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ARE CHILDREN REMORSEFUL AFTER
COMMITTING VIOLENT CRIMINAL ACTS?

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Arlene Elisa Garcia

June 1997

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ABSTRACT

In a survey research design, this project explores factors influencing whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others. The research question is: Are children remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others? The study was conducted at the San Bernardino County Juvenile Hall, and all 78 male respondents were incarcerated at the time of participation. All of the respondents surveyed were maximum security risk. Maximum security risk means juveniles incarcerated for felony crimes. The approach used in this study is a positivist exploratory design. The method of analysis is both quantitative and qualitative. Surveys were used as the method for gathering the data. This study will assist social workers in determining whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts. The study provides demographics about the respondents. Some demographics are age, ethnicity, religion, family size, family's economic status, sibling position, and last grade completed. The study also explores respondents feelings of guilt and remorse as very young children and their current sense of remorse for the crime they have committed. The results indicated that a majority of the respondents were remorseful for the crime they committed.

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INTRODUCTION/LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout history, societies have feared their children. It appears that the modern era in this country is no exception. Although crime and violence appeared to have been the way of the young, responses to youth crime today have departed from earlier views that juvenile offenders are neither criminal nor "responsible" for their acts. In the past decade, over 40 states have made adolescent offenders subject to the full penalties of the criminal law, including confinement for lengthy terms in adult prisons (Fagan, 1990).

The problem of what to do about violent delinquents has existed since the first juvenile court was established in 1899. Between 1940 and 1960 the number of juvenile delinquency cases rose from 200,000 to 813,000 (Day, 1997). Juvenile arrests for violent crime increased dramatically in the late-1960s. It reached an all-time high in the mid-1970s, but since the mid-1970s, juvenile crime began to recede (Jensen & Metsger, 1994).

In 1994, males were charged with 21 percent of all person offenses and 55 percent of all property offenses. Juveniles accounted for 7 percent of drug offenses and 18 percent of all public-order offenses (Dept. of Justice, 1995).

White and associates (1990) discovered that when girls are studied for predictors of adolescent delinquency, there are no notable differences from male characteristics of personality that predict antisocial behavior. They found that early antisocial behavior is the best predictor of later antisocial behavior. For at least some children, antisocial behavior appears to manifest itself early and remains stable.

The racial characteristics of those incarcerated in 1984, was non-whites (56.2 per 1,000 youth) which showed a significantly higher delinquency rate than whites (34.3 per 1,000 youth). The status offense rate was equal between non-whites and whites. Black males and females were more likely than whites and Hispanics to be arrested for crimes

against persons. Hispanics were more likely to be arrested for drug offenses. Whites were more likely to be arrested for status offenses (Dept. of Justice, 1984).

In 1994, the number of juveniles arrested remained at an unacceptably high level. In using the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (1994) offense groupings, about 19 percent of all juvenile court cases were referred to as index violent crime (e.g., homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault); whereas, 35 percent were referred to as index property crime (e.g., burglary, larceny, theft, motor vehicle theft, and arsons). About 12 percent of these cases involved a drug or liquor law violation.

Children today are committing more and more violent crimes than ever before. According to the California Criminal Justice Profile (1992), more than 13,000 juveniles were arrested in San Bernardino County alone. These children are committing violent crimes such as: rape, murder, attempted murder, armed robbery, carjacking, and assault with a deadly weapon.

The children of today are committing violent acts against others without necessity. They are not killing in self defense, or stealing in order to survive, they do it for recreation. They do not stop to think of the effects it will have on the victim or to think how wrong it is. They just act.

PROBLEM FOCUS

This study addresses the question: Are children remorseful after committing violent criminal acts? This study is an exploratory positivist study that explores whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts. This study reviews various explanations for juvenile delinquency with the hope of understanding what makes children commit dangerous acts in the 1990s.

The implications of this study for social work is related to direct practice with families and groups. The study attempts to show whether or not children who have committed violent criminal acts are remorseful. If they are not, it may be that somewhere during their developmental years, these children failed to attain feelings of guilt and shame for causing harm to others. Direct social work practice should involve educating parents on the developmental processes of children and the importance of good parenting for future years.

Other social work roles useful in this study is research and education. This research attempts to demonstrate that there is a correlation between violent crimes and feelings of remorse, with the hope that future research can be dedicated to finding solutions to the problem.

In order to better understand the meaning of remorse, one must first understand shame and guilt and how it is developed in childhood. The need to study children who are committing violent acts is imperative, so that social workers may employ interventions to decrease the violent acts which have been committed. Thus, social workers will be better equipped to provide treatment for these children. In order to understand how a child learns to be remorseful, we must first define and understand words that are closely related to remorseful, such as shame and guilt.

