A study of the relationship between drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as a teenager on gun violence among adult males

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ABSTRACT
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Wilson-Fant, Donna       BSW Virginia State University, 1989

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG ACTIVITY AND WITNESSING PARENTAL CONFLICT AS A TEENAGER ON GUN VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES

ADVISOR: Dr. Sandra Jean Foster
Thesis dated May 1997

The overall objective of this study was to examine the relationship between drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as a teenager on later gun violence in adulthood. The sample for this study consists of thirty-five adult males participating in a volunteer drug and/or violent crime support group in Rahway, New Jersey.

One questionnaire consisting of seventy-five questions was administered by one masters level social work student. The survey instrument was created by the researcher.

The study was an attempt to determine whether gun violence among adult males was perpetuated from teenage years. Also, whether drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as a teenager were significant factors in gun violence among adult males.

Findings indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between drug activity and gun violence as an adult male. The findings also indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between witnessing parental conflict as a teenager on later gun violence in adulthood.
A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG ACTIVITY AND WITNESSING PARENTAL CONFLICT AS A TEENAGER ON GUN VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
DONNA WILSON-FANT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1997
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for all of His many blessings; my husband, Randy and son, Rashard for their support and encouragement. To my brother and sister-in-law, Winston and Vanessa, and my cousin, Michelle, your support, too, was greatly appreciated. Special appreciation also goes to my typist, Lisa Conklin. I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Bobbie Edwards, for all your love, support and encouragement. Also, for all that you have had to endure while drugs and gun violence came close to destroying the lives of your two oldest children. You have always been and will always be the strength and backbone of this family. Your experiences, both good and bad, have been a lesson to me in this game called survival. Your dedication to your family is both admired and appreciated. Your wisdom, love and faith in God has moved this family from dreaming to achieving. I love you always...your favorite daughter, Donna.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.   INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.  LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG ACTIVITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AND GUN VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WITNESSING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARENTAL CONFLICT AS A TEENAGER AND GUN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION OF TERMS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.  METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN AND SAMPLE</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEASUREMENT</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA ANALYSIS</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.  FINDINGS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PEARSON’S (r) COEFFICIENT CORRELATION</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.  IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AND PARENTING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Pearson’s (r) Coefficient Correlation of Study Variables</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Gun violence is becoming more and more prevalent in today's world and violent acts with a gun are especially on the increase among teenagers. In the past four years, arrests for homicide among teenagers have gone up 93% compared with 16% for adults.¹ The teenagers of the baby boomers are arriving at the crime-prone years, and too many of them are packing firearms.²

Although America has always been a gun culture, gun violence has metastasized in a new way among teenagers. The gun has become neighborhood logic, rite of passage, administrator, avenger, instrument of impulse and rough justice.³ When guns reach critical mass, as such, they take on a malignant life of their own.

In 1993, a Harris Poll about teenagers and guns reveals that 58% of suburban school kids say they know where to get a handgun if they want one.⁴ Whether it's for protection or status, there seems to be more of an incentive for teenagers to have guns. Studies have indicated the worst

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
offenders were 18 year old males, whose arrest rate in 1993 was 1,007 of every 100,000 that age. A study by the Justice Department counted arrests for unlawful possession, use and sales of weapons. Guns were overwhelmingly the weapon involved. Among the grim revelation, teenagers 13 and 14 years old were arrested at a faster rate than adults 25 to 29 years old.

Gun violence among teenagers has become so prevalent in our society, that in November 1993, the Senate adopted an amendment to the crime bill, directing U.S. attorneys to prosecute teenagers 13 years and older as adults for certain violent crimes. The fact remains that we can no longer afford to let teenagers shoot and kill others simply because they are young.

From 1970-1985, individuals ages 18 - 24 were the most likely of any age group to commit murder with a firearm and the murder rate among this group was relatively steady. In 1985, murder by people under 24 years old began to increase.

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6 Ibid.
7 Carol Mosley-Braun, "Yes. Send A Message to Young Criminals," ABA Journal (March 1994).
9 Ibid., p. 36.
According to the literature, much of the nations overall homicide rate in the late 1980's and early 1990's was due to the surge in killing with firearms by young people between the ages of 15 - 24. The literature consists of several studies exploring firearm violence among teenagers (i.e., Fendrich [1995]¹⁰, Dembo, et al. [1995]¹¹, Henigan [1995]¹²) but very little has been written concerning the long term outlook on firearm violence once these teenagers become adults.¹³ Research has failed to address the significance of drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as indicators of perpetuated gun violence, therefore, the interrelatedness of these variables has not been explored.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The burden of gun violence is borne to a considerable degree by our country's most vulnerable population, it's


¹³Richard Dembo, et al.
young people.\textsuperscript{14} Homicide is the leading cause of death for black men ages 15 - 34 and the second overall leading cause of death nationwide for individuals ages 15 - 24.\textsuperscript{15} According to Charles Fallis, a spokesman for the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, among young adults ages 25 to 34, guns cause more deaths among Americans of this age than do motor vehicle crashes, or any other category of injuries.\textsuperscript{16}

Most of the present information on gun violence tends to center around gang involvement and easy access for anyone to obtain a gun.\textsuperscript{17} There is a lack of attention given to the perpetuation of gun violence through adulthood. Why is gun violence a problem in our society? Why do teenagers and adults commit violent acts with a gun? What can be done to stop the perpetuation of gun violence? Programs designed for deterring or alleviating gun violence have been


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{17}Karl Adler, et al., p. 1281.
abundant, but the cause remains the most important question.18

Most studies suggest that gun violence is due to the technological improvements to weapons and the increase in gun supply.19 Yet some policy makers believe that stricter gun control laws will assist in decreasing gun violence among teenagers and adults.20 Others suggest that the juvenile justice system has not effectively dealt with juvenile crime.21 These studies suggest that the availability and attractiveness of guns to teenagers and adults are significant causes of the increase of gun violence.22

Some researchers suggest that most juveniles who commit violent crimes suffered from long histories of severe beatings and sexual abuse by their drug addicted parents; these attacks possibly caused changes in brain chemistry and prompted violent behavior as the child grew.23 In another


22Michael Brown, "Violence in America."

