Contemporary Family Trends

The rise in the number of children and adolescents who exhibit problematic behaviors: Multiple Causes

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February 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Why do more children and adolescents exhibit problematic behaviours than in the past? What has changed? By the "past," I am not referring to bygone centuries for which little documentation exists, but to the period covering the decades of the 1930s through the 1950s. For instance, the rates for juvenile delinquency increased spectacularly from the 1960s and have peaked in the mid 1990s. Although they subsequently declined, these rates as well as those for most problematic behaviours have remained at a high level among boys and have continued to rise among girls.

These high rates mean that many children and adolescents lead a troubled life and fail according to the norms of our society. As a result, their families suffer, schools are negatively impacted, and some neighborhoods become less livable. As well, very aggressive behaviours are costly to society. For instance, it is estimated that a criminal career which begins in adolescence costs society over 2 million dollars (Cohen, 1998). Above all, high rates of problematic behaviours negatively affect "good" or prosocial children--who remain in the majority. Prosocial children often become victims, their school environment is less civil, and, as a consequence, their own behaviours may deteriorate.

In this paper, as we examine various factors related to the development of problematic behaviours, we ask: What has changed to explain the increase in such behaviours? While there is broad agreement concerning the personal and familial correlates of problematic behaviours, there is much less consensus and very little research regarding the larger sociocultural factors and, especially, the causes behind the increase itself. I am proposing that, since the 1950s, our society has facilitated the evolution of an environment, herein called the enabling environment, which favors the development of problematic rather than prosocial behaviours.

WHAT ARE PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOURS?

Summarily speaking, problematic behaviours are acts that negatively affect or hurt others, are destructive of or stressful to institutions such as families and schools as well as property and the natural environment. In contrast, prosocial children are usually cooperative with their parents, adults in general, peers, and are respectful of property and environment. Prosocial children may occasionally engage in one or two of the problematic behaviours listed below, in itself also a change from the past (Moffitt et al., 2001). But the focus of this article is on children who engage in several problematic behaviours on a regular basis, at least during a certain period in their lives.

A first category of behaviours appears early in life and consists of **negative** and **disruptive** acts and traits, such as low impulse control, irritability, lying, hyperactivity, unpleasantness and sullenness, noncompliance, defiance, and temper tantrums (Loeber et al., 2003). When these problems persist among older children, they result in constant talking back, staying out late at night despite parents' prohibition, truancy from school, running away, early sexual activities, and delinquency (Broidy et al., 2003).

Second are **aggressive** acts such as fighting, hitting, and biting, which are more common among smaller than older children (Tremblay, 2000; Tremblay et al., 2005); later on, intimidation, extortion, and other forms of bullying appear such as harassment, name-calling, rumor spreading, and social exclusion (Espelage et al., 2003). At their extreme, these acts enter the domain of **delinquency**, where we encounter sexual assault and rape, the use of arms to intimidate or threaten others, robbery, assault with injury, attempted murder, and murder. Also included are cruelty to animals, stealing, shoplifting and car theft, the trafficking of drugs as well as prostitution and pimping, and destructive behaviours toward property, whether private or public, or the environment, such as vandalism and fire setting. Excluded here are emotional problems and addictions:[i] their inclusion would orient the discussion toward a more psychiatric rather than psychosociological analysis.

PROBLEMATIC BEHAVIOURS HAVE INCREASED

Parents and teachers are a reliable source of information on trends in children's behaviours. In a 13-year study conducted between 1976 and 1989, yearly samples of parents and teachers increasingly reported that children destroyed things belonging to others, lied, stole, hung around with others who got into trouble, were whining, sullen, stubborn, and irritable--among others.[ii] In another study, experienced teachers reported that, between 1960 and 1980, children became more difficult to teach, less focused, less able to concentrate, and less self-disciplined.[iii] Peer victimization of children in schools has increased and bullying in general has continued into the 2000s. Furthermore, teacher victimization has become more frequent--a problem also encountered in France.

In Canada, youth crime increased in the 1970s through the early 1990s and then decreased in the mid 1990s; however, violent crimes continued to rise, albeit more slowly.[iv] In the U.S., the overall rate of delinquency more than doubled between 1960 and 1985, from 20 to 47 per 1,000 youths. Between 1985 and 1994, arrests for murder increased by 172% for the 14-17-year-old group and by 46% for other violent crimes such as aggravated assault, rape, and robbery. There has also been a resurgence of youth gangs in most of Canada's major cities and a Montreal study concluded that gang members display far higher rates of delinquent behaviours than do other adolescents.

Although most delinquents are arrested only once, they are usually arrested after a series of offenses for which they had never been caught. This is especially so for violent offenders, but it also applies to children below the age of 12 who are delinquent. For instance, in the New Zealand Dunedin longitudinal study[v], for every conviction for a violent crime, the respondents reported having committed 22 other violent offenses[vi] (Rutter et al., 2006b). Thus, increases in official delinquency reflect a rise in difficult behaviours in the rest of the child and adolescent population.

Furthermore, **girls** are more likely to engage in physically aggressive behaviour and delinquency than in the recent past, although their rates remain lower than those of boys.[vii] More are gang members. In Canada, the rate of violent delinquency for girls more than doubled from 1990 to 1999. Girls tend to aggress other girls, often to compete with them for boys.

Another concern resides in the age at which problematic behaviours emerge. For example, children as young as two years of age now exhibit severe problematic behaviours that will be later linked to early delinquency and negative adult outcomes. The number of 7-to-11-year-old delinquents has greatly increased and the types of crimes they commit have become more serious; they are also more likely to become chronic offenders than youths who become delinquent later (Rutter et al., 2006a:384).

PERSONALITY AND PERCEPTIONS: GENES AND ENVIRONMENT

Problematic behaviours, especially those related to serious delinquency and antisocial acts, are often fostered by personality characteristics such as irritability, low self-control, and irresponsibility (Moffitt et al., 2001). Such traits are at least moderately genetic. That is, depending on the types of behaviours which result, the nature of each child, and his or her environment, at least 40% of a child's antisocial behaviours may be related to genetic factors (Rhee and Waldman, 2002; Moffitt, 2005).

Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, genes are seldom the only or even the main determinant: rather, **joint genetic and environmental** dynamics enter into play. This joint contribution of nature and nurture occurs through three related processes: the genetic inheritance, the environment that this inheritance contributes to create, including poor parenting, and the impact of the sociocultural environment on a child's nature. (The latter is discussed in subsequent sections.) One also has to consider environmental influences on the developing fœtus which lead to **innate** characteristics. One can think here of a mother's malnutrition, smoking, and especially alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The latter often results in fœtal-alcohol syndrome which is characterized by damage to that part of the brain responsible for planning and self-control (Buxton, 2004; Kyshan and Moore, 2005).