Erikson (1963) proposed eight stages of psychosocial development. Two of Erikson's stages of development specifically refer to shame and guilt in children. The autonomy versus shame and doubt stage builds up and is resolved when a child is 2 to 4 years old. This period is dominated by the child's persistent needs for self-expression and mastery. Self-doubt results from repeated experiences of failure and inadequacy. The mechanism for achieving a strong sense of autonomy is the development of competence at a variety of skills. Imitation is the primary vehicle for skill learning during toddlerhood.

Through imitation children develop a repertoire of language and skills that enable them to express their own needs and to coordinate their behavior with that of others.

The other stage in which Erikson (1963) addresses guilt is the initiative versus guilt crisis which captures the child's needs to question existing norms and the emerging feelings of moral concern when norms are violated. This stage takes place during the ages of 4 to 6 (Newman & Newman, 1991).

Shame is an intense emotion that can result from two types of experiences (Morrison, 1989). One type of shame is social ridicule or criticism. Being scolded for having spilled your milk or for having lost your jacket, can probably reconstruct feelings of shame in toddlerhood. When a child is shamed, he/she feels small, ridiculous, and maybe even humiliated. If a child is never scolded for doing something wrong, does he grow up to be shameless? Most likely he will because he was not taught to feel bad about doing something wrong. Some cultures rely heavily on public humiliation as a means of social control because it helps children understand the difference between right and wrong. If as a toddler, the child is never made to feel shameful for doing something that is socially unacceptable, then how will that child ever understand whether the act is socially acceptable or unacceptable?

The second type of shame is internal conflict. As children construct an understanding of what it means to be a good, decent, capable person, they build a mental image of an ideal person, the ego ideal. Children feel shame when they recognize that their behavior is not meeting the standards of their ideal. Even though they have not broken a rule or done something "naughty", they may feel shame when they fail to live up to their own private idea of how they think they should behave. Is this true for the juvenile delinquent committing violent criminal acts, or do they simply accept the fact that they have failed? The juvenile delinquent usually accepts his failures and justifies his

wrong doings by convincing himself that it was his only choice. The experience of shame is extremely unpleasant. Children will refrain from all kinds of new activities, in order to avoid feeling shame. Therefore, the question arises, do juvenile delinquents feel shame, or did they for some reason fail to develop this in early toddlerhood (Newman & Newman, 1991)?

Shame involves an evaluation of the self. When ashamed, people feel as if they are a "bad person" and that the self has been humiliated or disgraced. Shame is a feeling characterized by a sense of feeling "small" and worthless in the eyes of both the self and others (Niedenthal, Tangney & Gavanski, 1994). Do children feel like a "bad person" after committing violent acts against others? Many people would assume that they don't, but do we really know the answer to this question? The answer is no, primarily because the research is very limited on the subject matter.

In understanding how one learns to feel guilty, first understanding what guilt is, is very important. Guilt is the internal psychological mechanism that signals when a taboo is about to be violated. Guilt is an emotion associated with doing something wrong or anticipating doing something wrong. Guilt is an emotion that accompanies the sense that one has been responsible for an unacceptable thought, fantasy, or action (Izard, 1977). A child's curiosity is limited to the extent that the family and the school impose restrictions on areas of legitimate inquiry or action. In other words, a child will feel guilty about certain things if and only if, the family and the school have imposed restrictions on those areas of inquiry or action. Is it therefore right to assume that a child does not feel guilty for committing violent acts against others simply because as young children, they were not taught to feel guilty. On the other hand, perhaps someone was causing harm to them when they were young children; therefore possibly, they were taught that hurting others was acceptable.

Feelings of guilt generally lead to remorse and some attempt to set things right again, to restore the positive feelings in a relationship. A child must develop a strong internal moral code, to help him/her avoid punishment. He or she must also develop the ability to reward the self for correct behavior. The more areas of restriction that are imposed on a child's thinking, the more difficult it will be for the child to distinguish between legitimate and inappropriate areas of thought. One way that a child has of coping with this problem is to develop a rigid moral code that restricts many aspects of thought and action (Newman & Newman, 1991). Does a child feel remorse after committing a violent act against another person, or does the child simply blame others for what he has done. For example, a child who states, "if my dad was not so abusive to me as a child, I would never have killed that old lady." In asking a child, if he feels remorseful after committing a violent act against another person, the response will be difficult to interpret because many times a state of denial is experienced after committing a crime. It's like, "well if I deny I did it, then they will believe I didn't do it." In order to feel remorseful about something one must first admit to him/herself that indeed, they did do something wrong.

