Super Predators Essay, Research Paper

What is the "super predator"? They are young hypercriminals who are

committing acts of violence of unprecedented coldness and brutality. This newest

phenomenon in the world of crime is perhaps the most dangerous challenge facing

society and law enforcement ever. While psychopaths are not new, this breed of

super criminal exceeds the scope of psychopathic behaviour. They are younger,

more brutal, and completely unafraid of the law. While current research on the

super predator is scarce, I will attempt to give an indication as to the reasons

a child could become just such a monster. Violent teenage criminals have become

increasingly vicious. John DiIulio, Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at

Princeton University, says, ⌠The difference between the juvenile criminals

of the 1950s and those of the 1970s and early 1980s was the difference between

the Sharks and the Jets of West Side Story and the Bloods and the Crips. It is

not inconceivable that the demographic surge of the next ten years will bring

with it young criminals who make the Bloods and the Crips look tame."

(Bennett, DiIulio, & Walters, 1996, p. 17). They are what Professor DiIulio

and others call urban "super predators"; young people, often from

broken homes or so called dysfunctional families, who commit murder, rape,

robbery, kidnapping, and other violent acts. These emotionally damaged young

people, often are the products of sexual or physical abuse. They live in an

aimless and violent present; have no sense of the past and no hope for the

future; they commit unspeakably brutal crimes against other people, often to

gratify whatever urges or desires drive them at the moment and their utter lack

of remorse is shocking. Studies reveal that the major cause of violent crime is

not poverty but family breakdown, specifically the absence of a father in the

household. Today, one-fourth of all the children in North America live in

fatherless homes. This adds up to 19 million children without fathers. In

comparison to children who live in two parent homes, these children will be

twice as likely to drop out of school, twice as likely to have children out of

wedlock, and they stand more than three times the chance of ending up in

poverty, and almost ten times more likely to commit violent crime and ending up

in prison. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, reported that the

rise in violent crime over the past 30 years runs directly parallel to the rise

in fatherless families. In the United States, according to the Heritage

Foundation, the rate for juvenile crime is closely linked to the percentage of

children raised in single-parent families. While it has long been thought that

poverty is the primary cause of crime, the facts simply do not support this

view. Juvenile criminal behaviour has its roots in habitual deprivation of

parental love and affection going back to early infancy. A father’s attention to

his son has enormous positive effects on the child’s emotional and social

development. A young boy abandoned by his father is deprived of a deep sense of

personal security. In a well-functioning family the presence of the father

embodies authority and paternal authority is critical to the prevention of

psychopathology and delinquency. In addition to the problem of single parent

homes, is the problem of the children whose behavioural problems are linked to

their mothers’ drug use during pregnancy. Children reaching their teenage years

could result in a potentially aggressive population. Drug use has more than

doubled among 12 to 17year olds since 1991. "The overwhelming common factor

that can be isolated in determining whether young people will be criminal in

their behaviour is moral poverty". (Worsham, James-Blakely, and Stephen,

1997, p 24) According to the recently published "Body Count: Moral Poverty

. . . and How to Win America’ s War Against Crime and Drugs," a new

generation of "super-predators, " untouched by any moral inclinations,

will hit America’s streets in the next decade. John DiIulio, the Brookings

Institute fellow who co-wrote the book with William Bennett and John Walters,

calls it a "multivariate phenomenon, " meaning that child abuse, the

high number of available high-tech guns, alcoholism and many other factors feed

the problem. University of Pennsylvania professor Mavin Wolfgang says, "6

percent to 7 percent of the boys in an age group will be chronic offenders,

meaning they are arrested five or more times before the age of 18." If that

holds true, because there will be 500,000 more boys ages 14 to 17 in the year

2000 than there were in 1995, there will be at least 30,000 more youth criminals

on the streets. Between 1990 and 2010, there will be 4.5 million more boys,

yielding 270,000 young criminals. "The big destruction happens early,"