23Scott Minerbrook, "A Generation of Stone Killers."
study reviewed by Minerbrook, researchers suggest that maltreatment increased children's inclination to act impulsively, to be extremely weary of the world and to exhibit "hypervigilance" to potential assault; it predisposed them to lash out and to misperceive threats and often cause children to lose the ability to feel empathy for others.²⁴

The first relationship that will be explored in this study is between witnessing parental conflict and gun violence. David, et al. (1996)²⁵ suggest that parental conflict has been associated with a rejecting relationship between parents and their children, which is related to children's problem behaviors. The intergenerational transmission of violence theory postulates that adult violence between intimates is learned by experiencing or witnessing violence as a teenager in the family of origin.²⁶

²⁴Scott Minerbrook, "A Generation of Stone Killers."


However, some studies (i.e., Kazdin [1991]\textsuperscript{27} and Friedman [1989]\textsuperscript{28}) suggest that some individuals exhibit healthy behaviors regardless of their family environment. Due to conflicting views of research in this particular area and the lack of views of whether violent crimes committed as a teenager is perpetuated through adulthood, additional research needs to be conducted to explain this relationship.

The second relationship that will be explored in the present study is between drug activity and gun violence. The relationship between drug activity and gun violence has played a role in several theories of gun violence. Several studies (i.e., Lyons [1996]\textsuperscript{29}, Fendrich, et al. [1995]\textsuperscript{30}, Hagell & Newburn [1996]\textsuperscript{31}) have shown that involvement in drug activity by teenagers have higher rates of gun violence than do teenagers with little or no involvement in drug activity. A study conducted by the American Medical Association, showed a significantly higher number of drug activity and weapon carrying among teenagers; however, the


\textsuperscript{28}Herbert Friedman (1989), p. 3.


\textsuperscript{30}Richard Fendrich, et al., "Substance Involvement Among Juvenile Murders."

use of the weapon was not significantly higher among teenagers who participate in drug activity.  

However, only a small amount of literature exists that thoroughly explains the relationship between drug activity and gun violence, and whether gun violence is perpetuated through adulthood. Therefore, this study will re-examine the relationship between drug activity and gun violence to establish a clearer understanding of teenage drug activity and its relationship to gun violence among adult men.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

If violent crimes with guns among teenagers are not curbed there will continue to be a rapid increase of gun violence, not only with the teenage population, but these acts of violence will perpetuate through adulthood. Prevention programs will not be effective and educational institutions, whether public or private, will not be safe for children or adults to attend. There must be an effective attempt to explain the long term effects of emotional trauma of teenagers witnessing parent conflict and teenage drug activity on gun violence in our society. The role of the social worker is vital in establishing productive interventions early in the lives of those who

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32Rebecca Voelker, "Taking Aim at Handgun Violence."

experienced either variable. The problem needs to be addressed at the root, instead of the application of surface intervention. This study will hopefully lay some important groundwork for the field of social work in this area for the future. The data from this study could be used to improve or expand on already existing policies and procedures that seek to eliminate or alleviate gun violence in our society.

The present study will fill some gaps by adding to some pertinent theories that were not totally explored and by applying some other theories and research. There are three main objectives of this study: the first is to explore the relationship between drug activity and gun violence; the second is to explore the relationship between witnessing parental conflict and gun violence; the third is to explore whether these variables have a long term effect from teenage years to adulthood. This study will explore whether drug activity or witnessing parental conflict is more significant in prolonged gun violent behavior.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DRUG ACTIVITY AND GUN VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES

Many experts agree that aggression and violence are on the rise in America. They point to increased aggressive behaviors among both adults and youths. What are contributing factors to violent behaviors? Prior research discussed by Fendrich and his colleagues focused exclusively on violent teenage offenders. Findings have shown that alcohol, either alone or in combination with other drugs, is the substance most likely to be ingested prior to the violent crime. Over half of all assaults committed after the perpetrators ingested substances, over 80% ingested alcohol.¹ In the past studies that these researchers focused on, they found 45% of all institutionalized teenager murderers reported that they were under the influence of drugs at the time of the homicide. However, the researcher’s sample of juvenile perpetrators was relatively small and not necessarily representative of the entire sample of teenage homicide perpetrators.

A report by a school’s Health Education Unit in Boston, has suggested that only 14% of today’s 14-15 year old

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¹Richard Fendrich, et al., "Substance Involvement Among Juvenile Murders."
teenagers will not have tried alcohol.\(^2\) Hagell and Newburn (1994) found that the reported use of alcohol and drugs amongst teenage school kids has been on the increase. These researchers focused on the Cambridge study on delinquency, which suggests that teenage offenders drank more beer and got drunk more often than non-offenders. In a study by Hagell and Newburn (1994), participants had been selected from a larger sample of teenagers who had been arrested for violent crimes three times or more. There was a total of 531 teenagers who participated. The participants were asked to complete a self report of violent crimes. The study revealed that 4 of 5 in the sample of teenagers used some sort of mood altering substance before committing a violent crime.