Additionally, this study provides information on whether the child feels remorseful because he has been caught or because he truly feels bad for what he did. In this study a series of questions are asked to measure a child's feeling of remorse. As it stands right now, a child of 14 years and older can stand to be tried as an adult in the criminal justice system. If this is already being implemented, then what will keep our society from sentencing younger children to the death penalty? If this study proves that children are not remorseful for committing violent crimes, then it might be that much easier to vote, "yes" on the death penalty for children. In a 1994 National Poll the question was asked, "when a teenager commits a murder and is found guilty by a jury, do you think he should get the

death penalty or should he be spared because of his youth?" The results showed that 60 percent of the national population voted "yes" he should get the death penalty; 30 percent voted "no", and 10 percent voted "I don't know" (Dept. of Justice, 1995). If it can be shown that children are committing violent acts against others simply because they were not taught as young toddlers to feel guilt, shame, and remorse, then maybe a greater percentage of our nation, will vote to spare them; and perhaps institute educational programs to teach shame, guilt, and remorse.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore factors which influence whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others. The study utilized a positivist exploratory approach which used a questionnaire as the method for gathering the data.

Research Question

The research question for this study is: Are children remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others? This study utilized an exploratory survey research design in answering the question. One implication of using the positivist paradigm for this research project is to help social workers explore reasons for the increase in violent crimes committed by juveniles.

METHODS

Sampling. Because of the great number of children committing violent crimes, it is necessary to limit the survey to a small population of interest. For the purpose of this research project, seventy-eight male juveniles incarcerated at the San Bernardino Juvenile Hall participated in the study. The population of interest consist of males between the ages of 10 and 17 who have been charged with committing violent criminal acts (e.g.,

murder, attempted murder, armed robbery, carjacking, rape, and assault with a deadly weapon). The ethnic make-up of the population of includes Hispanics, Caucasians, Blacks, and a smaller number of Asians. Subjects were only accepted on a voluntary basis and there was no consequence for choosing not to participate (See Informed Consent, Appendix B).

A stratified, systematic, sample was used to survey those individuals who had been charged with committing violent criminal acts. The group consisted of individuals who have been classified as mandatory security risk. The individuals classified as mandatory security risk are in juvenile hall for violent crimes. After separating the entire juvenile hall population into two groups, the survey was given to all the mandatory security risk inmates.

Data Collection and Instrument. Respondents were asked to complete, a survey questionnaire which was developed for this research (See Remorse Questionnaire, Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed for males who are currently incarcerated at the San Bernardino County Juvenile Hall. The questionnaire was pretested by the researcher for instruction of clarity and the amount of time needed to complete the instrument. The time needed to complete the instrument did not exceed thirty minutes. The respondents received and returned the completed questionnaire during a scheduled time set up by the researcher and the group counselors at the juvenile hall. The researcher distributed and picked up the questionnaire during the same visit.

Weaknesses and Strengths of the Instrument. Weaknesses of Self Report Inventories (SRI) provide very limited choices. The researcher pre-selected item choices which are relevant to the research project. Therefore, an attempt was made to allow for personal comments throughout the amended questionnaire, thus expanding statements of choice specific to the respondent (Babbie, 1989).

Another weakness of the questionnaire is that it may not have captured the internal motivational characteristics of the respondents (Babbie, 1989). For example, in this research project, the child might be feeling very remorseful because he has been caught and is facing a long time of incarceration. Also, the questions might have been answered dishonestly, or completed under chaotic conditions which prevented serious thought. An effort was made to express to the respondents the importance of thoughtful and honest responses and full completion of the data, in an effort to obtain an accurate reflection of whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others.

The strengths of SRI questionnaires are that a large quantity of information can be presented in a uniform manner and many persons sampled in a short period of time. Another strength of the SRI is that it is useful in describing the characteristics of a large population (Babbie, 1989). This particular survey provided space for checking off answers and using specified lines to allow for more explanation of answers.

Factors Measured by the Questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide a profile of juveniles who are committing violent crimes and to determine whether or not they are remorseful.

Procedure. The San Bernardino County Probation Department gave this researcher permission to use incarcerated subjects who volunteered as research participants (See Appendix C- Letter of Permission). Each questionnaire was distributed with written and verbal instructions on how to complete the questionnaire. The researcher briefed all the participants as to the purpose of the study and the importance of answering questions as honestly as possible. Questionnaires were distributed and questions were read "out loud" to respondents. The researcher collected completed questionnaires on the same day they were filled out.

This research project used a survey method. The questionnaire was completed in one sitting. Questionnaires were handed out to participants on their "living units" by the researcher. Respondents were asked to independently complete the questionnaires, without conferring with peers. Small groups of up to 15 participants were surveyed at one time. There were 11 survey sessions, whereby, the smallest group consisted of three participants and the largest group consisted of fifteen participants.

The researcher remained in the room until the last survey was completed and turned in. After the completed questionnaires were turned in to the researcher, a debriefing statement was read "out loud" to the participants. Respondents were given a debriefing statement with a telephone number to contact someone regarding information about the project, or if there was a need to talk about any troubling aspect of the survey (see Appendix - Debriefing Letter). At the time of distributing the questionnaires, the researcher had already assigned numbers to the questionnaires for identification purposes. Completed questionnaires were stored at the home of the researcher during the analysis of data.

