

The Committee often heard during its deliberations that the level of crime in a society cannot be separated from the social, economic and political milieu in which it occurs. Social science research has identified many interrelated factors in the social environment of persistent offenders that contribute to their criminality. These social factors, which are mainly evident in conditions of poverty and relative disadvantage, were identified to the Committee by witnesses from across the country.

A number of witnesses emphasized the relationship between dropping out of school and coming into contact with the juvenile justice system. Young people who cannot succeed in the classroom become discouraged and abandon their studies. They lack marketable skills in an economy that is experiencing de-industrialization and high unemployment. Unable to find work, some turn to crime.

In her submission to the Committee, Sharron Hilsen of the British Columbia Crime Prevention Association spoke of the connection between illiteracy, school failure, low self-esteem and crime:

... a lot of young offenders who are getting into trouble are ones who were identified in elementary school as not being good students, not able to read and write very well.

She added:

The education system is identifying these children, but the programs are not available to do anything about it, or they don't have enough special education people to work hands-on, one to one, to bring these children up to par. By the time they're in grade 8 or 9 they can't take it any longer and they drop out. (80:19)

Superintendent Randy Cunningham, of the Moncton Police Force, also emphasized the relationship between illiteracy, dropping out of school and crime. (72:29)

Dr. Irvin Waller, an active crime prevention proponent and a criminology professor with the University of Ottawa, informed the Committee that Canada is number two among the G-7 countries in levels of child poverty. In his view, this is one of the major factors contributing to Canada's current levels of interpersonal property crime and violence. (70:6)

Gloria Nicholson of the Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations Society told the Committee that the lack of available and affordable sports and recreation programs contributes to youth crime. She suggested that aboriginal youth socialize on the street, where the likelihood of becoming involved in criminal activity is high, because they have few positive alternatives. (82:23-24) Dr. Calvin Lee of the B.C. Coalition for Safer Communities also spoke of the role of recreational programs in developing resiliency in immigrant children undergoing the stress of relocation in a new country. (80:36)

Dr. Marc LeBlanc told the Committee that one of the causes of delinquency is inappropriate disciplinary methods of parents. Parents who use methods of discipline that lack consistency and coherence, and that are too punitive or, occasionally, too permissive, produce children who do not adapt well to the school environment and are likely to be delinquent. (75:13)