Heritage Foundation fellow Pat Fagan says. "By the age of 4 or 5, the kid

is really warped. Psychologists can predict by the age of 6 who’ll be the

super-predators." According to Fagan: Child abuse and alcohol ruin these

children. But the groundwork was laid three decades ago with the widespread

adoption of birth control, which made the sexual revolution possible. It altered

people’s dedication to their children and altered a fundamental orientation of

society. Sexual morality got unanchored in the 1960s, followed by the

legalization of abortion. "Abortion is a very definite rejection of the

child. So are out-of- wedlock births, as well as divorce. The [predators]

everyone’ s afraid of were abused kids. There’s sexual abuse and alcohol, and

just the general decline in the cultural knowledge of what love is. In 1950, for

every 100 children born, 12 had divorced parents or were born out of wedlock. In

1992, that number had quadrupled to 60 children for every 100 born. Throw

abortion into the mix, and the number shoots up to 92 per 100.■ (Duin,

1996, p. 31) John DiIulio asserts that "each generation of crime-prone boys

has been about three times as dangerous as the one before it." And, he

argues the downhill slide into utter moral bankruptcy is about to speed up

because each generation of youth criminals is growing up in more extreme

conditions of "moral poverty" than the one before it. Mr. DiIulio

defines moral poverty as "growing up surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and

criminal adults in abusive, violence-ridden, fatherless, Godless, and jobless

settings." The "super-predator", as told to a Washington press

gathering by DiIulio, is a breed of criminal so dangerous that even the older

inmates working their way through life sentences complain that their youthful

counterparts are out of control. He cites a growing body of scientific evidence

from a variety of academic disciplines that indicates that churches ameliorate

or cure many severe socio-economic ills. "Let [the liberal elite] argue

church-state issues…all the way to the next funeral of an innocent kid caught

in the crossfire," he says. "Our guiding principle should be, `Build

churches, not jails’–or we will reap the whirlwind of our own moral

bankruptcy." (Paul, 1996, p. 27) DiIulio’s "super predators" are

born of abject "moral poverty," which he defines as: The poverty of

being without loving, capable, responsible adults who teach you right from

wrong. It is the poverty of being without parents, guardians, relatives,

friends, teachers, coaches, clergy and others who habituate you to feel joy at

others’ joy, pain at others’ pain, happiness when you do right, remorse when you

do wrong. It is the poverty of growing up in the virtual absence of people who

teach these lessons by their own everyday example, and who insist that you

follow suit and behave accordingly. In the extreme, it is the poverty of growing

up surrounded by deviant, delinquent, and criminal adults in chaotic,

dysfunctional, fatherless, Godless, and jobless settings where drug abuse and

child abuse are twins, and self-respecting young men literally aspire to get

away with murder. Scholars who study drugs and crime are only now beginning to

realize the social consequences of raising so many children in abject moral

poverty. The need to rebuild and resurrect the civil society (families,

churches, community groups) of high-crime, drug-plagued urban neighbourhoods is

not an intellectual or research hypothesis that requires testing. It’s a moral

and social imperative that requires doing – and doing now. (Bennett, et al,

1996, p. 22). It can be assumed that the "super predator" is actually

a young psychopath or psychotic. While these terms have become largely

interchangeable, thanks in large part to Hollywood, there are distinct

differences between the psychopath, the psychotic, and the Super Predator.

British Columbia Psychologist Robert Hare has done some ground breaking research

into the study of psychopaths and has found that psychopaths tend to under

utilize regions of the brain that integrate memories and emotions. These

findings helped support long held theories that the destructive nature of

psychopaths was neurobiological in nature. Aside from the neurobiological

aspects of psychopathic behaviour: The psychopath knows right from wrong; they

are quite often charming, glib and impulsive individuals. They often brag about

grandiose life ambitions, but often lack the skills or the discipline to achieve

their goals. Psychopaths are easily bored and crave immediate gratification. It

has been found that psychopaths, quite often, have very high intelligence

quotients. When caught in a lie, the psychopath will shift blame, or switch

topics with no apparent embarrassment. They do not form deep or meaningful

relationships, and often end up hurting people who get close to them. While they

are intellectually aware of society’s rules, they feel no guilt when they break

them. (Kaihla, 1996) While many of the aspects described above fit the profile

of the "Super Predator", there are some important differences. The

"super predator is almost completely without ambition, they are often of

below average intelligence, and they do not recognize -intellectually or

otherwise- any rules of society. While psychopaths and the

"super-predator" both share the inability to feel emotion, the

psychopath can feign it to achieve a result, the "super predator"

seems completely incapable of even that. More interestingly, the "super

predator" is remarkably candid. They will more often than not, admit not

only to their crimes, but also as to the why, and as to the fact that they did

nothing wrong and would do it again. Psychopathy does not always manifest itself

in criminality. In fact, a psychopath could be a highly functioning and highly

successful individual in society. In contrast, the "super predator"

lacks the intelligence or the "masking capabilities" of the psychopath

to achieve success outside of the criminal world. (Bennett et al, 1996, p. 29)