Protection of Human Subjects. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity of human subjects, there was no need to collect personal names on the completed questionnaires in that data were reported in aggregate form. Permission to use these respondents was obtained from the County of San Bernardino, Director of Juvenile Hall in accordance with the California State University, San Bernardino's policy. A memo was written to the Director of Juvenile Hall in order to receive consent for the survey to be dispensed. Approval was given to the researcher on January 29, 1997 (See Letter of Approval, Appendix D). There are no known risks to humans as a result of completing this questionnaire.

RESULTS

Data Analysis. This research project used a survey response questionnaires to explore the research question, are children remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others. The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions. Statistical analysis were generated by the EPI6 computer analysis program.

The survey contained requests for demographic data which provided nominal variables such as age, ethnicity and religious persuasion. These were used to generate univariate statistics such as frequency tables and frequency distributions for the purpose of obtaining valid percentages related to these variables. Some ordinal variables were arranged by groupings, for example several questions which measured remorse, were treated as nominal variables. Appropriate measures of central tendency, such as the mean, the median, and the mode were calculated on age.

Ordinal variables were obtained from ranking information such as birth order, living arrangements, and parenting styles. First, univariate statistics such as frequency tables and frequency distributions were generated to describe the number of times each response was given. Measures of central tendency or summary averages such as the mean, the median, and the mode were calculated from ranking information such as age, highest grade completed, and size of family. Valid percentages were obtained from frequency tables of these variables in order to delineate the percentages of respondents. Other measurements of variation obtained from univariate statistics included minimum and maximum values, the range of values, variances and standard deviations. Nominal and ordinal level variables were collected from a sample of males who are currently incarcerated at the San Bernardino County Juvenile Hall.

Several questions requested comments. These comments are typed out and analyzed in the discussion of findings section. Related conceptualizations are grouped into

categories. Categories will be conceptually labeled broadly enough to encompass all the concepts, and the properties which they hold. Secondly, axial coding procedures are performed to make connections between categories. These connections follow the coding paradigm outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This paradigm involves discovering, from the categorized data, the progression of causal conditions that led to the occurrence of the phenomenon, including the structural conditions which are brought to bare on the interactional/action strategies addressing the phenomenon.

As a result of both open coding and axial coding, broad themes emerge in response to the questions asked. These broad themes may shed more light on the research question: Are children remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others? They are categorized according to similarity and attempts are made to synthesize in writing, the factors which influence how a child feels after committing a violent criminal act against another person.

The results of the study are provided in several tables. The first area to be examined are the demographics of the respondents. Secondly, all respondents were asked to describe the type of parenting they received as young children. Lastly, the tables are used to examine feelings of remorse in children after committing a violent criminal act.

Demographics

The ages of the respondents were between 12 and 18 years old. The majority of the respondents (51.3%) were between 17-18 years old. There were only 6 respondents (7.7%) between the ages of 12 and 14 years old. The remaining 32 respondents (41%) were between 15 and 16 years old (See Table 1).

The ethnicity of the respondents was divided into the following categories: Caucasian, Hispanic, African American, Asian, Native American, and other. The majority of the respondents (60.3%) were Hispanic. Sixteen of the respondents (20.5%) were

African American, and nine respondents (11.5%) were Caucasian. The remaining six respondents (7.7%) were Asian, Native American, or Other (See Table 2).

The majority of the respondents (47.4%) were Catholic. There were 17 respondents (21.8%) who stated "other" as their religion. Fourteen of the respondents (17.9%) stated they had "no" religion and 9 of the respondents (11.5%) stated they were Protestant. Only 1 of the respondents (1.3%) stated he was Muslim (See Table 3).

Type of Parenting

The majority of the respondents (26.9%) lived with their biological parents or with their mothers only (26.9%). Sixteen of the respondents (20.5%) lived with their mothers and stepfathers. Eleven of the respondents (14.1%) lived with a friend or other, 5 of the respondents (6.4%) lived with their grandparents, 3 of the respondents (3.8%) lived with their fathers and stepmother, and only one of the respondents (1.3%) lived with his father only (See Table 4).

The number of people in the family ranged from 2-12 people. The majority of the respondents (47.5%) had 5-8 people in their family. Thirty-four of the respondents (43.6%) had 2-4 people in their family, and only 4 of the respondents (8.9%) had 9-12 people in their family (See Table 5).

The majority of the respondents (41%) was the middle child in the family. Twenty-eight of the respondents (35.9%) was the oldest in the family. The remaining 18 respondents (23.1%) were the youngest in the family (See Table 6).

The majority of the respondents (78.2%) stated they belonged to the lower class. Sixteen respondents (21.8%) stated they belonged to the middle-class. Only one of the respondents (1.3%) stated he belonged to the upper-class (See Table 7).

Forty-two of the respondents (53.8%) stated "yes" to being in a gang. The remaining thirty-six respondents (46.2%) stated "no" to being in a gang (See Table 8).

