

"abused children are the most likely people to be violent". This statement "is well supported in the literature across the board, by police authorities, sociologists, anthropologists, neuropsychologists, medical doctors and, indeed, by law."³²

It is not only the battered child but the neglected one as well who runs a high risk of becoming a violent adult.³³

101. Child abuse does not happen in isolation. It is "part of a general cluster of characteristics which include family instability, minor criminal offenses, high mobility, unemployment, and general economic and social stress."³⁴ Extensive research has described some of the characteristics of the parents of abused children.

102. An important characteristic has to do with age and immaturity. The mothers are usually four years younger than the national average when they give birth to their first child.³⁵ In other words, they are immature and also unprepared for parenthood because they have not received any training in parenting. They rear their children the way they were reared by their parents: they have no other criteria for helping to shape the personality structure of their child as it should be developed. Emotional immaturity is often accompanied by poor knowledge of child development and unrealistic expectations of the child. This is one reason why it may be necessary to protect the child until the mother has the maturity and resources to cope with its demands.

103. Child abuse often occurs where there is a lack of family cohesiveness. A study found that almost one-third of the child-abusing mothers were unmarried; about 15 per cent of them had a very short acquaintance with their partners before marriage, and the biological father was absent from the home in over one-third of the cases.³⁶

104. In general, it found there was family discord and a likelihood of the break-up of the family unit. That means these children not only experienced physical abuse and all this implies in terms of potential brain damage and sensory deficit, but they would also very likely be reared in a one-parent family which may be unable to cope with them. Since about half of the mothers studied were of borderline or subnormal intelligence, it would be of no value to give them, for example, sophisticated psychotherapy and psychological supports when they did not have the intellectual resources to benefit from these forms of treatment: "What they basically need, . . . is the teaching of rudimentary concepts, such as how to rear a child, how to change a diaper, how to feed a child, and so forth."³⁷

These mothers have been thrust into the parental role well before they have developed any capacity to deal with it successfully.

105. This same study found a strikingly high level of personality disorders among abusive parents — 76 per cent of the mothers and 64