

Children

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likely to be exposed to violence and crime than are adults. Juveniles and young adults ages 12 to 19 are more than twice as likely to be victims of violent crimes as the population as a whole. The study also examined the progression of violence that children experience in this country. In the year prior to being interviewed, one in 20 children witnessed someone being shot, one in 200 witnessed a murder, and one in 50 was sexually assaulted. The survey demonstrated that as children grow older, the incidences of victimization increase. Among the 14 to 17 year old participants, one in 10 witnessed a shooting in the

past year, one in 75 witnessed a murder, and one in 20 was sexually assaulted.

This study should be a wakeup call for all of those involved in public policy. The study clearly demonstrates the cumulative effects on children exposed to multiple incidents of violence and how exposure to one form of violence may make a child more vulnerable to other forms. The children who suffer multiple exposures are the most likely to suffer serious long-term physical, emotional, and mental harm.

Many previous studies have shown how exposure to violence has damaging consequences for the physical and mental health of young

people. Clearly, the import of this study is that more needs to be done at the local, state, and national levels to appreciate and address the consequences of crime on children. There is no doubt we are witnessing the consequences of this exposure in our community. In the most recent ranking of violent crimes per 100,000 population (2006), the state of Florida ranked 4th in the country. We need to do something. Now!

Joy Howell, a Jacksonville attorney, has been a State Prosecutor, a US Senate Investigator, and the founder of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. He represents crime victims in civil claims for damages and advocates for the legal rights of all victims.



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