The majority of the respondents (80.8%) stated "no" to their parents being gang or ex-gang members. Fifteen of the respondents (19.2%) stated "yes" to their parents being gang members or are ex-gang members (See Table 9).

The majority of the respondents (48.8%) have fathers with only elementary school education. Thirty-three of the respondents (42.3%) stated they "did not know" what grade level their fathers completed. Twenty-four of the respondents (30.8%) had fathers with some high school education, and 16 of the respondents (20.5%) had fathers with some college education (See Table 10).

The majority of the respondents' (35.9%) mothers completed high school. Twenty of the respondents (25.6%) stated that they "did not know" the last grade their mother completed. Only four of the respondents (5.1%) stated that their mother completed the middle school. Twelve of the respondents (15.4%) stated that their mother only completed part of high school and the remaining fourteen respondents (18%) stated that their mother went on to some college (See Table 11).

The majority of the respondents (57.7%) stated "yes" to attending school before being incarcerated. Thirty-three of the respondents (42.3%) stated "no" they were not attending school before being incarcerated (See Table 12). The majority of the respondents (30.8%) completed the 10th grade before being incarcerated. Twenty-two of the respondents (28.2%) completed junior high school and 17 of the respondents (21.8%) completed the 9th grade. Fourteen of the respondents (17.9%) completed the 11th grade and only one of the respondents (1.3%) completed the 12th grade (See Table 13).

Feelings of Remorse

The majority of the respondents (57.7%) stated "yes" to feeling guilty when they got in trouble as a young child, whereas 33 of the respondents (42.3%) stated "no" they did not feel guilty when they got in trouble as a young child. The majority of the

respondents (57.7%) stated "no" to feeling bad after taking something that did not belong to them when they were a young child. Thirty-three of the respondents (42.3%) stated "yes" to feeling bad after taking something that did not belong to them when they were a young child (See Table 14).

The majority of the respondents (52.6%) stated "no" to being a first timer in juvenile hall. Thirty-seven of the respondents (47.4%) stated "yes" it was their first time in juvenile hall. The majority of the respondents (74.4%) stated "no" to ever being in a placement or any other type of external program. Twenty of the respondents (25.6%) stated "yes" they had been to placement or some other type of external program in the past. The majority of the respondents (53.8%) stated "no" to trying to benefit from chances that were given to them in the past. Thirty-six of the respondents (46.2%) stated "yes" that they tried to benefit from the chances that were given to them in the past (See Table 15).

The majority of the respondents (65.4%) stated "yes" to feeling bad about the crime they committed. Twenty-seven of the respondents (34.6%) stated "no" to feeling bad about the crime they committed. The majority of the respondents (85.9%) stated "no" to committing the crime again, if they could go back in time. Eleven of the respondents (14.1%) stated "yes" they would commit the crime again if they could go back in time. The majority of the respondents (66.7%) stated "no" they would not commit the crime again if they could get away with it. Twenty-six of the respondents (33.3%) stated "yes" they would commit the crime again if they could get away with it (See Table 16).

The majority of the respondents (59%) stated "yes" they think of their victims. Thirty-two of the respondents (41%) stated "no" they do not think of their victims. Thirty-nine of the respondents (50%) stated "yes" they think of their victims' family and the remaining (50%) stated "no" they do not think of their victims' family. The majority

of the respondents (55.1%) stated "no" they did not want to contact their victims family or friends, if given the opportunity. Thirty-five of the respondents (44.9%) stated "yes," they would want to contact their victims family or friends, if given the opportunity (See Table 17).

The majority of the respondents (61.5%) stated "no" they were not under the influence of drugs when they committed the crime. The remaining 30 respondents (38.5%) stated "yes" they were under the influence of drugs when they committed the crime (See Table 18).

The majority of the respondents (60.3%) stated "no" they were not under the influence of alcohol when they committed the crime. Thirty-one of the respondents (39.7%) stated "yes" they were under the influence of alcohol when they committed the crime (See Table 19).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Several significant findings of this research project are worthy of further discussion. There were seventy-eight male respondents who volunteered to participate. All of the respondents were incarcerated at the San Bernardino County Juvenile Hall. The majority of the respondents were Hispanic males between the ages of 17 and 18 years old. Also, the majority of the respondents were Catholic and lived with either biological parents or with their mothers only, prior to being incarcerated. Additionally, it was found that the majority of the respondents lived in a family of 5 to 8 people. Many of the respondents were the middle child.

Sixty-one out of the 78 respondents reported that their families were in the lower class. The majority of the respondents stated their fathers had only an elementary school education, whereas the mothers of the respondents had completed high school. This

statistic could be an indication that the respondents did not know what grade level their fathers had completed, since many lived with their mother only.

Many of the respondents stated they were attending school prior to being incarcerated and the majority of the respondents stated that the last grade they completed was the 10th grade. This shows that the juvenile delinquent does remain in school, although society tends to believe that they have the highest drop out rate. The study did not look at the whether or not the respondent was attending continuation or adult school.

