

*U***nderstanding**
Child Maltreatment
&
Juvenile Delinquency

*From Research to Effective
Program, Practice, and
Systemic Solutions*

Janet Wiig and Cathy Spatz Widom, with John A. Tuell

CWLA PRESS

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Headquarters
440 First Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085
E-mail: books@cwla.org

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Foreword

The abuse and neglect of children is one of this nation's greatest shames—a shame our nation has yet to fully acknowledge and of which it refuses to take ownership. In 2000, there were nearly 879,000 victims of child maltreatment, resulting in an estimated 1,200 deaths. There are approximately 550,000 children in living in foster care as a result of this troubling issue. These children are frozen in time, destined to spend months or years in limbo while waiting for our systems of care to bring permanency to their lives.

In another arena of our justice system, despite the declines in juvenile delinquency rates over the past several years, the level of crime committed by our nation's youth remains high. Regardless of the declines we have seen, there are warning signs we must heed. Females now make up more than 25% of the offenders in the juvenile justice system, more than double their representation 10 years ago. Children of color are disproportionately represented at every point of the juvenile justice system. Juveniles in the system are continuing to experience problems related to substance abuse, mental health diagnoses, and a lack of educational achievement.

Clearly, our nation must do more to nurture and protect its children. Historically, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have operated separately, frequently driven by mission statements, statutory mandates, funding allocations, and service plans that discourage collaboration. A solid body of research now exists that illustrates the misguided nature of this “silo” mentality. This research confirms the connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency and establishes the necessity of more coordinated and integrated service delivery by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Although a child's abuse

and neglect does not lead inevitably to delinquency, such a history is associated with an increased risk of crime and violence. In one prospective investigation looking at this relationship, study findings revealed that people who had been abused or neglected as children had a 59% greater likelihood of arrest as a juvenile. More specifically, those abused or neglected as a child were more likely than nonabused or non-neglected people to be arrested as juveniles (27% versus 17%), adults (42% versus 33%), and for a violent crime (18% versus 14%).

Upon my arrival in February 2000 as President/CEO of the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), the League renewed its commitment to the well-being of children and families through an ambitious 10-year strategic plan, Making Children a National Priority.

This plan is guiding our efforts through the first decade of the 21st century in achieving our mission and realizing our vision. As part of this renewed commitment, the League expanded the nature and scope of its work by, among other initiatives, creating the Juvenile Justice Division in July 2000 through a grant award from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The award supports "the education of CWLA members on the connections between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and the need for an integrated approach to programs and services." This goal led to the development of this monograph.

CWLA's Juvenile Justice Division has gathered the best research on the connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. We have combined this research with a description of a wide array of promising responses, from child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention for early onset of delinquency, to more formal juvenile justice system responses and child welfare and juvenile justice system integration and reform efforts. This has been achieved through the considerable expertise of Janet Wiig, JD, MSW, Executive Director, Institute on Criminal Justice,

University of Minnesota Law School, and Cathy Spatz Widom, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry and University Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, New Jersey Medical School. I have no doubt that this document will effectively aid agency and organizational leaders, policymakers, administrators, judges, attorneys, and practitioners in the field of juvenile justice and child welfare in understanding the relationship between abuse and neglect and juvenile delinquency. The real advance, however, will be how this monograph will assist them in developing practical program, practice, and system responses to this important issue.

As CWLA's Juvenile Justice Division continues to focus on the problem of child maltreatment, our hope is that this document will inspire its readers to embrace this challenge to improve outcomes for the victims of child abuse and neglect who are entering the juvenile justice system. It will be through improved coordination and collaboration, as well as effective integration of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, that we take the critically important first step to better meeting the needs of these children. And it will be through our collective embracing of these children as our own that we will begin to rid ourselves of the shame we have brought on ourselves and this great country.

Shay Bilchik
President/CEO
Child Welfare League of America