Juvenile drug addiction is not an easy subject of discussion. Drug addiction usually begins during adolescence. It is usually intertwined with typical youth behavior patterns and involves home and environmental factors. Drug addiction during adolescence often continues after 18 years of age.\(^3\) Scardaccione believes that teenage drug addicts are usually linked to the distribution of narcotics and not dealing for personal profit. Juliet Lyons

\(^2\)Ann Hagell and Tim Newburn, "Family and Social Context of Adolescent Re-offenders."

(1996) conducted a study of the psychological characteristics of juvenile offenders in a rehabilitation program. In completing her study, this researcher determined that alcohol and drugs are problematic in the general teenage population. Lyons, along with Fendrich and colleagues, found that drugs and alcohol were particularly associated with violence, in that they lowered awareness of the consequences of behavior. At the same time, motivation to commit violent acts was increased due to the need to fund an alcohol or drug habit.4

Contrary to previous research discussed, Dembo and colleagues completed a study on predictors of recidivism among teenage offenders, and they found that alcohol and marijuana were not found to be significant in re-arrest. However, the use of cocaine was found in high rates in studies of recidivism.

Christie Davies (1996) believes that this is an appropriate time for Americans to be writing books about violence. The author focused on a book by Bennett and Walters, who clearly state that the United States is now the most violent of the civilized nations, with ten million violent crimes every year; this represents a five fold increase since the 1950's.5 However, Davies disagrees with

4Juliet Lyons, "Juveniles Who Offend."

Bennett and his co-authors giving equal emphasis to crime and drugs. The link between these two evils, Davies believes, is not as simple as it seems.

In particular, they unreasonably attack the National Review for calling for drug legalization. Davies goes on to address the fact that nowhere do they properly confront the point made by Nathaniel Pallone and James Hennesy that 26 percent of property crime and 27 percent of robberies are carried out to get money for drugs. Should the price of drugs rise thanks to successful law enforcement, this, Davies presumess, may lead to even more violent crimes.

Mark Fraser (1996) discusses several factors which he believes will continue to be relevant in the increase of violent crimes. The convergence of youthful impulsivity, the growing availability of handguns, the declining socioeconomic conditions of many families and the emergence of street subcultures based on crack and other illicit drugs has made adolescence far deadlier.

The association between alcohol use and aggression is well documented. According to White and Hansell (1996), laboratory studies find that individuals are more aggressive

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6 Christie Davies, "The Violent Bear It Away," p. 54.
while under the influence of alcohol. Studies of violent offenders indicate that alcohol consumption often occurs immediately prior to most types of violent crimes. Self report victimization studies also indicate that one fourth to one half of all violent incidents involve alcohol use. Collons (1996) states that alcoholics and heavy drinkers are over represented among persons convicted of violent crimes. Recent studies have attempted to identify specific conditions that underlie the relationship between alcohol use and aggression and have found that this relationship is moderated by aspects of individual traits (e.g., aggressive tendencies, cognitive abilities), the situation (e.g., peer pressure, normative standard), the alcohol itself (e.g., dose, beverage type), and cultural norms.

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Further, Osgood (1994), found that the correlation between violence and alcohol use are lower than those between violence and other drugs and between property crime and alcohol use. Also, in most studies when confounding variables are statistically controlled, the relationship between alcohol use and criminal violence is no longer significant. Thus, both correctional studies and self reports of attribution do not provide strong support for a unique association between alcohol use and aggression during adolescence.

Although research on adolescents does not provide strong support for a direct relationship between alcohol and aggression, the data suggests that alcohol and drug users, as opposed to non-users, are more likely to be delinquent and to be involved in aggression. Longitudinal research indicates that initiation into aggressive behavior generally precedes alcohol and drug use; however, changes in drug use affects subsequent chances in aggression. Yet few


studies have examined changes in aggression in relation to changes in alcohol use specifically.

Statistics indicate that the relationship between alcohol use and violent crime is much higher for males than females, but these rates are dependent on race and social class according to Streifel (1993). Frieze and Schafer (1984) argued that whereas physical aggression is a frequent response of males when they consume alcohol, it is uncommon for females. Only a few laboratory studies, according to Frieze and Schafer (1984), have examined the relationship between alcohol use and aggression using female subjects, and these studies report inconsistent findings. Bushman and Cooper's (1990) meta-analysis indicates that females and males behave similarly in terms of alcohol related aggression in the laboratory. Other studies, however, have found differences depending on conditions such as the amount of alcohol consumed, the type of provocation, the response alternatives, and gender of the confederate. Gustafson (1991) concluded that for females, as for males, alcohol use

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17K. Pernanen, Alcohol in Human Violence (1991), New York: Guilford.

is not related to aggression when a non-aggressive, but instrumental alternative behavior is possible.

Laboratory research suggests that hostility level moderates the relationship between acute intoxication and aggressive behavior. In a study by Bailey and Taylor (1991), all subjects performed similarly on the first trial when they were intoxicated, regardless of aggressive personality. After provocation, subjects who were moderate to high in aggressive personality increased shock more dramatically than subjects who were low in aggressive personality.