In regards to early childhood, the majority of the respondents stated "yes" that they felt guilty when they got in trouble, but stated "no" they did not feel bad after taking something that did not belong to them. Erikson (1963) states that between the ages of 4 to 6, children question existing norms and the emerging feelings of moral concern when norms are violated. The research shows that feelings of moral concern existed in the participants at a very young age, since the majority of the respondents stated "yes" that they felt guilty when they got in trouble when they were very young.

The majority of the respondents stated "no" to being in juvenile hall for the first time. Most of the respondents had been incarcerated in the past. Although, the majority of the respondents stated "no" to ever being in placement or any other type of external program. Many of the respondents had not been to placement or any other type of external program simply because of the seriousness of their crime. Children are now being tried as adults, and sentenced to adult prisons.

The majority of the respondents stated "yes" to feeling bad about the crime they committed and stated "no" they would not commit the crime again if they could go back in time. Most of the respondents stated "no" they would not commit the crime again, even if they could get away with it. This demonstrates that the respondents truly felt guilty for the crime they had committed. According to Izard (1977), guilt is an emotion associated

with doing something wrong or anticipating doing something wrong. Feelings of guilt generally lead to remorse. The research proves that children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others. The majority of the respondents feel guilty because society says they have done something wrong and must now be punished for it.

Many of the respondents stated "yes" they think of their victims and half of the them stated "yes" they think of their victims family and friends. The majority of the respondents stated "no" they did not want to contact their victims family or friends, if given the opportunity. According to Umbreit (1993), there is a new practice area which mediates the conflict between crime victims and their offenders. The impact of the mediation process is to help victims achieve closure and to help offenders personally make amends.

Most of the respondents were not under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed the crime. This shows that most of the respondents were in a conscious state of mind when they committed their crime. This contradicts the belief that most juveniles who committ criminal acts are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In an open-ended question, the respondents listed the following as crimes they had committed: armed robbery, grand theft auto, possession of a firearm, attempted robbery, assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder, premeditated attempted murder, accessory to murder, murder, carjacking, home invasion, and terrorists threats. Many of the respondents who participated in this research project had several charges pending.

When asked to explain in their own words, the reasons why they did what they did, some of the responses given were: "I did it because if I didn't kill the person that person was going to kill me and I wouldn't be here today; because I needed money and I didn't want to get caught; it wasn't suppose to happen but my co-partner flipped out when the

inhabitant of the house we were robbing, woke up, it all happened so fast; I don't remember what I was thinking; because I went crazy one night while I was high; because they stabbed me and shot up my house; because I wanted to get some money for myself; because I had to protect myself and my varrio; because I was under the influence of alcohol and I wasn't thinking right." None of these responses are senseless or cold-blooded, unlike popular belief. The responses given by the participants seem tolerable and understandable, but yet, society is quick to label and sentence these juvenile to life in prison. You see, it's a lot easier and more accepted by society to incarcerate them and let them grow old in prison because they have committed a "bad" act and need to be "punished."

The implications to social work policy which need to be addressed as a result of this study are the death penalty and life sentences for juvenile delinquents. Our society is not addressing the underlying problem of juvenile delinquency. It is providing a quick, easy, and acceptable solution. This research would advocate that sentencing a child to death and/or 25 years to life in prison, is immoral and is by no means, treatment or rehabilitation. Many children are committing more and more violent crimes each day and prisons are being built to house them, society needs to begin to address the root of the problem. It appears the root begins by looking at the family system.

This research demonstrates that the majority of children who commit violent criminal acts against others are indeed remorseful because the majority of the respondents stated "yes" to feeling bad about the crime they committed. In some of the cases they did what they had to, in order to attain something they wanted. The society we live-in today, values money and possessions. Therefore, society should expect children to want nothing less. Children steal and kill because it's what they have learned. Newman & Newman (1991) states that children have been found to imitate aggressive, altruistic, helping and

stingy models. Children will model those who are prestigious, who control resources, or who themselves are rewarded. These children have learned that violence is a way of feeling safe and protecting themselves is necessary in a society that promotes violence through television. Also, children have learned to value money and possessions. Society cannot continue to condemn juvenile delinquents to death or twenty-five years in prison and believe that this is the solution to juvenile delinquency. As social workers, it is our ethical duty to change society's current way of dealing with juvenile delinquency. Incarcerating them for life, is not the answer.

An implication of this study for direct social work practice with families is to help children and their families learn about the cycle of violence and the negative influence of guns, drugs, and gangs in our society today. Direct social work practice should focus on reestablishing family unity and respect for others. Also, direct social work practice should involve educating parents on the developmental stages of children to help parents better understand why their children behave a certain way. Better yet, direct social work practice should focus on educating people about people. According to Newman & Newman (1991), "common threads of organization and understanding allow us to know one another, care for one another, and contribute to one another's well-being" (p. 4).

