

Issues in Children's
and Families' Lives

Vol.

4

Preventing Violence in America

Editors

Robert L. Hampton
Pamela Jenkins
Thomas P. Gullotta



Gimbel Child and Family Scholars

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***Issues in Children's
and Families' Lives***

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**Preventing
Violence in
America**



Issues in Children's and Families' Lives

AN ANNUAL BOOK SERIES

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Drawing upon the resources of Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut, one of this nation's leading family service agencies, **Issues in Children's and Families' Lives** is designed to focus attention on the pressing social problems facing children and their families today. Each volume in this series will analyze, integrate, and critique the clinical and research literature on children and their families as it relates to a particular theme. Believing that integrated multidisciplinary approaches offer greater opportunities for program success, volume contributors will reflect the research and clinical knowledge base of the many different disciplines that are committed to enhancing the physical, social, and emotional health of children and their families. Intended for graduate and professional audiences, chapters will be written by scholars and practitioners who will encourage the reader to apply their practice skills and intellect to reducing the suffering of children and their families in the society in which those families live and work.

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Volume 5: Primary Prevention Practices

AUTHOR: Martin Bloom

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Alva B. Gimbel, who spent much of her life and many resources on behalf of those who were less advantaged than she. Her generosity knew no boundaries of country, color, or class. She was an inspiration to all who came to know her.

The Gimbel Learning Community on the Prevention of Violence in America

In addition to the chosen Gimbel Child and Family Scholars, a small select group of practitioners, policymakers, and scholars were invited to the retreats that were held in 1994 and 1995. These individuals, some of whom contributed to this volume, significantly enriched the discussions that were held. The Alva and Bernard Gimbel Foundation and Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut would like to acknowledge the important role of the following individuals:

Susan Addiss
Lynn Andrews
Kathleen Beland*
Martin Bloom
Patricia Crittenden*
Steven Danish
Stephen Gardner
Donna Garske*
Chris Gullotta
Thomas Gullotta
Robert Hampton
Pamela Jenkins*
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Preface

Not a day passes in which some courtships do not sour violently, some spouses do not strike their mates, some adults do not harm their offspring, some elderly do not feel the wrath of their progeny, some children do not kill other children, some legal authorities do not overzealously fulfill their responsibilities, and some citizens do not violently abuse the rights of others unknown to them. Not a day passes in which violence does not occur.

With each new day, voices over the airwaves warn of clans of youth, born not of blood but of circumstance, gathering on street corners. They organize in long-forgotten shells of neighborhoods and in ignored public institutions such as schools. With each new day, photographers capture mothers cradling motionless loved ones in their arms. With each new day, news programs telecast—live and on scene—twisted forms of past lives bathed in clotted pools of darkness, draped in sheets, and arranged in neatly ordered rows. With each new day, images flash across screens of family members and friends clutching one another at funerals. With each new day, people die in vain.

This fourth volume in the *Issues in Children's and Families' Lives* book series represents a year-long effort by a talented group of scholars and practitioners to address the problem of violence in the United States. It is the result of a unique experiment being conducted by the Bernard and Alva Gimbel Foundation of New York, which seeks to identify promising mid-career scholars and practitioners working on issues of critical social importance to American society. Clearly, no issue is more pressing than the problem of violence.

This volume comprises 13 chapters that are organized into three unlabeled sections. The first section is intended to provide the

reader with an understanding of the subject matter. Thus, in Chapter 1, Thomas P. Gullotta, Pamela Jenkins, and Robert L. Hampton introduce the reader to selected writings of two of Western literature's greatest social commentators, Charles Dickens and Samuel Clemens. Revisiting these authors' observations on the human condition may temper nostalgic views of the past and sensitize readers to the material that follows. Chapter 2, by Jenkins, Hampton, and Gullotta, provides a selected theoretical overview of explanations for violence within families. Jenkins continues this selected theoretical overview in Chapter 3 by linking violence within families to community violence.

