

Our study of influences in the prenatal period has indicated that this is an extremely important time, one of the "exquisite periods"¹⁸ in the formation of an individual, having great effect on the growing fetus, and potentially, on its future as an adult. The prenatal period is the time to begin preventive measures designed to eliminate or to reduce those factors which may later place a child at risk of developing a criminal lifestyle. It is essential that the prospective mother have regular access to medical advice and treatment and to an adequate diet for her own sake as well as for the sake of the child she may give birth to. It is equally important that parents-to-be receive instruction in child care and parenting. It is the opinion of the Committee that much more could be done to identify and to help both the parents and a child potentially at risk before, as well as after, the birth.

Experiences around the time of birth are also of extreme importance. During the birth process the brain of the infant may be permanently damaged by careless or improper procedures such as unnecessary use of forceps or induction of labour, or by the over-use of pain killing drugs and anaesthetics. The importance of the mother-child bond may still be subordinated to hospital routine and convenience even though the early development and maturation of this bond is critical, particularly in the case of premature infants. Failure of the bond will place the future of this parent-child relationship at risk. Every possible step must be taken to identify and provide assistance to the high risk parent, who may be very young, immature or resentful of the child.

The last half of the *Report* deals with the early childhood experiences which might lead a child into violent crime as an adult. The effect of the treatment of a child during the first years of his life has been compared to the pouring of cement: "If you do not mix the batch right, you are stuck with it and you have to go at it with a sledgehammer later, and it is a slow, difficult and almost impossible process. And in those first three years the cement is setting and you ought to set every priority aside and do your best".¹⁹ The Committee assessed many possible influences, including emotional privation, physical and psychological abuse, minimal brain damage and hyperkinesis, learning disabilities, television and poor social conditions. No single one was found sufficient, in itself, to cause violent criminal behaviour. Unquestionably, however, violence was the most direct link discovered.

Elimination of child abuse must become an urgent priority of the federal and provincial governments. The solution is not exclusively legal or a question of enforcement, it is also a matter of identifying at risk groups and of providing assistance to parents of difficult children or children with physical or mental handicaps. Child abuse is one form of violence in our society. If we are to curb violent crime, we must take a closer look at some of the presuppositions which have become built into our social values.