Genetic inheritance, environment, and parenting

Parents who are aggressive, impulsive, and difficult to get along with, pass at least <u>some</u> of these traits via genetic inheritance to some of their children. But personality traits that influence behaviour are complex and **multigenic**: they are the result of the co-occurrence of several genes (Plomin and Crabbe, 2000). It is more difficult to transmit several genes than a single gene. As well, even disorders caused by a dominant gene, such as Down's syndrome, show a great deal of variability in outcomes (Wachs, 2000). Thus, in a family, genetic inheritance often produces variability and so does the same familial environment as each child reacts differently to its surroundings. As well, as children from the same family grow up, they are often affected differently by their schools and neighborhoods (Rutter et al., 2006:247).

Furthermore, difficult parents may not get along well and may exhibit poor parenting skills. Thus, in a second process, the behavioural manifestations of parental traits become part of the child's environment--as childrearing styles, marital styles, and role models. As well, children's own behavioural manifestations of their partly inherited traits, such as low self-control, often elicit negative reactions from parents. These reactions then become part of the child's environment and further act to influence his or her characteristics. These environments jointly created by parents and children are partly genetically driven and interact with each other to 'co-produce' child behaviours. In turn, these behaviours are more likely to be activated when the extra-

familial environment contributes added risk factors, such as poverty and neighborhood violence (Rutter et al., 2006).

Jaffee et al. (2003) have found that 5-year-old children whose fathers are very antisocial are more likely than other 5-year-olds to exhibit antisocial behaviours, perhaps suggesting a genetic effect. Furthermore, the longer these fathers live with their children, the higher the children's level of antisocial behaviour--the parenting effect. These fathers "provide rearing experiences that contribute to the development of their children's antisocial behaviour" (p. 120). They provide both negative genes and a negative environment--what has been termed a "double whammy."

When both parents exhibit problematic personality traits and/or behaviours, children may inherit a double dose of genetic liability and of **negative parenting**--one from each parent.[viii] As well, two parents who are similar in low self-control and antisocial traits are more likely to have a conflictual relationship. Children will then experience more domestic violence, child abuse, and familial instability (Moffitt et al., 2001). They are then more likely to grow up poor and live in a neighborhood that is itself detrimental to their development.

Children's faulty perceptions

It has long been observed that difficult children, even as young as age 4, are often biased in how they process information.[ix] Their perceptions and cognitions are faulty, including the ones they maintain concerning their parents and other authority figures. Adolescents classified as aggressive are far more likely to attribute hostile intentions to their teachers and blame them for the outcome of a hypothetical scenario than nonaggressive peers. Other studies have found that difficult children tend to impute threatening intentions to others, are easily slighted, and evaluate disobedience, defiance, and revenge as positive characteristics or as the only solutions to problems.

The old notion that difficult and especially delinquent children are what they are because of a low self-esteem has been debunked in recent years.[x] In fact, many antisocial children think highly of themselves and this inflated sense of self simply reinforces their bad behaviours. It allows them to filter out negative feedback from parents and teachers. As well, their behaviour often results in punitive reactions from adults and even peers. But, instead of being motivated to change, they interpret these reactions as a sign that they are being unfairly treated and this goads them into seeking revenge. Other children interpret negative reactions as a mark of status or a rationale for further maliciousness--especially when they receive the support of peers who are similarly oriented.

Difficult children may be less able or willing to learn social cues and to "read" other people, perhaps due to high levels of impulsivity and self-absorption. Indeed, Bates (1987:1132) has reasoned that infants and children who are difficult may learn less about their parents' attitudes and feelings than easier children. They may have less empathy (Wied et al., 2005). They may have a selective attention that leads them to ignore their parents and to focus on delinquent peers and activities. This deficit in turn leads to friction between child and parents, further reinforcing the child's negative perspective and behaviours. All these factors, when combined, make it more difficult to raise such children and a web is formed that encapsulates disruptive behav-

iours with attitudes supporting these behaviours. It is a dynamic process whereby both behaviours and attitudes are caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

In contrast, prosocial adolescents are more likely to endorse values and motives consistent with conformity to interactional roles and are far less likely to attribute hostile intent, even when reprimanded (Nelson and Crick, 1999). It is then easier for their parents and teachers to guide them to internalize and act upon generally accepted norms of behaviour.

What has changed? The enabling environment

The increase in the rates and seriousness of children's negative behaviours in the past decades **cannot be explained by genetic causes** (Rutter et al., 2001). The gene pool of a population needs more than a few decades to change. Therefore, one can only conclude that, in the recent past, negative genetic predispositions **were counterbalanced**. Indeed, the causes of problematic behaviours are **multiple** and interlocking. The following social elements, among others, have combined in recent decades to prevent children from getting the dose of structure, stability, and values needed for normal development. They are:

- less parental or adult presence at home to anchor children's lives;

- fewer family rituals that attach youth to a regulating calendar of events;

- schools and neighborhoods that no longer serve as effective communities, hence providing inadequate collective supervision;

- reduced importance of religion as a life-structuring element and agency of social control; and,

- access to media products and programming of a materialistic, individualistic, and violent nature.

In turn, all of these have been influenced by historical trends toward individualism, parental goals of independence and self-sufficiency for their children, a general emphasis on self-fulfillment, and the predominance of materialistic values within a consumerist market economy.[xi]

Considering all these elements, it may not be surprising that problematic behaviours have increased (Garbarino, 1999). Our society, especially for some groups, may present too many opportunities for the emergence of problematic behaviours and too few opportunities for the optimal development of children's abilities and prosocial tendencies. Indeed, there are many opportunities and even encouragements for individuals to adopt problematic behaviours in large and heterogeneous societies such as ours, where social change is rapid, value consensus relatively low, and community social control weak. In the past, when neighborhoods were more cohesive, children were more openly censured for their negative behaviours. The current environment too often enables the emergence of problematic behaviours even when no genetic predispositions exist.

PARENTING: AN INTERACTIONAL AND COLLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Parenting is an interactional and collective enterprise (Ambert, 2001; 2005c).

Parents and children: Co-creation of problematic outcomes

In some families, difficult child behaviours emerge because parents' problems, childrearing philosophies, or lack of skills prevent them from adopting suitable socialization practices. As children become more difficult, parenting practices are further disrupted, and the husband-wife relationship may suffer. "The child facilitates the disruption of its own environment by eliciting maladaptive parental behaviour, or increasing the strain on a marginally good marriage" (Earls, 1994:316). Some parents become discouraged and respond inappropriately so that their attempts to control the negative behaviours often result in an escalation of parent-child antagonism. Other parents abandon all semblance of authority and abdicate their parental role (Laird et al., 2003).

Patterson et al.(1990) show that, when a child has an extreme antisocial score on personality tests in grade 4, parenting practices are much more disrupted when the same child is assessed again in grade 6, compared to a child who had been more prosocial in grade 4. Similarly, when parenting is poor at one point, children are more likely to be antisocial at the next assessment (Moffitt, 2005). Difficult children generally impair a family's ability to solve problems that are relevant to its positive functioning (Forgatch, 1989). This is especially the case in families with children who are born with the symptoms of FAS and related brain damage (Buxton, 2004; www.fasworld.com and www.come-over.to/FAS).