In a study by Robins (1970), the findings indicated that early aggressive behavior as compared to alcohol use is a better predictor of later alcohol related aggression. The results suggested that males who engage in alcohol related aggression are aggressive from early adolescence and behave aggressively whether or not they use alcohol. Further, the data indicated that early aggression leads to increases in alcohol use, but alcohol use does not lead to increase in aggressive behavior. Although that study focused on alcohol use in adolescence, the findings are similar to those reported in retrospective longitudinal studies that have demonstrated that adolescent aggressive behavior is consistently related to the later development of alcoholism in adulthood and possible aggressive acts. Lyons (1996) suggests that although alcohol and drugs are directly
related to violent crimes, a high level of family disruption is also an important factor in determining causes of violent behaviors in teenagers.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WITNESSING PARENTAL CONFLICT AS A TEENAGER AND GUN VIOLENCE AMONG ADULT MALES

Witnessing parental conflict is one of the variables used to explain gun violence among adult males. This is the second variable explored in this study to show a significant relationship between teenagers and gun violence. Despite years of research, the relationship between these variables is ambivalent in determining a long term effect through adulthood.

How teenagers interpret the parent that they witness may be a key determinant in how it affects them. Every teenager has his/her own unique way of coping with parental conflict. One way of coping may be aggressive criminal acts against those in the environment, in order for that teenager to feel safer. These aggressive acts can range from pushing people to using a gun against them.\(^1\) \(^9\) Teenagers living in homes with parental conflict are subjected to feelings of shock and fear, as well as the strain of being constantly at risk of hurting themselves or others.\(^2\) \(^0\) Wagar and Rodway


\(^2\)\(^0\)Ibid.
suggest that when conflict appears to be the primary focus of both parents, many teenagers attempt to take on that conflictual characteristic outside the home. Within the home, the clash between spouses or live-in members often proves to be highly disruptive to physical and emotional well-being.\textsuperscript{21} Palermo and Simpson (1994) suggest that many members of society, young and old, show the negative consequences of family violence. They show difficulty in adaptation, communication, and in establishing relationships.\textsuperscript{22}

Teenagers who witness parental conflict have a high probability of learning that conflict is resolved through violence and that violence is sanctioned as a mode of stress management.\textsuperscript{23} The extent to which teenagers learn these lessons is mediated by their propensity to identify with their parents and model the behavior at any level.\textsuperscript{24}

Violence in the home, and particularly that which occurs


\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
between a teenager's parents, is prevalent in many homes.\textsuperscript{25} Palermo and Simpson suggest that because teenagers learn parenting and other skills by observation/experience, we have a generation of teenagers being raised without adequate role models.

David and colleagues report that of 363 anger episodes witnessed by teenagers, 21.5\% were anger incidents between parents. Parental conflict has received substantial attention, at least in part, because of its positive correlation with behavioral and emotional problems in teenagers.\textsuperscript{26} The literature discussed a mega analysis of 92 students examining teenagers from married and divorced families. Researchers found that teenagers in homes with high parental conflict have more behavioral problems than teenagers in either low conflict intact or divorced families.\textsuperscript{27}

Violence is often the expression of frustration and hostility, at times generated by a profound dissatisfaction with the business of life.\textsuperscript{28} Unchecked by moral values, it may erupt and become highly destructive.\textsuperscript{29} Those basic

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{25}Corinne David, et al., "The Role of Family Conflict and Marital Conflict in Adolescent Functioning."
  \item \textsuperscript{26}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{28}George Palermo and Douglas Simpson, "At the Roots of Violence."
  \item \textsuperscript{29}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
moral values which service to direct one's personal or group libidinal energy constructively are usually learned in the family that upholds them, and their importance is reinforced by civic laws. The functions of the family should lie primarily in offering to its members the affective, social, and educational arena that promotes the personal and social growth and emotional stability of its members.

According to Simpson and Palermo, as the nonfunctioning or noncoordination of the various organ systems creates sickness in the human body, so the disruption of family is producing a nonfunctioning society. To this effect, Zimmerman's various parallels on the relationship between family and society through the centuries, and his ideas of a possible connection between the decline of the modern family and the general breakdown of society is quite appealing.

Bureaucracy, extreme rationalism, and utilitarianism have reduced man to a pure subject, an organism with behaviors that can be predicted, manipulated, and controlled. According to Palermo and Simpson, social

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30 George Palermo and Douglas Simpson, "At the Roots of Violence."

31 Ibid.


frustration creates insecurity, hostility and confusion. And too often hostility and violence find their outlet in the family itself. Families should be the result of togetherness, sharing, love, work, lack of selfishness and awareness of the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their members and others. Healthy families help to form healthy communities.

Over 2400 teenagers under the age of 18 were charged with murder or manslaughter as a result of weapons violence, with the highest percent using guns. Older teenagers have also been found to engage in high rates of physical aggression against friends, dating partners and family. Roling and Neidig refer to past research that indicates 20 to 30% of college students report that one of their teenage relationships was characterized by some form of physical assault. Witnessing parental conflict is a risk factor that has been proposed. Potential mechanisms of violence transmission includes direct imitation, displacement of anger from parent to teenager, and using violence as a coping strategy. Wolff (1955) states that "the duties of


35 Jennifer Langhinrichesen-Roling and Peter Neidig, "Violent Backgrounds of Economically Disadvantaged Youth."

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.
a person toward others are the same as his duties toward himself...Natural obligations are absolutely unchangeable."

Certainly, more teenagers have witnessed parental conflict more than parents and clinicians realize. For example, research indicates that even though mothers believe the child is unaware of parental conflict, the majority of teenagers have either seen or are aware of almost every incident.38 The literature discusses 29 articles reviewed on the effects of witnessing parental conflict by teenagers. Roling and Neidig concluded that there is evidence to suggest that teenager witnesses are at risk for a variety of external behaviors including increased aggression at home, school and in the community; most involving weapons.