The next section, which consists of five chapters, explores subjects deserving of special consideration in the attempt to understand population aspects of violence and possible preventive factors. Accordingly, Robert L. Hampton and Betty R. Yung, in Chapter 4, examine the disproportionate presence of violence within minority populations and discuss preventive interventions. Martin Bloom explores the concept of psychological resilience in Chapter 5, followed by Aleta L. Meyer and Linda Lausell's examination in Chapter 6 of the influence spirituality may have as a possible protective factor. In Chapter 7, Steven J. Danish and Thomas R. Donohue review the dark side of television programming and discuss opportunities for improving television's prosocial programming. This part of the book concludes with Chapter 8 by Stephen E. Gardner and Hank Resnik in which they examine gang formation and discuss efforts by the Federal Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, through its High-Risk Youth Demonstration Grant Program, to promote positive youth development.

The final five chapters provide illustrations of different efforts under way to reduce the incidence of violent behavior in American society. In Chapter 9, Garry Lapidus and Mary Braddock review the calls of public health authorities for training models for health care professionals and describe a model educational project that is under way in Connecticut. In Chapter 10, Billie P. Weiss shares the efforts of the Los Angeles, California, community to form a collaborative multiagency response to violent behavior. In Chapter 11, Kathleen R. Beland discusses the social competence literature and her experiences in developing and implementing the Second Step curriculum for use in school systems. In Chapter 12, Lynn Andrews and Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, drawing on the social competence and

resilience literature, describe their efforts to develop a community program to reduce aggressive behaviors among preschool youth. Finally, challenging many of the programmatic concepts of this volume, Donna Garske uses a thought-provoking feminist perspective in Chapter 13 to explore behavior within society.

It is our hope that readers will find the work of the Gimbel Child and Family Scholars and associates to be a starting point for their own efforts to reduce violent behavior in the United States. We hope that community leaders, practitioners, and graduate students in such applied disciplines as social work, public health, psychology, nursing, and child and adolescent development will use this volume to build local and state programs aimed at promoting a society in which peace can prosper.

—Robert L. Hampton
—Pamela Jenkins
—Thomas P. Gullotta

Acknowledgments

Many people were involved in the development of this project. The authors were the principal players in transforming initial ideas into final drafts. They are both scholars and practitioners and share a common commitment to reducing violence. This book would not have been possible without them.

I want to thank Thomas P. Gullotta, CEO of the Child and Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut, for first developing the concept for the Gimbel Scholars Program and the board of directors of the agency for supporting his efforts to make this learning community a reality. I would also like to thank the many individuals who assisted with the research and other related tasks that go into completing an edited volume: Marianne Eismann, Diane Gaboury, Tawanna Gaines, Heather Gendler, Judy Lovelace, Sarah Rogers, Sandra Toussaint, and Wendy Traub. Finally, I want to thank my colleagues in the Departments of Family Studies and Sociology and in Academic Affairs at the University of Maryland for their support.

—Robert L. Hampton

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• CHAPTER 1 •

Of Dickens, Twain, and Violence

THOMAS P. GULLOTTA

PAMELA JENKINS

ROBERT L. HAMPTON

[Nancy] was lying, half dressed. . . . "Get up!" said [Sikes]. "It is you, Bill!" said [Nancy], with an expression of pleasure at his return. "It is. . . . Get up" "Bill," said [Nancy] in the low voice of alarm, "why do you look like that at me!" [Sikes] sat regarding her, for a few seconds, with dilated nostrils and heaving breast; and then, grasping her by the head and throat, dragged her into the middle of the room, and looking once towards the door, placed his heavy hand upon her mouth. "Bill, Bill!" . . . gasped [Nancy]. . . . [Sikes] freed one arm, and grasped his pistol. The certainty of immediate detection if he fired flashed across his mind even in the midst of his fury; and he beat it twice, with all the force he could summon, upon [Nancy's] upturned face. . . . She staggered and fell, nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead. [Nancy struggled to raise herself, whereupon Sikes], shutting out the sight [of her] with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down. (Dickens, 1837/1894e, pp. 383-384)