Families with disruptive children are sometimes marked by what is known as "conflictual mutuality" between mother and child. While the mother usually prevails in disputes with children who behave normally, with difficult children(and boys in particular), it is the child who does. In fact, a mother's positive behaviour toward a usually disruptive boy can encourage the latter to take advantage of her (Lavigueur et al., 1995). Oppositional and disruptive behaviours in childhood also lead to affiliation with deviant peers and lower school commitment (Simons et al., 1998). Difficult boys are often rejected by discouraged parents and teachers alike (Garbarino, 1999). However, if one of these risk factors is removed by, for example, separating the child from deviant peers, the probability of further problems can be reduced. This is why it is so important to **intervene early** in the lives of difficult children because a great proportion of them, albeit not all, can be helped. In contrast, interventions are less successful during adolescence (Moffitt, 2005:533).

Behavioural monitoring versus permissiveness

Parental monitoring and behavioural control, including reasoning and appropriate punishment, are key to child development (Larzelere, 2001). Competent parents are aware of their children's activities and whereabouts, make appropriate maturity demands, and set limits on behaviours. Poorly monitored youngsters are at a greater risk for delinquency, illicit drug use, early sexual involvement, and even school underachievement (Pettit et al., 2001). Mounts (2001) found that adolescents who reported higher levels of parental supervision at Time 1 had lower levels of problematic behaviours at Time 2. Galambos et al. (2003) have found that parents' firm

behavioural control prevents problematic behaviours from escalating among adolescents whose peers are deviant.

The relationship between parental monitoring and problematic behaviours is often reciprocal. For instance, Stattin and Kerr (2001) have shown that adolescents who are delinquent are less likely than others to tell their parents about their activities, thus in effect lowering parental supervision. When delinquency increases, parents find it more difficult to monitor their adolescents and may simply cease monitoring their activities (Laird et al., 2003).

Families with proper monitoring dynamics are probably characterized by other positive qualities (Simons et al., 2004). They may be better organized, may have more stable and perhaps less individualistic parents and children with easier and more cooperative temperaments; more time may be spent on prosocial parent-child interaction than in other families, whether single- or two-parent families, whether rich or poor (Kerns et al., 2001). Such families may also be able to more effectively filter out negative peer, neighborhood, and media influences.

For their part, **permissive parents** place very few maturity demands on their children and do not actively socialize them: they fail to set rules concerning school, behaviour at home, or activities with peers. Adolescents raised in such a context tolerate frustration poorly and are more likely to be underachievers. They lack emotional control and purpose in life (Lamborn et al., 1991). Parental permissiveness may have more negative consequences than strictness in a society when norms of behaviour change rapidly: A child then needs far more guidance than in times when the entire community agrees on what constitutes proper and moral behaviour. For her part, Baumrind (1991:114) noted that "in a context of social instability, caregivers are required to sustain a higher level of supervision than would be needed in a period of stability." There are now more dangers that confront adolescents than was the case 50 years ago. Hence, "premature emancipation is perhaps a greater threat to mature identity formation than delayed separation from family attachments" (p. 115).

Parenting: A collective phenomenon

Parenting is also a group phenomenon linked to the concept of the effective community (Steinberg et al., 1995). In such a community, parents tend to be involved in school activities, get acquainted with other children's parents, and supervise each other's children (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987:7). There is a correlation that links delinquency to lack of supervision **by adults in general** (Mekos et al., 1996). The better-supervised adolescents are by everyone, the less they are to engage in problematic behaviours. Unfortunately, in this decade, only a minority of adults would feel comfortable reprimanding children who are misbehaving in public. As one social worker told me, "You never know when they'll pull a knife on you." Therefore, collective supervision has diminished over time because of urbanization, lack of consensus on childrearing, and also because of adults' fears of adolescents.

As well, the collectivity has to encourage parents to socialize their children properly. Some professionals, especially those in private practice, believe that children should be allowed to make all their choices themselves and that adults should not teach them rules of morality because, they think, children are basically moral--a throwback to old philosophies (Hymowitz, 1999). But research proves the opposite. Parents have been muzzled by professionals, intimidated by peer

group influence on their children, and brainwashed by the media. Many have lost their "parenting compass" and are afraid to set limits on their children's behaviours and to teach them appropriate values.

Child and adolescent maltreatment

Children who have been or are abused at home, experience, at least on average, higher rates of developmental problems than others. They share some of the characteristics of those who witness interparental violence, although their outcomes are even more negative.[xii] For instance, they do less well in school, are more frequently delinquent, have more peer-related problems, and are less reciprocal in their relationships. Understandably, they become hyper-vigilant to danger and threat, tend to attribute hostile intent to others and, as a result, are often more aggressive. Physically maltreated children tend to be more antisocial, even after accounting for the genetic transmission of problematic personality traits (Moffitt, 2005:542).

Yet, the majority of abused children do not become difficult or even abusive later on. Salzinger et al., (1993) pointedly remarked that **protective factors** must exist for severely abused children who turn out well, while risk factors must exist for children who are not abused but go on to become abusive adolescents and adults. These protective factors may be found within the child's personality, at the family level (supportive siblings or one parent who is loving), in rewarding peers, in good schools, or in a prosocial neighborhood.

What has changed? Parental characteristics and situations

Certain parental characteristics have changed since the early 1960s and these changes are one of the factors related to the increase in problematic behaviours in children.

Marital status and domestic conflict

Divorce rates soared after the 1960s to decline slightly after the peak years of the 1980s (Ambert, 2005a). Similarly, births to single mothers increased until the 2000s (Ambert, 2006). While most children of divorced parents and those growing up with a lone mother or lone father manage quite well, it is the case that this population of children are at greater risk for behavioural and emotional problems than are children in stable two-parent families.[xiii] Single parenting may constitute a liability, both as a result of the selection of certain individuals into the single-parent status and of the limitations that this status too often places on resources and parenting abilities. A disproportionate number of delinquents come from single-parent families, and this finding holds across ethnic groups and western societies (Ambert, 2005c).

Children who witness verbal and especially physical violence between their parents are more likely than others to exhibit aggressiveness as well as other negative behaviours. Their prognosis is even less favorable when, in addition, they are victims of violence themselves (McGuigan and Pratt, 2001). Even though most children who grow up in an environment of parental conflict grow up to be prosocial, parental conflict and violence place children at high risk because:

- the example they are subjected to (role modelling);
- elevated levels of accompanying stress; and,
- disrupted parenting practices that often follow or co-occur (Buehler et al., 2006).

Parents who quarrel frequently and/or abuse each other do not provide an environment favorable to child development. As well, some of these parents are genetically predisposed to aggressiveness and low impulse control and may pass these predispositions on to some of their children via genetic inheritance and especially so when both partners share similar personality traits.

Domestic violence is one of the best predictors of child abuse: fathers who mistreat their spouses are more likely to abuse their children as well. Women who have been abused as children have a higher chance of living with an abusive man. In turn, abused mothers use harsh punishment more often than nonabused mothers. Thus, parental conflict and domestic abuse contribute to problematic behaviours in a proportion of children. However, we do <u>not</u> know if they have contributed to the <u>increase</u> itself of such behaviours: we have no reliable statistics proving that parents have become more conflictual and abusive toward each other since the 1960s than was the case before.