Palermo and Simpson completed a study with 474 at risk teenagers who participated in the Job Corp program. All the data was collected on site, which included modification of the conflict tactic scale. Participants scored the highest in witnessing parental conflict and perpetrating violence with a weapon.

Conflict which was encapsulated or hidden from teenagers is viewed as not being as detrimental to the teenager as direct witnessing.39 However, witnessing

38Jennifer Langhinrichesen-Roling and Peter Neidig, "Violent Backgrounds of Economically Disadvantaged Youth."

parental conflict can result in a traumatic process. Silvern and Kaersvang suggest that in the midst of a traumatic event, a teenager may not quite experience the event itself; instead, they experience the fragmentation of self and fragmented, uninterpreted images of the event. While trauma is normally resolved within months, pathology occurs when defense and repetition alternate and insidiously support one another, to become two faces of a prolonged, potentially indefinite process. Teenage witnesses of extremely violent parental conflict may experience traumatic memories, according to Silvern and Kaersvang. Traumatic memories are typically accompanied by extreme anxiety and rage. These witnesses may feel shame by being utterly helpless and out of control, exhibiting continuous patterns of violent behaviors. The goal of immediate intervention for teenagers who have witnessed parental spousal abuse is to prevent long term pathology by providing support and

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44 H.J. Schwartz.
encouragement to disclose and formulate what they have witnessed, with its personal and effective meaning.\(^{45}\)

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Alcohol and drugs have been observed to cause many forms of cognitive impairments.\(^{46}\) Being under the influence of either alcohol or drugs appears to narrow attention,\(^{47}\) interfere with memory processes,\(^{48}\) and diminish the ability to engage in abstract thinking.\(^{49}\) Applying this array of consequences to the explanation of aggressive behavior, several researchers have proposed what is referred to as cognitive theories of drug and alcohol induced aggression.\(^{50}\) These cognitive theories have also

\(^{45}\)Louise Silvern and Lynn Kaersvang, "The Traumatized Children of Violent Marriages."


\(^{47}\)Ibid.


been referred to as cognitive theoretical perspectives.\textsuperscript{51} Pernanen further states that a person under the influence of drugs and alcohol may not correctly perceive the reasons for other people's behavior, making the actions of others appear more arbitrary and provocative than they would be to a sober perceiver. As a result, Pernanen believed intoxicated individuals are more likely to respond with aggression.

The second theoretical framework that supports this study is the social learning theory. The social learning theory focuses on specific observable behaviors.\textsuperscript{52} This form of behavioral theory states that people learn or acquire their behaviors.\textsuperscript{53} For example, Fraser (1996) states that early offenders are likely to come from families in which assaultive and predatory behaviors are across generations. Perhaps more than any other setting in the social ecology of childhood, conditions, processes, and experiences in the family shape the behavior of teenagers.\textsuperscript{54} From a family perspective, emerging research suggests that teenagers in some homes are trained, literally

\textsuperscript{51}R. Gustafson, "Aggressive and Nonaggressive Behavior as a Function of Alcohol Intoxication and Frustration in Women."


\textsuperscript{53}A. Kazdin, "Aggressive Behavior and Conduct Disorder."

but unintentionally, to respond to authority with hostility, through observation of their parents.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS}

H\textsubscript{1}: There will be a significant and positive relationship between drug activity as a teenager and gun violence among adult males.

H\textsubscript{2}: There will be a significant and positive relationship between witnessing parental conflict as a teenager and gun violence among adult males.

\textbf{Variables:} The independent variables of this study are drug activity and witnessing parental conflict. The dependent variable is gun violence.

\textsuperscript{55}G.R. Paterson, et al., "A Developmental Perspective on Antisocial Behavior."
**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug Activity:</td>
<td>Refers to using, selling or delivering any illegal mood altering substance or alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Conflict:</td>
<td>Refers to behaviors displayed by either parent toward the other parent, which includes yelling, cursing, threatening or physical aggression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Violence:</td>
<td>Refers to any use of a gun to threaten, scar, harm or kill an individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Aggression:</td>
<td>Any behavior where one person is touched by another person with any part of their body or an object, with harmful intent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN AND SAMPLE

The sample on which this study was drawn from was thirty adult males participating in a volunteer drug and/or violent crime support group in Rahway, New Jersey. Data was collected by administering a questionnaire to the male participants. The questionnaire was administered by one masters level social work student. The method of sampling that was used was convenience (non-probability) sampling. This method was used because the participants have had experiences involving violent crimes including gun violence. This group is convenient for me because I have close affiliation with several of the participants, and I have also participated in the group, from a victim’s point of view.

MEASUREMENT

A composite scale was used to combine each respective variable. Drug activity is operationalized as the extent to which one has sold or used any illicit drug and/or alcohol. The questions are designed to see whether the respondent had any involvement in drug or alcohol activity as a teenager or adult. This scale is composed of thirty-five items about drug activity.
Witnessing parental conflict is operationalized as the extent to which one has seen his parents yell, curse, hit, kick, push and/or throw objects at each other. The questions are designed to see whether the respondent has witnessed any parent conflict as a teenager. This survey instrument is composed of five questions about witnessing parental conflict. The witness scale was divided into three categories: High = 4-5; Medium = 2-3; Low = 0-1. The highest possible score is 25 points.