This study should be replicated to include incarcerated girls to find out if they are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts. Also, it should be replicated to include non-violent juvenile delinquents and explore their level of remorse. Another reason for replicating the study would be to explore the parenting styles of primary caregivers, and other family dynamics.

In conclusion, this research project addressed whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts. The research demonstrated that the majority of children are indeed remorseful after committing violent crimes. The research

addressed in an open-ended question the reasons why respondents acted as they did, and surprisingly enough, the responses were reasonable. The respondents were consistent in answering the questions which addressed feelings of remorse. It is this researchers opinion that the respondents answered questions as honestly as possible (See Remorse Questionnaire, Appendix A).

Table 1 - Age of Respondents

Age	# of participants	Percentage (%)
12-14	6	7.7%
15-16	32	41.0%
17-18	40	51.3%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 2 - Ethnicity of Respondents

Ethnicity	# of respondents	Percentage (%)
Caucasian	9	11.5%
Hispanic	47	60.3%
African American	16	20.5%
Asian	2	2.6%
Native American	1	1.3%
Other	3	3.8%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 3 - Religion of Respondents

Religion	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Catholic	37	47.4%
Protestant	9	11.5%
Jewish	0	0%
Muslim	1	1.3%
None	14	17.9%
Other	17	21.8%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 4 - Living Arrangements of Respondents Prior to Incarceration

Living Arrangement	# of participants	Percentage (%)
Biological Parents	21	26.9%
Father and Stepmother	3	3.8%
Father only	1	1.3%
Friend/Other	11	14.1%
Mother and Stepfather	16	20.5%
Mother only	21	26.9%
Grandparents	5	6.4%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 5 - Family Size of Respondents

Size	# of participants	Percentage(%)
2-4 people	34	43.6%
5-8 people	37	47.5%
9-12 people	4	8.9%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 6 - Sibling Position of Respondents

Birth Order	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Oldest	28	35.9%
Middle	32	41.0%
Youngest	18	23.1%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 7 - Economic Status of Respondents

Class	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Upper	1	1.3%
Middle	16	21.8%
Lower	61	78.2%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 8 - Gang Membership of Respondents

	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	42	53.8%
No	36	46.2%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 9 - Gang Membership of Respondents' Parents

	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	15	19.2%
No	63	80.8%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 10 - Respondents' Father Educational Level

Grade Level	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
0="I don't know"	33	42.3%
1st-8th grade	38	48.8%
9th-12th grade	24	30.8%
13th-19th grade	16	20.5%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 11 - Respondents' Mother Educational Level

Grade Level	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
0="I don't know"	20	25.6%
6-8th grade	4	5.1%
9-11th grade	12	15.4%
12th grade	28	35.9%
13-16th grade	14	18.0%
Total:	78	100.0%

Table 12 - School Attendance Prior to Incarceration

School	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	45	57.7%
No	33	42.3%
Total: 78		100.0%

Table 13 - Last Grade Completed by Respondent Prior to Incarceration

Grade Level	# of participants	Percentage (%)
6-8th grade	22	28.2%
9th grade	17	21.8%
10th grade	24	30.8%
11th grade	14	17.9%
12th grade	1	1.3%
Total: 78		100.0%

Table 14 - Respondents Feelings of Guilt and Remorse as Very Young Children

Feelings	Yes	No	# of Respondents (%)
Guilty	45 (57.7%)	33 (42.3%)	78 (100%)
Remorse	33 (42.3%)	45 (57.7%)	78 (100%)

Table 15 - Respondents First Time in Juvenile Hall or Placement

Incarceration History	Yes	No	# of Respondents (%)
First time in JH	37 (47.4%)	41 (52.6%)	78 (100%)
Prior placement	20 (25.6%)	58 (74.4%)	78 (100%)
Benefit from chances	36 (46.2%)	42 (53.8%)	78 (100%)

Table 16 - Respondents Current Feelings of Remorse

Feelings	Yes	No	# of Respondents (%)
Feel bad about crime	51 (65.4%)	27 (34.6%)	78 (100%)
Committ crime again	11 (14.1%)	67 (85.9%)	78 (100%)
Get away and repeat	26 (33.3%)	52 (66.7%)	78 (100%)

Table 17 - Respondents Feelings Towards Victim and Victim's Family

Feelings	Yes	No	# of Respondents (%)
Think of victim	46 (59%)	32 (41%)	78 (100%)
Think of victim's family	39 (50%)	39 (50%)	78 (100%)
Contact family	35 (44.9%)	43 (55.1%)	78 (100%)

Table 18 - Respondents Under the Influence of Drugs

Drugs	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	30	38.5%
No	48	61.5%
Total: 78		100.0%

Table 19 - Respondents Under the Influence of Alcohol

Alcohol	# of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	31	39.7%
No	47	60.3%
Total: 78		100.0%