Parental criminality

The rise in delinquency and criminality up to the mid 1990s means that more parents have a criminal past: there has been an increase in the prison population in Canada, the U.S., and Great Britain. A large number of inmates are and will be released in already burdened neighborhoods--as parents and as future parents. In 1999, more than 1.5 million American children below the age of 18 had an incarcerated parent, up from one million in 1991 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000). An estimated 10 million more children have parents who have been imprisoned at some time in their young lives.

Adolescents and young adults who are very antisocial are also those who will reproduce a substantial segment of the next generation of violent children (Henry et al., 1993; Moffitt et al., 2001). Hence, parental antisocial characteristics, and particularly criminality, are important contributors to children's problematic outcomes. Imprisonment is a particularly strong marker (Murray and Farrington, 2005). For instance, 40% of the two million American adults in jail have a parent or a sibling behind bars. Butterfield (1999) reports that a California study of 1,000 girls in detention found that 54% had a mother who had been locked up and probably a higher percentage had such a father.

Parental values and behaviours

Parents who subscribe to <u>materialistic values</u> with a preoccupation for upward mobility or "moving up socially" (who also have a high divorce rate--Clydesdale, 1997), often do not have the time to relate to their children so as to teach them appropriate values. When parents invest so much of their time in work for materialistic and competitive reasons, their behaviours serve as models for their children's value development and behaviours. When parents' entire lives revolve around material goals, their children may develop problematic behaviours related to acquisitiveness such as shoplifting. Fortunately, not all children walk through this door: their personal resilience, prosocial peers, a good school, or a redeeming neighborhood can offset negative parental example.

When parents are **overworked**, especially when poor, children may go unsupervised, a risky matter in a society where opportunities for problematic behaviours abound. In fact, a substantial proportion of delinquent acts are committed between 3 and 8 p.m., when children are neither in school nor with a parent present at home (Hewlett and West, 1998:49). When both parents are overworked and return home, often after a long commute and without any transition period to "decompress," they have to simultaneously attend to domestic chores, their relationship, and children. They may not always be in a position to be attentive to all of their young children's or adolescents' behavioural cues--particularly so when the latter often prefer not to be communicative.

Other parents may be **poor role models** in the context of their children's sport activities: they may encourage their children to engage in rude and even assaultive behaviours. Yet other parents lead a personal life with serial sexual partners and not only serve as role models but also may turn a blind eye to their children's lack of sexual restraint or irresponsible sexual activities. Similarly, parents who are themselves violent, if not necessarily against their children, act as role models in the development of childhood aggressiveness (Stewart et al., 2002).

We now turn to some of the extra-familial factors behind the increase in problematic behaviours in children since 1960s.[xiv]

PEERS

After the 1950s, several changes in the character of peer groups are evident and these too are implicated in the rise of problematic behaviours. These changes took place as a substantial proportion of small children were raised in non-family care, often with serial caretakers, while their parents were at work. Enrolment in Junior Kindergarten is now widespread (Ambert, 2005c). As a result, peers occupy an increasingly central and constant role in the social lives of children and exercise a more salient influence on their attitudes and behaviours at a very young age. The segregation of children and young people into age groups not only fosters a sense of solidarity with peer values and behaviours but also separates children from many of their parents' activities. In contrast, children living in traditional villages of Africa and many Asian and Latin American countries are well integrated in the life of the community and in their parents' world, including the world of work, which is, in many of these traditional societies, still based around patterns of kinship and family interaction. These children learn their adult roles by imitating their parents as they help them and the village school reinforces kinship linkages. These children play in mixed-age groups, the 6-year-olds or 10-year-olds collectively watching over the toddlers.

In our society, age segregation is fostered by the educational system and the technologized world of employment. It is also often promoted by consumerism and may be self-chosen and reinforced by the peer culture that has evolved along age lines. For instance, even when they are at home, children isolate themselves in their room to watch TV programs and videos valued by their age-mates or surf the web. Hence, children contribute to their own segregation. This situation may reduce parental influence and, because of the overall cultural context, constitute risk factors.

Peer selection and influence

Peer groups are formed on the basis of shared similarities and children who tend to be antisocial are likely to have similar friends.[xv] Once dyads and groups are formed, the members influence each other. A majority of difficult adolescents "hang out" with similar peers and this group membership further contributes to individual delinquency. As Schulenberg et al. (1999) have pointed out with respect to substance use, without a peer context that supports these behaviours, adolescents would have far fewer opportunities to engage in such activities: they would not have "a place" of social acceptance where they can use drugs. This applies to both genders; however, girls are more negatively affected by opposite-sex friends than are boys. This is especially true for girls who experience puberty early. Such girls are at risk of developing negative behaviours as a result of associating with antisocial older male peers who may exploit their psychological vulnerability for sexual purposes. But even some all-girl peer groups are becoming more antisocial.

Even when a peer group is not deviant, its members are at an age when material possessions, especially clothing apparel and audiovisual equipment, are highly prized. Competition for popularity may lead many adolescents to engage in problematic activities in order to acquire these status symbols. One can think here of shoplifting and of intimidating peers into surrendering their possessions.

In some schools, antisocial children are more often rejected by their peers and this rejection contributes to increasingly aggressive behaviours over the years (Dodge et al., 2003). In other words, when a child is already showing signs of aggressiveness, acceptance by **pro**social peers contributes to a reduction of this behaviour while peer rejection, and especially harassment, increases it (Rusby et al., 2005). Other studies show that aggressive children are often accepted by peers or, at the very least, are not rejected, especially in more violent environments (e.g., Poulin and Boivin, 2000). In a classroom with several difficult children, being aggressive may even lead to high status rather than rejection. This in turn reinforces difficult behaviours once they are approved by the peer group.

Absence of a counterbalancing parental peer group

Parents who try to assert their authority often hear the following: "But all the others are going!" "Everybody is doing it" and "everybody has one"--powerful and often intimidating messages (Ambert, 2001). Each parenting couple and, more and more, each single mother or father has to face what is presented by their child as a normal entitlement. Parents come to feel that, if they do not conform to the requirements of the peer group, they will deprive and isolate their child.

Parents are generally more isolated when it comes to tactical and moral support: there is no such thing as a parental subculture or peer group, and this constitutes a disequilibrium that is detrimental to their role (Small and Eastman, 1991). When children refuse to cooperate and/or to divulge information, parents have few recourses (Stattin and Kerr, 2001). As a result, parents are unable to be authoritative: their child's materialistic peer group is far more clever and better organized than they are. Nevertheless, overall, when adolescents' peers have competent parents, the latter contribute to positive developmental outcomes above and beyond their own parents' competence (Steinberg et al., 1995).

Many parents make it a point of knowing their children's friends' parents. **Parent networks** become an effective supportive community and fulfill several functions both for parents and their children. When these are school based, they can contribute to a smoother socialization process, norms that are more closely adhered to, and better-informed parents. It is, however, far more difficult for parents of adolescents than for parents of young children to know the parents of their children's peers--at a time when such contacts would be the most helpful.