Gun violence is operationalized as the extent to which one has used a gun to threaten, scar, shoot and/or kill another person. The questions are designed to see whether the respondent has participated in any gun violence as a teenager or adult. This survey instrument is composed of twenty-nine items about gun violence.

This survey instrument was created by the researcher and consists of seventy-five questions. A statistical analysis was not done. Instead, the facilitators of the group reviewed the survey instrument. They determined that the reliability and validity of the survey instrument was accurate.

This survey instrument is composed of questions about demographics, drug activity, parent conflict and gun violence. The five response categories range from never to all the time. This survey instrument will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete.
DATA ANALYSIS

The independent variables, drug activity and witnessing parental conflict, are continuous. The dependent variable, gun violence, is also continuous. Therefore, to determine the statistical test for each hypothesis, the researcher used Pearson’s (r) to test the validity of the hypothesis. Cross tabulations were also used to examine the association between variables. The data obtained in this study was coded into a computer and analyzed by the use of the statistical computer program, *Statistical Package For The Social Sciences*.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The total number of respondents was thirty-five. Adult males accounted for one hundred percent of the sample. Forty-five percent (N=16) of the sample were between the ages of 18-28, fifty-four percent (N=19) of the sample were between the ages of 28-38. Eighty-five percent (N=30) of the sample were African American, nine percent (N=3) were Hispanic American, three percent (N=1) were European American and three percent (N=1) were Native American. Fifty-four percent (N=19) of the sample were raised by both parents, thirty-one percent (N=11) of the sample were raised by their mothers, six percent (N=2) of the sample were raised by their fathers, and nine percent (N=3) of the sample were raised by an extended family member. Fifty seven percent (N=20) of the sample lived in the inner city, thirty-four percent (N=12) of the sample lived in the suburbs, and nine percent (N=3) of the sample lived in rural areas as teenagers.

Ninety-three percent (N=33) of the sample reported witnessing verbal parental conflict as teenagers and seven percent (N=2) reported that they did not witness any verbal parental conflict as teenagers. Eighty-four percent (N=29) of the sample reporting witnessing physical parental conflict as teenagers and sixteen percent (N=6) of the
sample reported that they did not witness any physical parental conflict as teenagers.

Seventy-seven percent (N=27) of the sample reported that they sold drugs as teenagers and twenty-three (N=8) percent of the sample reported that they did not sell drugs as a teenager. Eighty-six percent (N=30) of the sample reported that they used drugs as teenagers and fourteen percent (N=5) of the sample reported that they did not have any drug usage as teenagers. Sixty percent (N=21) of the sample drank alcohol as a teenager and forty percent (N=14) of the sample reported that they did not drink alcohol as a teenager.

Seventy-one percent (N=25) of the sample committed some type of gun violence as a teenager compared to twenty-nine percent (N=10) of the sample reporting that they did not commit any type of gun violence as teenagers. Fifty-seven percent (N=20) of the sample who committed gun violence as a teenager, reported that they were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while committing gun violence. Forty three percent (N=11) of the sample who committed gun violence as a teenager, reported that they were not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while committing gun violence.

As adults, eighty percent (N=28) of the sample reported selling drugs and twenty percent (N=7) of the sample reported that they did not sell drugs. Eighty-nine percent
(N=31) of the sample reported that they used drugs as an adult, and eleven percent (N=4) reported that they did not use drugs as an adult. Seventy-four (N=26) percent of the sample reported drinking alcohol as an adult and twenty-six percent (N=9) reported that they did not drink alcohol as an adult.

One hundred percent (N=35) of the sample reported committing gun violence as an adult. Fifty-seven percent (N=20) reported to have been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs while committing gun violence, and forty-three percent (N=15) reported that they were not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while committing gun violence. Eighty-six percent (N=30) of the sample committed gun violence between the ages of 18-24, and fourteen percent (N=5) reported committing gun violence between the ages of 25-31.

The findings also indicate that sixty-three (N=22) percent of the sample sold drugs as a teenager and committed gun violence. Nine percent (N=3) of the sample committed gun violence but did not sell drugs as teenagers. Fourteen percent (N=5) of the sample sold drugs but did not commit gun violence as teenagers. And fourteen percent (N=5) of the sample did not sell drugs or commit gun violence as teenagers.

Seventy-seven percent (N=27) of the sample sold drugs as a teenager and committed gun violence as an adult.
Twenty-three percent ($N=8$) of the sample did not sell drugs as a teenager, however committed gun violence as an adult.

Sixty-three percent ($N=22$) of the sample used drugs as a teenager and committed gun violence as a teenager. Nine percent ($N=3$) of the sample committed gun violence as a teenager but did not use drugs as a teenager. Twenty-three percent ($N=8$) of the sample did not commit gun violence as a teenager, however did use drugs as a teenager. Five percent ($N=2$) of the sample did not use drugs as a teenager nor commit gun violence. Eighty-six percent ($N=30$) of the sample used drugs as a teenager and committed gun violence as an adult. Fourteen percent ($N=5$) of the sample did not use drugs as a teenager, however committed gun violence as an adult.

Forty-eight percent ($N=14$) of the sample who committed gun violence as adults and teenagers were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while committing gun violence. Nine percent ($N=3$) of the sample were under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol as adults but not as teenagers when gun violence was committed. Nine percent ($N=3$) of the sample were under the influence drugs and/or alcohol as teenagers but not as teenagers when gun violence was committed. And thirty-four percent ($N=10$) of the sample were not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol as an adult or teenager when gun violence was committed.
Eighty percent (N=28) of the sample used drugs as adults and teenagers. Six percent (N=2) of the sample used drugs as teenagers but not as adults. Eight percent (N=3) of the sample used drugs as adults but not as teenagers. And six percent (N=2) of the population did not use drugs as adults or teenagers.