Violence such as Sikes's against Nancy (in what many would consider their common-law marriage) in *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1837/1894e) is not a rare occurrence in Western literature. For centuries, writers have recorded the violent times in which they lived, at times expressing their outrage over these conditions and at others simply reflecting the societal norms that governed the periods in which they wrote. For this reason, it is hard to understand

why, until a little more than two decades ago, family violence was not mentioned in the professional literature (Gelles, 1980). It is hard to understand how, until street violence spilled from urban streets and into schools, young people harming other young people could have been ignored. It is hard to understand how, until the publication of Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemuller, and Silver's 1962 work on the battered child syndrome, child abuse could have gone unnoticed. In this chapter, we examine several selected passages from the works of certain prominent authors and discuss their handling of violent themes.

It is our intention to reawaken the reader to the reality that violence has been and remains an integral part of Western culture in general, and American culture in particular. What with daily media announcements of serial killings, planned executions of family members, and gang-related retaliations for real or imagined affronts, it would seem unnecessary for us to remind readers of the presence of violence. However, our concern is not with the present, but with the past. Furthermore, our concern is not with history, but with literature. Not that literature is reality—it is not, just as the film *Boys Town* is not reality. But the images in fiction have become—have always been—powerful representations of the past, of family life, of societal values, of what life should really be like.

In the fictionalized world, rivers are wide and lazy, offering refuge and avenues of escape to those who seek them. When evil presents itself, no messy mitigating factors interfere with the swift application of justice. Such clear literary images enable reporters, politicians, and common citizens to be transported to mythical places in the imagined past, when, if all was not good with the world, at least decided action could be taken to make it so.

But did such a time and place ever really exist? In a society where the printed word has become digitized, abridged, animated, scripted, and taped, it has become all too easy to lose the original intent of some authors' language. Like the October leaf separated from its branch, literary passages cut free from their stories are left to drift into oblivion. Meanings change and so, literally cleansed, Scrooge, Tom Sawyer, and others become available to market the commodities of the new day, whether they be automobiles, paint, or fast food. Our intention here is to ask the reader to pause and reflect on the circumstances surrounding us, to reconnect with the authors of the works we will discuss and with those authors' stories, and,

in doing so, to approach the remainder of this volume with heightened awareness and sensitivity.

Western literature is rich with examples of violence between family members, from the Bible to children's stories such as *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Snow White*. Cruelty is a recurring theme in Shakespeare's plays—the cruelty of offspring toward an elderly parent (*King Lear*), the cruelty of one spouse toward the other (*Othello*), the cruelty of youth toward youth (*Romeo and Juliet*), and the cruelty of adult toward youth (*Titus Andronicus*).

When we consider the position of children and women in Western societies in premodern times—that is, prior to 1620—we should not be surprised at the violence that was often visited upon them (see Edward Shorter's *The Making of the Modern Family*, 1977, for a seminal discussion of this issue). Children were considered the property of their parents, and society rarely intervened in parent-child relationships, even when children were being abused. Similar attitudes existed concerning men's rights over women; for example, consider the ancient practice of wife selling. In *The Life and Death of the Mayor of Casterbridge*, Thomas Hardy (1886/1966) incorporates an episode of wife selling as a crucial element in the novel's plot:

"For my part I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gypsy fellows do their old horses. . . . Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men who are in need of such articles? Hey? Why begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her!"

She turned to her husband and murmured, "Michael, you have talked this nonsense in public places before. A joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often, mind!"

"I know I've said it before; I meant it. All I want is a buyer."

[An offer of 5 guineas is made.] "Now," said the woman, breaking the silence, so that her low dry voice sounded quite loud, "before you go further, Michael, listen to me. If you touch that money, I and this girl go with the man. Mind it is a joke no longer."

"A joke? Of course it is not a joke!" shouted her husband, his resentment rising at her suggestion. "I take the money: the sailor takes you. That's plain enough. It has been done elsewhere—and why not here?"

. . . "Mike," she said, "I've lived with thee a couple of years, and had nothing but temper! Now I'm no more to 'ee, I'll try my luck elsewhere. 'Twill be better for me and Elizabeth-Jane, both. So good-bye!"