QUALITY OF SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

Schools are key agents of child socialization and research has documented the importance of the early grades in the formation of child behaviours (Coie and Jacobs, 1993). It is in school that children are most affected by the peer group. Teachers can be influential, and the educational quality of each institution and classroom is important (Frempong and Willms, 2002).

Schoolmates and teachers

Children who attend schools with a high ratio of difficult peers are at an increased risk to experiment with or develop patterns of similar behaviours. In contrast, the life of children in schools with a more prosocial population is easier and generally conflicts less with their home life (Cleveland and Wiebe, 2003). What has changed is that, in the past, children who engaged in problematic behaviours dropped out early. Now, because of mandatory schooling and the disappearance of agricultural and industrial jobs, they remain enrolled longer but "without a stake in behavioural conformity" (Toby, 1995:151). Such students have had an increasingly negative influence on their peers and teachers.

As this was happening, schools were becoming overcrowded and impersonal and, as strain mounted on teachers in some schools, more took sick leaves and substitutes could not maintain discipline nor offer much academic content. "The role of teacher no longer commands the automatic respect of students and their parents.... less experienced, or less effective teachers cannot rely on the authority of the role to help them maintain control" (Toby, 1995:156). Thus, the level of collective socialization offered by schools is often inadequate to prevent the development of problems or to control those that have arisen. In turn, students' difficult behaviours lower teachers' morale and expectations. Teachers often fear their stronger students.

An experimental study illustrates the positive influence of a good teacher (Pedersen et al., 1978). Sixty children attending an urban school of very low quality were randomly assigned to three grade-one teachers. Nearly 60% of the first graders assigned to the 'facilitative' teacher completed more than 10 years of school compared to 40% of the other children. Over two thirds of the first group achieved high levels of occupational success as adults compared to 40% of those who had been with the less qualified teachers. Quite a few studies do show that teachers' beliefs, expectations, and behaviours affect students' perceptions, behaviours, and peer acceptance (Birch and Ladd, 1998). For instance, if teachers do not show disapproval of aggression or are afraid of bullies, these youths' social status may be enhanced (Chang, 2003). As well, teachers who have low expectations of poor and/or minority students slow the pace of instruction and lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure (Pattillo-McCoy, 2000).

Educational contents and contexts

Schools that foster a sense of community and uphold high standards are more effective in terms of educational outcomes and in their ability to maintain a **prosocial culture** among students (Alexander and Entwisle, 1996). In turn, such a school culture prevents disengagement from educational activities on the part of children, in itself a factor that deters problematic behaviours. Furthermore, schools that actively encourage parental involvement may actually prevent the development of negative behaviours. However, communication between parents and teachers becomes less frequent and effective as children enter middle school, in part because teachers no longer encourage parental involvement. Yet, as Eccles and Harold (1996) point out, it is exactly when children are entering adolescence that parents need more teacher feedback and encouragement to remain involved.

Classrooms may have become **too unstructured**: children spend much less time than 30 years ago being directly taught as a group by their teachers. Rather, they often work in teams or engage in various activities independently. This can lower their academic potential and this lack of structure offers too many loopholes through which vulnerable children can fall and withdraw from the educational path they are meant to be on. Teacher direction is needed, as is teacher warmth, factors that are related to positive child outcomes in the classroom (Brody et al., 2002; Cournoyer, 2000).

Yet, classrooms may also be **too structured**: children sit still for long periods and then go on to spend too many hours sitting at home in front of the TV or Internet. Children's unstructured outdoor activities have declined by 50% (Doherty, 2006). This level of physical inactivity may contribute to hyperactivity (Diller, 1999). Regular physical exercise and **cooperative play** would allow children to release physical impulses within a controlled and noncompetitive setting. Instead, schools and particularly high schools invest in their teams of athletes and exclude most children who are less motivated to compete or less physically coordinated.

QUALITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

Both in Canada and the U.S., there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of the effects of neighborhoods, especially disadvantaged and segregated ones, on child development (e.g., Curtis et al., 2004). In cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Winnipeg, some of the neighborhoods have, in recent decades, seen an increase in the concentration of social challenges, including problematic behaviours.

Effects on children

In communities that have a high employment rate, where neighbors interact with each other **to enforce rules**, and are able to control teenage groups, children have fewer serious problems than in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty, a high level of criminality, and gang activity (Chung and Steinberg, 2006). Lynam et al. (2000) suggest that the lack of effective social control in poor areas is particularly consequential for impulsive children.

It seems that a certain percentage (a critical mass) of low-income neighbors increases the risk for problematic behaviours and subsequent school difficulties in children as young as age 5. In contrast, a critical mass of affluent neighbors raises a child's chances of staying out of trouble. In Vancouver, Hertzman (2006) has found that, in terms of general child development, in a typical affluent community, 15% of children are vulnerable compared to 50% in low-income areas. In an American program designed to improve families' living conditions, inner-city families were relocated, some to the suburbs, others to another area of the inner city. Later on, the children who had moved to suburban apartments were more likely to go to college and, once adults, to earn higher salaries than children who had moved to other apartments in the city (Rosenbaum, 1991).

Children in neighborhoods that are both poor and beset by social problems, including gangs, are often **not adequately socialized**, especially when their parents are also poor. They fail to develop the personal life skills and related attitudes expected in mainstream society, as well as the social skills needed in the work place. They often develop values and behaviours in opposition to the rest of society (Ogbu, 1994). Anderson (1999) writes about the code of the street and the rejection of mainstream values, which encourage antisocial behaviours.

In large, low-income housing developments, parents are often deprived of adequate power of supervision as their children roam hallways and staircases. Youths often belong to gangs that rule the area, and therefore largely escape the supervision of responsible adults (Welsh, 2006). When gang members come to rely on firearms, as has recently become the case in Toronto, guns spread throughout a wider segment of the youth population (Blumstein, 2002). These neighborhoods are also disproportionately populated by single-parent families. A larger proportion of children in these families are less well monitored, particularly when mothers' educational level is low (Quane and Rankin, 1998). Finally, children and adolescents are often not **adequately protected** from bullying, sexual abuse, substance abuse, delinquency, and early childbearing.

Low-income parents, generally mothers, who live in high-poverty neighborhoods, especially in housing projects, are subject to more stress (Gutman et al., 2005) and are deprived of the resources that a middle-class woman takes for granted in raising her children (Edin and Lein, 1997). As Cook and Fine (1995:132) note, low-income mothers have to be more strict and vigilant because "errors" lead to delinquency, drug addiction, early pregnancy, and even death. Therefore, success in childrearing is seen in terms of the basic tasks of feeding, housing, and shielding their children from danger (Arnold, 1995). Loftier goals such as the development of children's verbal and reading skills are a luxury in such environments.