Seventy-one percent (N=25) of the sample sold drugs as teenagers and used drugs as adults. Six percent (N=2) of the sample sold drugs as a teenager and did not use drugs as an adult. Seventeen percent (N=6) of the sample used drugs as an adult but did not sell drugs as a teenager. And six percent (N=2) of the sample did not use drugs as an adult nor sell drugs as a teenager.

**PEARSON’S (r) COEFFICIENT CORRELATION OF THE STUDY’S VARIABLES**

Hypothesis 1 stated that there will be a positive and significant relationship between drug activity and gun violence. The analysis of this relationship between drug activity and gun violence reveals that there was a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between drug activity and gun violence (r = .5420 and p = .000). The more participation in drug activity, the more likely gun violence will occur. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there will be a positive and significant relationship between witnessing parental conflict as a teenager and gun violence. The analysis of
this relationship between witnessing parental conflict and gun violence reveals that there was a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between witnessing parental conflict as a teenager and gun violence. The more a teenager witnesses parental conflict, the more likely the teenager will commit gun violence ($r = .5366$ and $p = .000$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is accepted.

TABLE 1: Pearson’s (r) Coefficient Correlation of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DRUG ACTIVITY</th>
<th>WITNESSING PARENTAL CONFLICT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GUN VIOLENCE</td>
<td>$r = .5420$</td>
<td>$r = .5366$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
<td>$p = .000$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summation, it was found that there is a significant relationship between drug activity and gun violence. The effects of drug activity were found to be quite stable across a wide range of gun violence. Thus, several conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, the data indicate drug and alcohol involvement as a teenager will more than likely perpetuate through early adulthood, along with acts of gun violence. Second, most acts of gun violence will occur while the teenager or adult is under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Data further suggest that, along with selling drugs comes using drugs among teenagers and adults.

Drug activity is an important factor to eliminate in order to decrease gun violence in our society. Selling drugs creates a need to protect oneself from robbery or threats of robbery. Therefore, the use of a gun may be warranted. Using drugs and/or alcohol lowers the ability to tolerate various behaviors which may be perceived as threatening and/or degrading. In turn, making an appropriate judgement call is hindered, and the need to defend oneself becomes inevitable at any level.

In addition to verifying the existence of a significant relationship between drug activity and gun violence, comparatively, not as strong of a relationship between
witnessing parental conflict as a teenager was confirmed. It was found that there is a significant relationship between witnessing parental conflict as a teenager and gun violence. The effects of witnessing parental conflict as a teenager were found to be stable across a wide range of witnessed parental conflict.

Several conclusions may also be drawn from the existing data. First, the data indicates that a two parental household can be just as or even detrimental than a single parent household. Second, teenagers who witness parent conflict may be more inclined to believe that violence is an appropriate method in resolving conflicts. Third, over eighty-five percent of teenagers are around while their parents are yelling and cursing at one another. These findings suggest that a conflictual parental configuration, either verbal or physical, witnessed by teenagers is critical for inhibiting involvement in gun violence. Concluding that witnessing parental conflict as a teenager has a significant influence on aggressive behaviors, including gun violence, would be consistent with findings of past research.
LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The findings of this study are limited to adult males participating in one violent crimes group in Rahway, New Jersey. The sample for this study was limited to thirty five respondents, which limits the study to this population only and cannot be generalized to the entire population of violent crime offenders.
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND PARENTING

Gun violence in America continues to jeopardize the lives of young and older people and the quality of life within their community. Traditionally, interventions focused on resolving the symptoms, but now attention needs to be directed toward the contributing factors. The current study addressed and confirmed two such contributing factors of gun violence: drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as a teenager. Although, comparatively speaking, drug activity had a slightly stronger relationship with gun violence, both are important factors to consider when working with teenagers.

As social workers, we must begin to concern ourselves with not only the teenager’s behavior(s), but also the environment in which the teenager is being reared. This study indicates that witnessing parental conflict can have a negative, long term effect on teenagers. According to this study, it is safe for social workers to assume that a teenager’s environment has an effect on their character development. This study also indicates that teenagers who are reared with both their mother and father are just as vulnerable to gun violence as a teenager reared in a single parent home. Therefore, as social workers we cannot assume that a two parent household is a healthier environment than a single parent household.
To the extent that drug activity is considered a contributing factor of gun violence, social work practitioners need to develop and implement interventions that educate teenagers and adults about the short and long term effects of drug activity. According to this study, teenagers and adults who use and/or sell drugs and alcohol are more likely to commit an act of gun violence than a teenager or adult who does not use and/or sell drugs and alcohol. Therefore, early intervention that will address these findings before drug activity occurs during teenage years is very important in reducing gun violence among teenagers and adults.

As parents, we must be aware of our behaviors and how they can affect teenagers. It is imperative for parents to understand that although we may not consider ourselves to be our teenager’s role model, we are. The interactions that parents have between one another in the presence of their teenager are conditioning that teenager on how to respond to others. Before parents can condemn their teenager for aggressive and violent behaviors, parents must take a close look at their methods and behaviors in handling conflictual situations among one another.

