IMPACT OF TRAUMA

Traumatic stress can interfere with a child’s physical, emotional and intellectual development. The Attorney General (AG) recognizes the epidemic levels of exposure to violence faced by our nation’s children. A 2009 DOJ study showed that more than 60 percent of the children surveyed were exposed to violence within the past year, either directly or indirectly. 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. Approximately 90 percent of juvenile detainees reported having experienced at least one traumatic event and 75 percent reported having been exposed to severe victimization. Additional statistics on girls in the juvenile justice system and sources for further information can be found in the first Federal Partners Report on Women and Trauma http://nicic.gov/Library/025082.

How a Trauma-Informed Approach Can Make a Difference

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides national leadership, coordination and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. OJJDP supports states and communities to improve the juvenile justice system so that it protects public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides effective and responsive treatment and rehabilitation. OJJDP recognizes the need to incorporate a trauma-informed approach in all aspects of programming. The AG’s Defending Childhood Initiative is at the forefront of this issue. The goals are to prevent children’s exposure to violence, mitigate the negative effects of exposure to violence, and develop knowledge and awareness about this issue. OJJDP supports the Defending Childhood Initiative’s trauma-informed approach by encouraging programs to improve the identification, screening, assessment, and referral of children and their families to appropriate programs and services; to increase access to and utilization of quality programs and services; and to develop new programs and services where gaps exist.
Major Accomplishments 2010-2013

In 2010, DOJ awarded grants to eight sites in cities and tribal communities to develop plans for comprehensive community-based efforts to further the goals of the Defending Childhood Initiative. Each of these sites received additional support in 2011 to help launch, sustain, and expand programs.

The final report of the AG’s Defending Childhood Task Force presents findings and policy recommendations, serving as a blueprint for preventing children’s exposure to violence and reducing its negative effects.

OJJDP and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation provided $2 million to support reforms in treatment and services for youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

In 2013 OJJDP will award funding to implement or enhance family drug courts for individuals with substance abuse disorders or co-occurring mental health disorders, including histories of trauma. Two additional OJJDP programs focusing on mental health and trauma are the Tribal Youth Program and the Second Chance Act Re-entry Program.

The OJJDP Suicide Prevention Task Force for Youth in Contact with the Juvenile Justice System is currently disseminating findings.

A study examining trauma assessment and treatment for youth in juvenile justice is currently underway in five Michigan counties. Outcomes to be measured include recidivism, academic standing, resilience, behavior, and trauma symptoms.

New Directions and Collaborations

OJJDP will implement the recommendations of the Defending Childhood Task Force, continue to support programs that mitigate the effects of trauma, and offer successful strategies to move the field in the direction of utilizing a trauma-informed approach when working with all children.

OJJDP supports a joint initiative of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and Yale University’s National Center for Children Exposed to Violence to better equip law enforcement professionals with information and tools to identify trauma and to use trauma-informed responses to violent events.

Additional Resources

Update contact: Stephanie.Rapp@usdoj.gov

www.ojjdp.gov

www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf


