



DEFENDING CHILDHOOD

PROTECT HEAL THRIVE

SEPTEMBER 2010

Fact Sheet

Issue

The Attorney General has launched the Defending Childhood initiative to address a national crisis: the exposure of America's children to violence as victims and as witnesses. The Attorney General has been personally and professionally committed to this issue for many years, dating back to early in his career when he served as the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia and through his tenure as Deputy Attorney General in the Clinton Administration.

A recent U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)-funded study concluded that a majority of children in the United States have been exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools, and communities. The consequences of this problem are significant and widespread. Children's exposure to violence, whether as victims or witnesses, is often associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm. Children exposed to violence are also at a higher risk of engaging in criminal behavior later in life and becoming part of a cycle of violence.

Goals

The goals of the initiative are to prevent exposure to violence, mitigate the negative impacts of exposure when it does occur, and develop knowledge and spread awareness about this issue.

We will achieve these goals by building on prior and ongoing efforts; developing a comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative effort with our public and private partners; and leveraging federal resources and federal funding within DOJ and throughout the government. In 2010, DOJ provided more than \$5.5 million to address the high incidence of American children's exposure to violence. The President's fiscal year 2011 budget request includes \$37 million for this initiative.

Contact

Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Department of Justice
202-514-2007
www.justice.gov



We've got to break this cycle of violence. Through enhanced prevention, intervention, and accountability efforts, I believe we can. And I know that this work begins by coming together and reinvigorating our commitment to collaboration.

—Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.

FAST FACTS*

- Children exposed to violence are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol; suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior.
- Sixty percent of American children were exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools, and communities.
- Almost 40 percent of American children were direct victims of 2 or more violent acts, and 1 in 10 were victims of violence 5 or more times.
- Children are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime than adults.
- Almost 1 in 10 American children saw one family member assault another family member, and more than 25 percent had been exposed to family violence during their life.
- A child's exposure to one type of violence increases the likelihood that the child will be exposed to other types of violence and exposed multiple times.

*Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S., and Kracke, K. 2009. *Children's Exposure to Violence: A Comprehensive National Survey*. Bulletin. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. More information is available at www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf or www.unh.edu/ccrc/projects/natscev.html.