Discrimination and segregation

Native and minority-group children, especially black, are at risk for negative behaviours because a large proportion live in high-poverty areas.[xvi] Furthermore, American black middle-class neighborhoods offer less protection against the development of negative behaviours than do white middle-class districts because black middle-class areas are generally in close proximity to very poor ones (Sampson et al., 2000). Even in places such as Toronto and Montreal, black middle-class children often go to school with peers from disadvantaged neighborhoods and are exposed to antisocial role models. Indeed, black middle-class parents "have less control over the experiences to which their children will be exposed--less than they would in a more homoge-

neously middle-class setting" (Patillo-McCoy, 1999:92). These children "do not have to search far to get involved with the 'wrong crowd'" (p. 108).

In order to remain motivated to complete at least high school and so that the lure of illicit activities becomes less powerful, children and adolescents have to know that entry-level jobs are available. However, poor, segregated neighborhoods and Native reserves continue to lack employment opportunities. In the Greater Toronto Area, special community programs are initiated in some neighborhoods that have experienced a great deal of gun violence among black youths (Black, 2006). In B.C., Kershow et al. (2005) have found that neighborhoods with more Natives are at higher risk for child problems as a result of the lingering effects of colonialism and residential schools.

AFFLUENCE AND POVERTY

However, one should not err in the direction of attaching an aura of superiority to a district simply on the basis of **material affluence** and lack of street crime. An affluent neighborhood is not automatically a "good" one in which to raise children. Much depends on parents' values and family orientation. Indeed, now, in some middle-class and even affluent areas, no effective community is in evidence: parents are largely absent, permissive, and uninvolved. A segment of adolescents spend their time away in cars, at various "hot spots," or partying with drugs in otherwise empty homes, and engage in break-ins and thefts. More research is needed about relatively affluent children who become difficult and even delinquent in "good" neighborhoods. One can only speculate here about causality: parents may be too busy, too permissive, and, at the same time, value success above all else and thus fail to transmit prosocial values to their children.

As indicated in the sections on neighborhoods, for many children, **poverty** is one key cause of problematic behaviours (Strohschein, 2005). For instance, serious delinquency tends to originate in disadvantaged families, a finding that has been replicated in several western countries (Sampson, 1993). For example, in New Zealand, most adolescents who exhibit several behavioural problems come from very poor and dysfunctional families, even though 13% of all children from such backgrounds are problem free (Fergusson et al., 1994). For children reared in advantaged homes (economically and emotionally), only one out of 400 to 500 becomes a multiproblem adolescent, and 80% are totally problem free. Parental poverty constitutes a risk factor for behavioural problems and their persistence (Reyno and McGrath, 2006)--and so does its timing in a child's life and its duration (Dearing et al., 2006). However, poverty is not a sufficient cause in the rise in problematic behaviours because child poverty has been much higher in recent history. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, under current conditions, poverty exacerbates problems. Enabling norms and cultural influences have to be present to explain the linkage between poverty and problematic behaviours. Very little research exists on this topic.

MEDIA INFLUENCES

The role that the media play in the rise of children's attitudes and behaviours is a much-debated issue. To begin with, it is more difficult to study specific media as a causal effect in children's attitudes and behaviours today than in the 1970s. Indeed, how can one isolate the effect on children of TV programming when similar content is accessed on the Internet, DVDs, and video games? And how can one isolate this effect when it pervades the entire culture of our societies? We live in a media-saturated society.

Second, some contend that the media have no effect on behaviours and attitudes. However, it is illogical to deny that violent or sex-suffused media have no effect while at the same time accepting the fact that the tobacco industry's ads foster smoking among adolescents. Furthermore, why would companies invest so many billions in advertising if it had no effect? Third, there are fears in some quarters that accepting research results pointing to the media in the chain of causality leading to problematic behaviours among our children might lead to censorship. Lawyers for the media industry are particularly active in promoting this fear. The media constitute a very powerful and increasingly interconnected industry and lobby. For instance, many magazines and newspapers are owned by mega-corporations that include TV stations and cable networks that control the production of the films, music videos, electronic gaming and Internet websites to which children and young people are drawn. It's also true that the media can control the dissemination of research results that could be damaging to their image--and to their bottom line. Studies show that violence sells: violent TV shows have a higher probability of being exported and thus of being profitable (Hamilton, 1998).

Two often-heard rationalizations by producers are, first, that the public is given what it wants and, second, that the shows and movies reflect reality. One could as easily argue that the media fabricate reality. For instance, between 1990 and 1998, the number of murder stories on TV news increased by 600% while the real murder rate had declined by 20% (Glassner, 1999). Over 50% of the crimes shown on TV are murders while they represent only 0.2% of the crimes reported by the FBI (Bushman and Huesmann, 2001).

Children and adults utilize TV and the Internet as a source of information. These media have become for many what the critical sociologist Habermas called an insulating experience that splits children and adults off from "the context of everyday practice" and leads to cultural impoverishment (1987:16). Children are active social actors and participate in the reconstruction of the messages they receive from the media. However, they can be empowered to make a realistic reconstruction only to the extent that the real world around them, particularly their families, their peers, and schools offer them this alternative.

Yet, as we have seen in previous sections, not all children benefit from such healthy alternatives. In fact, perhaps a quarter of children do not have a home/peer/school environment that can counterbalance the negative effects of the media on their attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, parents are also subjected to media contents of dubious value and many use talk shows as educational sources. Yet, these shows often focus on the sensationally deviant: conjugal infidelities, incest, child prostitution, mother-daughter rivalry over boyfriends, pregnancies of unknown paternity following intercourse with several sexual partners, and so on. Parents,

especially the less educated, evidence great interest in these shows: what, then, can they teach their children (Austin, 2001)? As well, one should not fail to mention the fact that the Internet carries many risks for children, from entering pornographic sites to making dangerous contacts in chat rooms (Berson and Berson, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001).

The promotion of violence

The average child has witnessed well over 8,000 murders on TV by the end of grade school. The American National Television Violence Study (1998) found that over 40% of violent acts are perpetrated by "good" characters--thus glamorizing violence--and over 55% of the victims of violence show little pain or suffering, thus desensitizing children to its true effects (Donnerstein and Linz, 1995). The rate of violent crime in the U.S. and other western countries rose dramatically after 1965, coinciding with the coming of age of the first generation of children raised with TV (Bushman and Huesmann, 2001). Centerwall found that, between 1945 and 1974, the white homicide rate increased by 93% in the U.S., by 92% in Canada, but declined by 7% among white South Africans where television was banned. Centerwall estimated that a 10-to-15-year time lag occurs between the introduction of TV and increases in homicide rates because TV exerts its behaviour-modifying effects primarily on children (reviewed in Donnerstein and Linz, 1995).

Using an experimental and longitudinal method, Joy et al., (1986) compared three Canadian towns, one of which did not receive TV transmission until 1974. They tested the children before the introduction of television and two years after. The children in the town that had received television two years earlier showed a substantial increase in aggressiveness that was not observed among the youngsters in the other town. They also exhibited a sharp increase in sex-role stereotyping (Kimball, 1986).