In terms of drug activity, parents must become more involved in their teenager’s life. As a parent, in order to assist in decreasing the probability of a teenager committing future acts of gun violence, the parent must
eliminate the participation in drug activity. Parents must become more observant and inquisitive in the lives of their teenagers. First of all, parents must not assume that if they don’t live in a particular part of town their child won’t be exposed to drug activity. Drug activity occurs in all areas. Therefore, instead of attempting to shield their teenager from drug activity, parents must educate their teenager and themselves on the effects of drugs, selling and using. As it was found in this study, drugs and alcohol are significantly associated with gun violence among teenagers and adult males.
Dear Participant,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine whether drug activity and witnessing parental conflict as a teenager have a significant impact on gun violence among adult males.

Your answers are very important to me. They will help complete the requirements for my thesis at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta Georgia.

Your participation is totally voluntary and your identity is anonymous. Therefore, you should not put your name on the survey instrument.

Thank you very much.

Donna Wilson-Fant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How old are you?</td>
<td>_____ (Male or Female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What sex are you?</td>
<td>_____ (Male or Female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What is your ethnic/racial background? (Check one)</td>
<td>Native American ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>African American ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian American ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic American ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>European American ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other (Write it in) ______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) As a teenager, who did you live with? (Write it)</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Where were you raised? (Check one)</td>
<td>Inner City _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suburbs _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural _____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) As a teenager, did you witness the person(s) you</td>
<td>a) never b) rarely c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered to be a parenting figure push his/her significant other? (circle response)</td>
<td>sometimes d) often e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) As a teenager, did you witness the person(s) you</td>
<td>a) never b) rarely c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered to be a parenting figure kick his/her significant other? (circle response)</td>
<td>sometimes d) often e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) As a teenager, did you witness the person(s) you</td>
<td>a) never b) rarely c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered to be a parenting figure slap his/her significant other? (circle response)</td>
<td>sometimes d) often e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) As a teenager, did you witness the person(s) you</td>
<td>a) never b) rarely c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered to be a parenting figure yell/curse at his/her significant other? (circle response)</td>
<td>sometimes d) often e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) As teenager, did you witness the person(s) you</td>
<td>a) never b) rarely c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered to be a parenting figure throw objects at his/her significant other? (circle response)</td>
<td>sometimes d) often e)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11) As a teenager did you sell drugs?  Yes ___ No ___ 
If "No" go to #19.
12) As a teenager did you sell marijuana? Yes ___ No ___
13) As a teenager did you sell hashish? Yes ___ No ___
14) As a teenager did you sell LSD? Yes ___ No ___
15) As a teenager did you sell cocaine? Yes ___ No ___
16) As a teenager did you sell crack? Yes ___ No ___
17) As a teenager did you sell alcohol? Yes ___ No ___
18) As a teenager did you sell barbiturates? Yes ___ No ___
19) As a teenager did you use drugs? Yes ___ No ___
If "No" go to #28.
20) As a teenager did you use marijuana? Yes ___ No ___
21) As a teenager did you use hashish? Yes ___ No ___
22) As a teenager did you use cocaine? Yes ___ No ___
23) As a teenager did you use LSD? Yes ___ No ___
24) As a teenager did you use crack? Yes ___ No ___
25) As a teenager did you drink alcohol? Yes ___ No ___
26) As a teenager did you use barbiturates? Yes ___ No ___
27) As a teenager did you use amphetamines? Yes ___ No ___
28) As a teenager did you ever use a gun? Yes ___ No ___
If "No" go to #42
29) As a teenager, did you ever use a gun to threaten another person? (circle response)
   a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often e) all the time
30) As a teenager, did you ever use a gun to scar another person? (circle response)
   a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often e) all the time
31) As a teenager, did you ever use a gun to shoot another person? (circle response)
   a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often e) all the time
32) As a teenager, did you ever use a gun to kill another person? (circle response)
   a) never b) rarely c) sometimes d) often e) all the time
33) As a teenager, were you ever under the influence of drugs/alcohol when you committed a gun violence? Yes ___ No ___
   If "No" go to #42.
34) As a teenager, were you ever under the influence of marijuana when you committed a gun violence? Yes ___ No ___
35) As a teenager, were you ever under the influence of hashish when you committed a gun violence? Yes ___ No ___
36) As a teenager, were you ever under the influence of LSD when you committed a gun violence? Yes ___ No ___
37) As a teenager, were you ever under the influence of cocaine when you committed a gun violence? Yes ___ No ___
59) As an adult, have you ever been under the influence of hashish when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

60) As an adult, have you ever been under the influence of LSD when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

61) As an adult, have you ever been under the influence of cocaine when committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

62) As an adult, have you ever been under the influence of crack when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

63) As an adult have you ever been under the influence of alcohol when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

64) As an adult have you ever been under the influence of barbiturates when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

65) As an adult have you ever been under the influence of amphetamines when you committed a gun violence?  
Yes____ No____

66) As an adult, if you have committed gun violence, how old were you at the time of the violent act(s)?  
18-24 _____ 25-31 _____ 32- older _____

67) As an adult have you used drugs? Yes____ No____  
If "No" stop here.

68) As an adult have you used marijuana? Yes____ No____

69) As an adult have you used hashish? Yes____ No____

70) As an adult have you used cocaine? Yes____ No____

71) As an adult have you used LSD? Yes____ No____

72) As an adult have you used crack? Yes____ No____

73) As an adult have you drank alcohol? Yes____ No____

74) As an adult have you used barbiturates? Yes____ No____

75) As an adult have you used amphetamines? Yes____ No____
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