APPENDIX A: REMORSE QUESTIONNAIRE

I.D. Number _____

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Age _____
2. Ethnicity:
Caucasian _____
Hispanic _____
African American _____
Asian _____
Native American _____
Other _____
3. Religion:
Catholic _____
Protestant _____
Jewish _____
Muslim _____
None _____
Other _____

FAMILY DATA AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS DATA

4. Who did you live with before getting locked-up?
Biological parents _____ Mother and stepfather _____
Father and stepmother _____ Mother only _____
Father only _____ Grandparents _____
Friend _____ Alone _____
Other: Specify _____
5. Number of people in your family? _____
6. What is your sibling position in family of origin?
Oldest child _____ Youngest child _____
Middle child _____
7. How would you describe your family's economic status?
Upper-class _____ Middle-class _____
Lower-class _____
8. Are any of your parents gang members or ex-gang members?
Yes _____ No _____
9. What was the last grade completed by your father _____ ?
10. What was the last grade completed by your mother _____ ?

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

11. Were you going to school before getting "locked-up?"
Yes _____ No _____

12. What was the last grade you completed? _____

EARLY CHILDHOOD

13. When you were a young child and you got in trouble, did you feel guilty?
Yes _____ No _____

14. When you were a young child and you took something that did not belong to you, did it make you feel bad?
Yes _____ No _____

CRIMINAL HISTORY

15. Are you a gang member?
Yes _____ No _____

16. Is this your first time in juvenile hall?
Yes _____ No _____

17. List current charge(s) and priors.

18. Have you ever been to placement or any other type of external program?
Yes _____ No _____

REMORSEFULNESS

Answer these questions in terms of your most recent crime, not including violation of court orders.

19. Do you feel bad about the crime(s) you committed?
Yes _____ No _____
Why or why not? Explain. _____

20. If you could go back in time, would you do the crime again?
Yes _____ No _____
21. If you could get away with it, would you commit the crime again?
Yes _____ No _____
22. Do you ever think of your victim(s)?
Yes _____ No _____
23. Do you ever think of your victim's family?
Yes _____ No _____
24. If given the opportunity, would you contact your victim(s) family/friends?
Yes _____ No _____
If yes, what would you tell them. _____

25. Looking back, can you honestly say, you tried to benefit from chances that were given to you?
Yes _____ No _____
Explain. _____

26. Were you under the influence of drugs when you committed the crime?
Yes _____ No _____
27. Were you under the influence of alcohol when you committed the crime?
Yes _____ No _____
28. How did you feel while you were committing the current crime?
Explain. _____

29. In your own words, describe all the reasons why you did what you did.
Explain. _____

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

This study is designed to explore feelings of remorse in children who have committed violent acts against others. The study is being conducted by Arlene E. Garcia under the supervision of Dr. Ira Neighbors, a professor of Social Work at the California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study you will be asked to answer questions relating to family, gang participation, school, and feelings of remorse. The information you provide will be kept confidential. Data will be held in sealable envelopes in a file cabinet not accessible to others. Analyzed data will be reported in group form only.

Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty and to remove any data at any time during the study.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand the nature and purpose of this study. I freely consent to participate.

Participants signature

Date

APPENDIX C: DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

In this study, at no time did the researcher deceive or hoax you in any way. The data collected will be analyzed to discover and describe whether or not feelings of remorse exist in children who have committed violent criminal acts.

If you are interested in finding out the results of the study, you can obtain them by writing a letter to Ms. Arlene Garcia Box #79 at 900 E. Gilbert St. San Bernardino, CA. 92404. The results should be available in mid June, 1997. If you have any questions or concerns as a result of your participation in this study, you can write to Ms. Arlene Garcia at the address above or Dr. Ira Neighbors in the Social Work Department at 5500 University Drive San Bernardino , CA. 92407.

Also ,a Mental Health Referral Form is available to you through JJOP at the Juvenile Hall if you feel you need to talk to someone about how you are feeling.

Please do not reveal the nature of this study to other potential subjects.

INTEROFFICE MEMO

DATE January 27, 1997

PHONE

FROM Arlene Garcia, Group Counselor

MAIL CODE

TO Gary Paytas, Director I



SUBJECT Approval for Project Proposal

I am submitting this memo to request your approval to conduct a study here at juvenile hall. The study explores factors influencing whether or not children are remorseful after committing violent criminal acts against others.

I am currently a student at the California State University, San Bernardino working on my Masters Degree in Social Work. As a partial requirement for the degree, I must conduct a research project.

Attached is a copy of the anonymous survey which I would like to distribute to minor's on maximum security risk, who are currently housed in juvenile hall. I would like to begin collecting my data by February 13, 1997. If you could please notify me by letter of your decision before then, I would be most grateful.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact me at (818) 961-9124 or you can contact my research advisor, Dr. Neighbors at (909) 880-5565. Thank you for your time and cooperation

Approved by Claude Potts 1-29-97

Gary Paytas

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