In the 1980s, researchers began to harvest the results of other longitudinal studies and found that young adults tended to act more aggressively when they had watched more violence as 8-year-olds. In fact, the linkage between adult aggressiveness and childhood viewing of violence on TV was even stronger when children reached adulthood than it had been at age 8. Boys who had not been aggressive at age 8 but had watched more violence had become more aggressive young adults than a similar group of nonaggressive boys who had watched fewer episodes of violence, as reported in Bushman and Huesmann (2001). Studies of more recent cohorts have shown that TV violence now affects girls' level of aggressiveness as well (Huesmann et al., 2003) and television viewing in general is related to teenage and young adulthood aggressiveness (Johnson et al., 2002).

Such results indicate that it is not only a predilection for aggressiveness that leads children to select television violence but that this violence can also lead to aggressiveness. Although exposure to violent TV and videos is not the main factor in the etiology of aggressiveness, it is part of the enabling environment for problematic behaviours (Garbarino, 2006; Gentile, 2003). Viewing violence may teach children that conflict can be resolved only with verbal or physical aggression. Second, it may lead to the development of a lower threshold for frustration, so that children tolerate irritants less easily and react to them more explosively. Third, exposure to violence may desensitize as to the severity of its consequences, so that even killing can appear routine (Cantor and Nathanson, 2001). Lastly, children learn aggressive techniques such as how to punch, kick, and kill via these programs.

Killing is the goal in many video games. Some studies have found a small link to aggressiveness (Sherry, 2001) while others have found larger ones (Garbarino, 2006). Longitudinal studies still have to be carried out. Furthermore, one would need to separate the effect of violence on TV from that on videos, not exactly a small task. As Funk et al. (2000) point out, at the very least; playing violent video games will not improve children's overall behaviour, although it may improve their visual coordination. And finally, let's acknowledge that one of the questions which we have not effectively addressed is: What developmental experiences do children not get when they spend so much time watching TV, playing video games, and surfing the net?[xvii]

The promotion of consumerism

The very influential American advertising industry spends over $12 billion a year marketing directly to children.[xviii] Furthermore, pop stars promote lifestyles (clothing, for instance) that preteens and adolescents try to emulate. Thus, mass culture creates false needs and identification. In turn these false needs may contribute to less prosocial attitudes and even behaviours, both among parents and children. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Advertising and Children points out that "advertising might trigger materialistic attitudes by teaching children to measure personal worth by the products they own." Children learn how to dress and to behave according to this clothes-related self-presentation from the media. There is little research on how children's consumer behaviours may be linked to the development of problematic behaviours.

Whenever experts give presentations on these issues, they unavoidably remind the public that parents have to exercise control over what children view, and that they should discuss detrimental programs and advertising with children. The entertainment industry follows suit and places the entire responsibility on parents. Whether parents can shoulder this new responsibility is questionable, as we see below. This is certainly an added burden. As Seiter (1993:193) points out concerning mass media's efforts to target children, "A distinctive, peer-oriented consumer culture now intervenes in the relationship of parents and children, and that intervention begins for many children as early as two years of age."

At least one observational study has shown that, in a supermarket, (that is to say in a public place), 65% of all parents' refusals to buy foodstuffs advertised on TV instantly resulted in parent-child conflict or arguments (Atkin, 1978). One can then wonder what takes place in the privacy of the home when parents attempt to curtail television viewing or video games and even use of the Internet: conflicts probably often arise (Alexander, 1994:52). At any rate, a majority of children report receiving no parental supervision in these domains (Garbarino, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS: THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

What has changed that can explain the sharp rise in the rate of problematic behaviours among children and adolescents during the 1960s-1990s? As we have seen, a confluence of factors has occurred, each feeding upon the other, and changing the social fabric within which children grow up.

What has changed?

1. A key change lies in the gradual and then swift rise in **visual media** programming highlighting materialism and consumerism (including advertising), individualism, then violence, hedonism, and lack of civility. Thus, the values and the **general cultural context** surrounding children's lives have been substantially altered. Yet, broad cultural patterns are much neglected variables in the explanation of several recent phenomena--in itself a reflection of bias on the part of researchers. But this lack of research does not mean that a society's complex set of values and norms have no profound influence on the development of behaviours. They do. In the same vein, social scientists and psychologists have become particularly reluctant to offer advice that may sound moral (Sleek, 1998).

2. The above changes were accompanied by a general acceptance of a **lower level of civility**, whether in terms of civic engagement, graffiti, altruism, politeness, clothing, personal deportment and self-presentation (both at home and elsewhere).

3. At the same time, definitions of masculinity emphasizing macho posturing and the **devaluation of nurturance** have encouraged aggressive behaviours (Garbarino, 1999). For its part, the reconstruction of femininity has downplayed nurturance while too often failing to distinguish assertiveness from aggressiveness. As a result, many more girls have become violent (Garbarino, 2006).

4. The rising rates of **divorce** through the mid 1980s and **births to single mothers** have left many children in poverty, unsupervised and unprotected. Such children often have only one parent invested in them and that parent, **lacking social support**, may be too burdened financially and emotionally to be effective (Ambert, 2005a, 2006).

5. **Disadvantaged neighborhoods** spread and became socially disorganized and characterized with high rates of one-parent families, burdened schools, criminality, violence, and drug trafficking. The diffusion of guns also led to more lethal violence among youths, particularly those in gangs. In this context, the widespread **availability of alcohol and drugs**, and even **arms**, among the adolescent population has not helped.

6. **Adult supervision decreased**, as did effective adult role models and adult investment in children's moral development. This decrease was fostered by many factors already discussed in previous sections and, in a feedback loop, the difficult behaviours of children have contributed to keeping more and more adults away from them.

7. The **reduced influence of religion** on daily life, on morality, and as a support to the parenting role is another important factor. The diminished role of religion as an agency of social control was replaced by media morality and the more recent waves of individualism. Yet, research indicates that adolescents who attend religious services are less likely to engage in early sexual activities (Lammers et al., 2000) or to be delinquent (Johnson et al., 2001), in part because religious involvement increases their disapproval of such behaviours, the proportion of prosocial peers in their social network, and time spent with parents.

Return to an earlier theme: The enabling environment

Our society has made it more difficult for children to grow up prosocially. There is not enough structure, there are too many alternatives to choose from in a constantly evolving scenery of stimuli, too many temptations, and, often, **too few rewards for prosocial behaviours**. Prosocial children are surrounded with images that often lead them to believe that they are in the minority. They may even feel "abnormal" when in the presence of difficult peers who seem to belong to TV advertisements and programs. One can perhaps advance that our society does not sufficiently validate and reward "good children."

The technological/materialistic culture that has evolved since the 1960s, especially as promulgated in the media, <u>does not meet the requirements for the development of civility and prosocial behaviours in children</u> and adults alike. It should not come as a surprise if problematic behaviours have become more prevalent. As pointed out, it is first of all a matter of having created a culture that enables such behaviours. Were we able to research similar trends over the millennia, we might find that societies that had rapidly evolved toward urbanization and materialism also experienced sudden peaks in problematic behaviours among their youths. For instance, even youths carrying genes predisposing them to aggressiveness could not suffer from these problems in a society that was civil and did not provide dysfunctional opportunities--such as guns with which to kill impulsively, thus increasing the murder rate. This **supply of negative opportunities** has become part of the enabling environment. As our society becomes more technological, materialistic, and sedentary, **human nature is severely taxed** and the higher the risk that children will not develop optimally--in terms of behaviour, abilities that are not actualized, or health.

