to 6 is more limited in scope. Nevertheless, day-care workers and teachers should receive appropriate tools and skills to deliver better services and to contribute to the future well-being of communities.



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

The following examples show that early crime prevention programs can reduce delinquent behaviours.

- ❖ A program in Montreal to prevent antisocial behaviour in boys who were disruptive in Kindergarten provided school-based social skills training (age 7 to 9) and home-based parent training over a two-year period. The treated boys showed significantly improved academic adjustment throughout elementary school and significantly fewer self-reported delinquencies from age 10 to 15 years, compared to untreated disruptive boys. This preventive intervention appeared to have a significant, positive impact on the social development of the disruptive Kindergarten boys. (Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, Vitaro & Pihl, 1995).
- ❖ A nation-wide intervention program in 42 Norwegian schools (2500 students in grades 4 through 7) has reduced bullying problems by 50 percent. (Olweus, 1994).
- ❖ A study showed that social skills training for aggressive and disruptive boys (ages 8-9 years) and skills training for their parents resulted in reduced aggression and increased association with less disruptive peers at age twelve, compared to non treated boys with aggressive behaviour. Positive interaction with peers may be necessary to sustain benefits from skills training with children and their parents. (Vitaro & Tremblay, 1994).
- ❖ Children living in an Ontario housing project who participated in a recreation program (skill development and sports league) had significantly lower rates of vandalism relative to a comparison group (no recreation program) in a similar housing complex. (Jones & Offord, 1989).

CONCLUSION

There is almost no scientific literature on First Nations crime risk factors. However, First Nations communities' specific socio-economic status allow comparison between risk factors generally associated with crime. As previously mentioned, it is possible to infer that living conditions are currently contributing to crime-related issues and anticipate an increase in crime-related problems in the future. Although this is not intended to sound the alarm, the data presented above are disturbing and crime prevention for children 0 to 6 years deserves particular attention.

Positive programs emphasize having fun, celebrating successes, sharing good news, and rewarding achievements. Such a positive approach brings people together, raises self esteem and creates the kinds of communities where crime does not thrive, while it addresses specific problems that may play a role in crime. (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, 2004).



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