

early childhood has not been shown to be an adequate explanation, in itself, of later criminal behaviour. Rather we have been struck by the degree to which such factors as: an inability to cope with life, family instability, the failure to develop controls against violent behaviour, low self-esteem caused by emotional privation, abuse or alcoholism, underlie both criminality and poverty. This does not mean to suggest either that poverty does not intensify these problems, or that the elimination of poverty would have no influence on the incidence of crime.

Alcoholic or Criminal Parents

145. Some witnesses speculated about the possible genetic link between alcoholic parents and delinquent children, particularly alcoholic fathers and delinquent sons. The genes that put a person at risk for certain types of alcoholism may express themselves in childhood by aggressiveness and by retarding the development of impulse control.¹⁰¹

146. The effect of alcoholic parents is primarily to multiply a child's risk of stress by lowering the socio-economic standing of the family, by producing marital discord and instability, and by precipitating violent confrontations or the sexual abuse of children.¹⁰² One of the most damaging consequences is role reversal in which a young child attempts to look after and protect the addicted parent. These prematurely grown-up children quickly learn not to trust their parents, other adults or society in general.¹⁰³

147. The chronic anti-social offender drinks an excessive amount of alcohol. The abuse of alcohol is associated with between 50 and 60 per cent of all violent crimes. In some cases alcohol can trigger paradoxical rage reactions which are "frequently of a murderous intent." These individuals can create a lethal situation in families with young children.¹⁰⁴

148. When there is alcoholism in the family, there is also emotional neglect of the child, because one or both parents may not be able to meet its emotional and physical needs.¹⁰⁵

"A home with an alcoholic parent is a dreary and difficult environment for children. They are immersed in confusion, groping for security. Unhappy within the home, they are often just as miserable outside it, exposed to taunts from schoolmates and pity from grownups. Fear, lack of sleep and food, and lack of guidance and normal family affection may make children withdrawn or openly hostile."¹⁰⁶

149. The personality features one finds in criminals are no different from those of abusive parents.¹⁰⁷ It is not surprising to find that children with a criminal father are more likely to be physically abused. Research has supported the observation that "in many instances delinquency and parental criminality and psychopathology represented a common underlying difficulty in adaption on the part of an entire family."¹⁰⁸