What can be done?

There is no question that a high priority resides in the **reform of media programming**. Yet, decades of such warnings have merely seen the media producing ever more violence, sensationalism, and materialism. This is a large-scale social and cultural problem that will be addressed only when our economy/polity reduce the influence of the powerful media industry and its lobbyists.

Overall, children need a stable and secure family structure with preferably, but not necessarily, two parents who are loving and authoritative (Ambert, 2005, 2006). The definition of caring has to be reoriented so that it is linked to **both genders** and becomes part of our public life. Parents need other adults to help them care for their children in the traditional sense of the word. As well, **parental moral authority** has to be strengthened.

Raising the intellectual quality of schools and doing so in a manner that would captivate a larger number of students with different interests is important. This means more qualified teachers, more male teachers, a more structured classroom, and a more **inclusive physical education** program so that children are engaged physically: more exercise during classroom time and nonaggressive sports for all. Research on young children indicates that helping them develop some concern for others may contribute to a decrease in negative behaviours (Hastings et al., 2000).

Furthermore, school programs emphasizing social skills and **prosocial values** can also reduce aggressiveness (Aber et al., 2003) and encourage prosocial dispositions (Maccoby and Lewis, 2003). For instance, in centers such as Toronto and Montreal, some schools have used a program whereby a mother regularly brings her infant in a classroom to teach empathy and nurturance to children. A reduction in the level of antisocial activity in a school population will in turn have a positive feedback and reduce other problematic behaviours. However, <u>tax cuts, which mainly benefit the rich, are depleting the resources allocated for education</u>. Yet, costs to society in the future will be greater than current savings. For instance, a cost-benefit analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project has established that, while the program cost $12,356 per child, when the total benefits adjusted for inflation were calculated, the net benefit to society was $88,433 per participant (Welsh, 2001).

After-school programs, especially for low-income children are helpful, along with continued police vigilance to eliminate youths' access to firearms (Blumstein, 2002). <u>Group interventions need to be carefully evaluated</u>. Indeed, there is the danger that, when difficult children are brought together in residential treatment programs or special day schools, a "contamination" effect may take place (Dishion et al., 1999)--as occurs in penal institutions. Furthermore, most interventions are designed for older children who are already problematic. The Study Group on Very Young Offenders recommends **prevention** of disruptive behaviours among small children (Loeber et al., 2003) and delinquency among already disruptive children as is done at the Child Development Institute in Toronto. Thus, what is needed is **early intervention** that is <u>pursued</u> at all age levels and addresses a broad range of risk factors at the personal, familial, and extra-familial levels (Farrington, 2000).

<u>Most interventions are localized while the rest of the children's environment remains unchanged</u>. For instance, programs focusing on families "at risk" help many children, especially when combining social support for parents, parenting skills interventions, and early childhood education (Olds et al., 1998; Webster-Stratton, 1998). But such initiatives would be even more successful across the board and over time within the context of supportive ones in schools, neighborhoods, and even the media--what are called "**multisystemic**" programs (Loeber et al., 2003). Overall, much needs to be done socially and culturally to improve children's odds of developing prosocial behaviours rather than problematic ones (Hastings et al., 2000). While isolated interventions are helpful, what is required is a general cultural and economic shift: <u>sociocultural change is necessary to buttress interventions at the personal, familial, and school levels.</u>

Endnotes

i. Although emotional problems do not necessarily result in problematic behaviours (Arseneault et al., 2000), a proportion of children and especially young persons with severe behavioural problems also suffer from emotional problems at some point--a phenomenon referred to as comorbidity. It is still not known whether this is the result of simultaneous development or whether problematic behaviours lead to emotional problems, such as depression, because of the stress they engender and the negative reactions they provoke.

ii. References for this paragraph are: Achenback and Howell, 1993; Heath, 1994; NCES, 2002; Jeffrey and Sun, 2006.

iii. Teachers also report that children have become more self-confident, free to challenge, and less inhibited (Heath, 1994).

iv. References for this paragraph are: Statistics Canada, 2003; Fox, 1996; U.S. Department of Justice, 2000; Moffitt et al., 2001; Loeber and Farrington, 1998; Arseneault et al., 2000; Gatti et al., 2005.

v. Longitudinal studies follow the same people over time and can provide answers in terms of causality.

vi. Indeed, in my students' autobiographies, the number who reported having committed 'delinquent' acts as adolescents increased after 1980. The majority never came to the attention of the police (unpublished data).

vii. References for this paragraph are: Coie and Dodge, 1998; Crick and Dodge, 1994; Edwards, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2001; Hanna, 2000; Keenan, 2001; Butts and Snyder, 1997; Loeber et al., 2003.

viii. Related references are: Galbaud et al., 1998; Moffitt et al., 2001; Moffitt, 2005:533.

ix. References for this paragraph are: Dodge and Frame, 1982; Webster-Stratton and Lindsay, 1999; Crick and Werner, 1998; Wyatt and Haskett, 2001; Coie and Dodge, 1998.

x. References for this paragraph are: Baumeister, 1999; Straub, 1999; Costello and Dunaway, 2003; Hughes et al., 1997.

xi. References for this paragraph include Bumpass, 2001; Hymowitz, 1999; Garbarino, 1995, 2006.

xii. References for this and the following paragraph are: Margolin, 1998; McGuigan and Pratt, 2001; McCloskey et al., 1995; Straus and Smith, 1990; Widom, 2000; Eckenrode et al., 1993; Sternberg et al., 1993; Howes, 1988; Salzinger et al., 1993.

xiii. References for this paragraph are: Carlson and Corcoran, 2001; Willms, 2002; McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994; O'Connor et al., 2001; Hill, 1999; Hetherington, 1999.

xiv. Space considerations prevent discussion of the important influence of older siblings on children's development: Baillargeon et al., 2002; Duncan et al., 2001; East and Jacobson, 2001.

xv. References for this paragraph are: Ryan, 2001; Haselager et al., 1998; Duncan et al., 2001; Espelage et al., 2003; Pardini et al., 2005; Vitaro et al., 1997; Gaughan, 2006; Moffit et al., 2001; Garbarino, 2006.

xvi. Only 35% of low-income Canadians feel that their neighborhood is a suitable place in which to bring up children compared to 63% of high earners (Statistics Canada, 2002).

xvii. Overall, as suggested by Subrahmayam et al. (2001:86), "any activity that is engaged in for a disproportionate amount of time at the expense of other leisure activities must have negative consequences on social and educational development."

xviii. The same phenomenon was recently documented on a French news channel. For pre-teens, aged 8-12, especially girls, advertisers focus on what they call the 4Ms: mecs (boys), musique, mascara (make-up), and mode (fashion)--TV5, September 15, 2003. References for this paragraph are: Dittman, 2002; Quart, 2003; Clay, 2000; Chaplin and John, 2005; Clay et al., 2005.

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