

# Conclusion

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*John A. Tuell, MA*

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A shameful number of children and youth are victims of abuse and neglect. This number rose disturbingly in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2000, there were approximately 879,000 substantiated instances of maltreatment. It is estimated that of these instances, more than 1,200 cases resulted in the death of the victim. The research presented in this monograph provides undeniable evidence that victims of childhood maltreatment often enter the juvenile justice system and become tomorrow's serious and violent offenders. Although the earlier research examining this connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency may have suffered from serious methodological problems and contradictory findings, more recent studies reflect the ability of researchers to overcome these problems and incontrovertibly identify the importance of childhood victimization as a risk factor for subsequent delinquency and violence. When examining this valuable knowledge, it is critically important to maintain a balanced perspective on this connection. The research cited in Part 1, reflecting findings from prospective studies from four distinct regions of the United States, reveals that the relationship between child maltreatment, juvenile delinquency, and the other associated negative outcomes is not inevitable or deterministic. We must be vigilant in our efforts to understand the implications of this research, however, so that practitioners, administrators, and policymakers from the child welfare, juvenile justice, and associated systems can develop more effective collaborative and coordinated multisystem approaches. Critical to this effort is developing and delivering more effective preven-

tion and early intervention responses for abused and neglected children and youth, thereby reducing the unnecessary and inappropriate use of out-of-home placement and incarceration.

Historically, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems have operated in separate silos, often with distinct funding allocations for mandates in behalf of the children, youth, families, and communities they serve. Juvenile and dependency court judges, court service practitioners, and child welfare case managers can provide voluminous accounts of this reality and its adverse effect on service delivery. A recent survey of public juvenile justice agencies nationwide,\* found that, of the 230 responding agencies and organizations (representing 42 states and a variety of jurisdiction populations), less than 10% had developed any collaborative program or project to address the population of delinquent offenders with previous individual or family histories of child maltreatment. This supports the vitally important assertion that we must do much more to effect sustained reductions in child abuse/neglect and juvenile delinquency. Despite the paucity of program, practice, and system solutions available to accomplish positive outcomes in behalf of this targeted population, this monograph has identified a range of programs and practices as well as system reform efforts, and has also included cost-benefit analysis of several program efforts that have the potential to produce positive outcomes. As these efforts are highlighted, it is critically important that we recognize that many of these programs may not have been subjected to rigorous scientific evaluation. This has historically been true of efforts to prevent delinquency.<sup>1</sup>As we try to build on the programs, practices, and system solutions to effectively intervene in behalf of this targeted population of juvenile offenders, it is imperative that we

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\* The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) developed a juvenile justice/child welfare survey, which was administered to approximately 1,500 public juvenile justice agencies nationwide to determine the presence of programs or projects addressing this link. The results and findings will be presented at the CWLA Juvenile Justice/Child Welfare Summit in New Orleans, Louisiana, in May 2002. The report will be retrievable at [www.cwla.org/programs/juvenile](http://www.cwla.org/programs/juvenile).

develop a greater capacity to evaluate these current and future interventions.

CWLA has created the Research to Practice Initiative (R2P) within its National Center for Research and Data\* to address this key element. As CWLA provides leadership in the identification of existing program initiatives, as well as the development and implementation of new programs, practices, policies, and systemic solutions in this area, the CWLA Juvenile Justice Division will coordinate with R2P to ensure this goal is achieved. This will subsequently provide the juvenile justice and child welfare systems with replicable models that have proven effective in achieving positive outcomes for this population of children, youth, and families.

The challenge to address the relationship between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency sufficiently and effectively is formidable. It is critical to embrace common responsibilities and common goals that require the child welfare, juvenile justice, and other youth-serving agencies to work in new, more effective, collaborative efforts. It is in this manner that we can interrupt the path to criminal offending that is frequently the outcome for childhood victims of abuse and neglect. If we are to realize a common mission and vision for the well-being of our children, youth, and families, and witness substantial, sustained reductions in child abuse/neglect and juvenile delinquency, we must understand the research that establishes the connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency. Then, we must design and implement effective program, practice, and systemic solutions.

CWLA, with and through its members and other juvenile justice agencies and organizations, will lead this effort by continuing to raise the national level of awareness regarding the connec-

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\* The CWLA Research to Practice Initiative will build the capacity to rigorously evaluate existing programs. It will establish criteria for the completion of rigorous evaluations and support proficient adaptation of the methods to diverse communities. Retrieved from the CWLA website: [www.cwla.org/programs/r2p](http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p)

tion between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency through (a) an ongoing information dissemination campaign; (b) local and statewide symposiums that bring together practitioners, administrators, and policymakers from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems; and (c) collaboration with other national organizations and state and local agencies to provide workshop presentations and keynote addresses at conferences. In addition, CWLA will further develop its inventory of programs, practices, and policies contributing to more coordinated and collaborative multisystem efforts while developing credible evaluations for current interventions. Finally, CWLA will use the guiding principles articulated in its monograph, *Making Children a National Priority: A Framework for Community Action*, which sets forth a broad and inclusive framework for ensuring the healthy growth and development of all of America's children and youth. CWLA will develop tools and resources that states and communities can use in mobilizing, assessing, planning, and implementing reforms. Through its National Center for Field Consultation, CWLA will enhance support states and communities in site-based efforts to provide better outcomes for this population.

The challenging and exciting work in behalf of children, youth, families, communities, and neighborhoods throughout the country remains ahead for all of us working for the improved integration and enhanced functioning of the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The scope and nature of the work is far reaching and ambitious. The CWLA Juvenile Justice Division challenges everyone to actively engage in the noble work to realize our mission and achieve our goals.

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## Endnote

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1. McCord, W., Widom, C. S., & Crowell, N. A. (Eds.). *Juvenile crime, juvenile justice*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Panel on Juvenile Crime: Prevention, Treatment and Control: Committee on Law and Justice and Board of Children, Youth, and Families.