The "super predator" is not psychotic. Psychotics are largely out of

touch with reality. They suffer from delusions, hallucinations, or other

disordered states. They are often found not guilty of crimes they commit by

reason of insanity. (Kahlia, 1996). Today, especially in the inner cities,

children between 5 to 9 years of age are often left to their own devices. They

spend much of their time hanging out on the streets or soaking up violent

television programs and violent rap music; they have easy access to guns and

drugs, and can be extremely dangerous. By the year 2005 they will be teenagers,

a group that tends to be, in the view of Northeastern University criminologist

James Alan Fox, "temporary sociopaths…. impulsive and immature.” There

are currently 39 million children under 10 in the U.S., more than at any time

since the 1950s. "This is the calm before the crime storm," says Fox.

"So long as we fool ourselves in thinking that we’re winning the war

against crime, we may be blind sided by this bloodbath of teenage violence that

is lurking in the future." Nearly all the factors that contribute to youth

crime -single-parent households, child abuse, deteriorating inner-city schools -

are getting worse. At the same time, government is becoming less, not more,

interested in spending money to help break the cycle of poverty and crime. (Zoglin,

1996, p. 52+) Some Statistics on the Rise of Juvenile Crime • The number

of juvenile murderers tripled between 1984 and 1994. • Youthful murderers

using guns increased four-fold over the same period. • Juvenile gang

killings have nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 1992. • In 1994, eight

in ten juvenile murderers used a firearm, up from five in ten in 1983. •

The number of juveniles murdered increased 82 percent between 1984 and 1994.

• The nation-wide juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes increased 50

percent between 1988 and 1994. [Source: U.S. Department of Justice] •

Over the next ten years, the population of 14 to 17 year olds will grow 23

percent, and the current generation of juveniles has already brought us the

worst juvenile crime rates in recorded history. • Since 1965, the

juvenile arrest rate has more than tripled, and over the last ten years the

homicide rate has more than doubled among 14 to 17 year olds. • During

the 1980s, the white juvenile crime rate grew twice as fast as the black

juvenile crime rate, and from 1983 to 1992, the arrest rate for murder grew 166

percent among blacks, but also grew 94 percent among whites. The increasing

juvenile murder rate coincides with an increase in "stranger murders,"

suggesting juvenile predators are less discriminating in their targets. •

While in the past most murders occurred between family members and friends, the

Federal Bureau of Investigations recently reported that 53 percent of homicides

are committed by strangers. • "Stranger murders" are now four

times as common as killings by family members. • Perpetrators of stranger

murders have a better than 80 percent chance of not being punished. [Source:

U.S. Department of Justice] Local police, prosecutors, and inner-city preachers

know that the kids doing the violent crimes are more impulsively violent and

remorseless than ever. For instance, Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne

Abraham who sits on the Council on Crime in America speaks of the frightening

reality of elementary school kids who pack guns instead of lunches. Likewise,

Dan Coburn, a former Superior Court Justice and Public Defender in New Jersey

recently wrote, "This new wrote horde from hell kills, maims, and

terrorizes merely to become known, or for no reason at all. These teens have no

fear of dying and no concept of living." Even maximum-security prisoners

agree. When asked by DiIulio what was triggering the explosion of violence among

today’s young street criminals, a group of long- and life-term New Jersey

prisoners did not voice the conventional explanations such as economic poverty

or joblessness. Instead, these hardened men cited the absence of people -

family, adults, teachers, preachers, coaches- who would care enough about young

males to nurture and discipline them. In the vacuum, drug dealers and "gansta

rappers" serve as role models. "I was a bad-ass street

gladiator," one convicted murderer said, "but these kids are

stone-cold predators." (Bennett et al, 1996, p. 40) Even more shocking than

the sheer volume of violent juvenile crime is the brutality of the crime

committed for trivial motives: a pair of sneakers, a jacket, a real or imagined

insult, a momentary cheap thrill. Here are some examples: • A 59-year-old

man out on a morning stroll in Lake Tahoe was fatally shot four times by

teenagers "looking for someone to scare." The police say the four

teenagers, just 15 and 16 years old were "thrill shooting." • A

12-year-old and two other youths were charged with kidnapping a 57-year-old man

and taking a joy ride in his Toyota. As the man pleaded for his life, the

juveniles shot him to death • A 14-year-old boy was murdered while trying

to reclaim a $2,500 stereo system he had received from his grandfather. Five

juveniles, ranging in age from 15 through 17 years, were charged with the crime.

(Hazlehurst & Hazlehurst, 1998, p. 150). Profiles In every community,

roughly 2 percent of the juvenile offender population is responsible for up to

60 percent of the violent juvenile crime. Only 25 to 35 juveniles in every

100,000 members of the population will engage in criminal activity that matches

the Serious Habitual Offender pattern. Based on criteria developed by the U. S.

Department of Justice, this means that 0.03 percent to 0.04 percent of all

juveniles between 14 and 17 years old will be Serious Habitual Offenders. A

profile of a Serious Habitual Offender was collected from data collected and

analyzed by the Reagan Administration team at the U.S. Department of Justice in

the 1980s presents a graphic portrait of the serious habitual offender: The

typical SHO is male, 15 years and six months old. He has been arrested 11 to 14

times, exclusive of status offences, and five times for felonies. He comes from

a dysfunctional family; and in 46 percent of cases, at least one of his parents

also has an arrest history. He has received long-term and continuing social

services from as many as six different community service agencies, including

family, youth, mental health, social services, school, juvenile, or police

authorities, and continues to drain these resources for years before he is

finally incarcerated as a career criminal. The typical SHO’s family history

follows a classic pattern of social pathologies: 53 percent of his siblings also

have a history of arrest; and in 59 percent of these cases, there is no father

figure in the home. The absence of a father is particularly destructive for

boys; only 2 percent of SHOs are female. Furthermore, 68 percent of these

offenders have committed crimes of violence, 15 percent have a history of

committing sex crimes, and 51 percent have a reported missing or runaway record.

If a broken family characterized by physical or sexual abuse is an early

indicator of criminal behaviour, then virtually all of these serious habitual

offenders fit this category. These findings are consistent with the Heritage

Foundation’s widely reported analysis of the true root causes of violent crime,

particularly the crimogenic conditions associated with broken or dysfunctional

families. • SHOs do not consider the crimes they have committed to be all

that bad. • Forty-five percent are gang members, 64 percent associate

with other serious habitual offenders, and 75 percent abuse drugs. Recent

studies show that illegal drug use among the young is on the rise and a

significant majority of all present day SHOs -"Super Predators"- use

or sell illegal drugs and often become addicted themselves. Illegal drug use and

alcohol abuse tends to be regular features of their criminal conduct. Drugs, in

particular, are part of the criminal scene of these juvenile offenders, and the

use and sale of drugs contributes significantly to a SHO’s other criminal

activity. The need to purchase illegal drugs, combined with the warped hedonism

of the addict, shapes and drives much of the criminal activity of this class of

criminals. Juvenile crime and violence is on the rise. Many criminologists are

calling it an epidemic, a ticking time bomb, the calm before the storm, and a

long descent into night, you choose the clichИ. The reasons for this rise

in teen crime seems to have its roots not so much in poverty as it does to

poverty of values. Experts like John DiIulio and James Q. Wilson believe that

the cure lies in a renaissance of personal responsibility and a reassertion of

responsibility over rights and community over egoism. There is definitely a need

for more study on the new breed of teen criminal -"the Super

Predator". We don’t need yet another library full of jargon riddled

criminology studies to tell us what the Roman sages knew: what society does to

children, children will do to society. Most in the education as well as the

psychological fields will blanch whenever the terms values, church,

responsibility, and family, are bandied about. But the inescapable reality is

that since the sixties, when these terms were castigated and relegated to

"being quaint", we have witnessed an incredibly fast and pernicious

rise in the types of pathologies that have accompanied the decline of the family

structure. While I am by no means a religious zealot, it seems to me that

government has been a poor substitute for the family and the church in teaching

basic core values. Government certainly has a role to play financially, but the

strictures and the applications of any type of largess need to come from

Community leaders or clergy members who have a real stake in the community.

While it is tragic that there seem to be a large number of "lost

youths" mired in a life of crime and violence, the safety of the community,

especially the children in the community, should be the primary concern. I will

side with John DiIulio and agree that we need more churches, but I also feel

that more correctional facilities need to be built to house young offenders. If

children as young as 7, 8, or 9 years of age need to be incarcerated like

adults, then do it. While this may seem harsh, I believe that it is the only way

to prevent further decay. With harsher enforcement of laws towards violent

minors enforced, attention can be paid to addressing the ills that create the

problem, family decay. More attention needs to be paid to the people who

actually live in the communities affected. We must deal with this problem of the

"super predator" teen thug swiftly and harshly, before it’s too late

to save the children in danger of falling in with or becoming victims of crime

themselves.

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