

**Revenue Maximization for Helping At-Risk Kids (H.A.R.K.):
Children Who Witness Violence in Jacksonville**

An Analysis of Local Data

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I. Introduction

Researchers focused on child abuse and domestic violence have recently turned their attention to the traumatic and life-altering effects of children being *witnesses* to violence. This research documents that the *witnessing* of violence by children often has the same detrimental effects as being a direct victim of it: specifically, increased risk of delinquency (especially violence), decreased academic performance, higher rates of drug use, elevated rates of teen pregnancy, and higher rates of arrest (Widom 1996).¹ “Children who witness violence experience higher levels of behavioral, social, and emotional problems than children who have not witnessed violence” (Kracke, 2001).² These children often suffer attachment disorders (they don’t trust people), they alternately lash-out-at or withdraw from those around them, fail in school, and most damaging of all, lose their self-esteem and come not to care about the future. As Jeffrey Edelson points out, “any definition of witnessing violence must include all of the various ways in which children experience a violent event. Children may see violence or be a direct part of it, but more often they may hear a violent event and experience its aftermath” (1999, p. 842).³ There are several stages to witnessing violence and several ways that children become aware of it.

The reality, of course, is that many children who witness violence also become victims of violence. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s 1998 “Safe Start Initiative,” for example, which targets children who witness violence, notes that there are between “3 and 10 million” child witnesses to violence in the home each year, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation suggests that violence in the home is the most under-reported of all crimes (Kracke 2001; Kelly, Thornberry & Smith 1997).⁴ Consequently, official statistics dramatically underestimate the actual levels of violence children experience. In short, measuring violence experienced by children is a very difficult thing to do—requiring the cooperation of multiple agencies with overlapping jurisdictions and distinct spheres of authority. We are grateful to Jay Plotkin, Keto Porter, Marlene

¹ Widom, C.S. (1994). *The Cycle of Violence*. Research Preview. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

² Kracke, Kristen (2001). *The “Green Book” Demonstration*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

³ Edleson, Jeffrey (1999). “Children’s Witnessing of Adult Domestic Violence.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Vol 14 No. 8 August: 839-870.

⁴ US Department of Justice, Federal Register (1998). *Safe Start Demonstration Project and Evaluation of the Safe Start Initiative*. Also: Kelly, B. , T Thornberry & C Smith (1997) *In the Wake of Childhood Maltreatment*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

Hayes, and Cathy Goldman of the State Attorney's Office for giving us access to these data and for the generous amount of time they spent answering my questions. I would also like to thank Judy Truett and Gayle Alston from the Department of Community Services, as well as Gail Patin from Hubbard House.

II. History of This Project

The first phase of this research project was devoted to bringing together various organizations (both governmental and private) serving abused children in the City of Jacksonville—to encourage them to learn more about one another and to collaborate on funding applications. This first, earlier, component of the project sought to identify areas of interest for collaboration among and between local service providers as well as to identify specific areas of interest. The Department of Community Services partnered with the University of North Florida and a small team of students and I gathered information regarding service organizations active in the City. Through archival research, interviews, and a survey we documented areas in which local organizations were active and wished to expand. This research culminated in an Implementation Luncheon in which we shared findings with representatives from approximately 30 agencies serving children in Jacksonville, including SHANDS Jacksonville Pediatric Injury Control System, Daniel inc., Duval County Public Health Department, Bridge Healthy Families, Community Connections/Healthy Families Jax, Hubbard House, and several others.

What emerged from this research with service providers was an awareness of the need to build funding proposals based on sound data collection and evaluation methods—as well as the need to more thoroughly identify “service populations” of needy residents. Without thorough documentation of *actual residents in need—before a project starts*--it is increasingly difficult to secure and justify funding from the federal government or even philanthropic foundations. Moreover, without a willingness to collaborate, share information—and indeed sometimes even resources—all but the largest service organizations are getting squeezed out of existence.

Today's second component of the project documents and profiles a specific population of “at risk kids” in our community. The data presented here offer a clear “demonstration of need”—and reveal a matter of concern for local government including education, public health, and criminal justice.

III. Revenue Maximization for Helping At Risk Kids (H.A.R.K.): Children Who Witness Violence in Jacksonville

2 Tasks for Revenue Maximization: “Demonstrate Need” and “Encourage Collaboration”

As the recent US Dept of Justice *Safe Start Demonstration Project* documents:

According to the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, more than 90 percent of children who were abused or neglected did not get the services they needed ...Services are crisis oriented and divide children and families into distinct, often arbitrary categories (Safe Start Demonstration Project).

Florida has been particularly hard hit by this problem in recent years, as local jurisdictions have been asked to shoulder larger and larger portions of the expense for social services. According to the *United Way of Florida* and *Florida Children’s Services Councils*:

Each year, Congress appropriates billions of dollars to individual states for specific health and human services. Many of these funds are made available to states only on a matching basis—with the state receiving \$1.00 (or sometimes more) for every \$1.00 it puts up as match. Florida fails to draw down millions of dollars annually because it does not have state general revenue match funding available.

In an effort to better position the State of Florida to acquire needed resources to serve at risk children, “revenue maximization” strategies are being developed to increase resources for programming. “Revenue maximization” involves the development of strategies to identify and claim these federal funds as reimbursement for the broadest scope of eligible services and clients. It is the coordinated effort to draw down—by using local matching dollars—as much federal money as possible to address local critical human services needs. This study is a local example of a statewide realization that broader, more scientifically grounded and collaborative efforts are going to be necessary to bring more resources into the City for serving at risk

children. The Helping At Risk Kids (H.A.R.K.) project seeks to track and identify juvenile witnesses of violence for the purposes of early intervention, counseling, and *prevention*.

Facts & Issues:

In February 1994, Harry Shorstein, the Duval County State’s Attorney, directed his office to expand services offered to victims of domestic violence. “In addition to aggressively prosecuting anyone who abuses a child, we also seek to address the psychological needs of children in abusive homes” (Shorstein 2001).⁵ Writes Shorstein:

The Help-At-Risk Kids (HARK) Program is an intervention program for children in abusive homes, run by the Hubbard House domestic violence center. My office requested Hubbard House design a curriculum for children of all ages exposed to domestic violence and assisted in obtaining funding to implement the program. HARK was the first program of its kind in the nation (Shorstein 2001).

IV. The HARK Curriculum: Intervening with Children who Witness Violence

- Referrals to the *Helping-At-Risk-Kids* (H.A.R.K.) program
 - Hubbard House- full service domestic violence center
 - 10-week age-appropriate curriculum (age 3-17)
 - Program goals
 - Educate children about violence/abuse
 - Teach non-violent methods to communicate and solve problems
 - Help to break cycle of violence
 - Develop plans for safe living
 - Build higher self-esteem

⁵ Shorstein, Harry L. (2001) “Statement on Juvenile Justice.” Jacksonville, FL: State Attorney Fourth Judicial Circuit.

- Who is referred to H.A.R.K.?
 - Children in homes where domestic violence has occurred
 - Tracking of witnesses with the State Attorney Juvenile Witness Screen for the purposes of early intervention, counseling, protective monitoring; monitored through police reports. Went online in 1995 and continues to this day.
 - Juvenile delinquents with documented home violence
 - H.A.R.K. as part of juvenile adjudication when it becomes clear that violence has been a part of the child's experience

V. Data Included

- Statistical analysis of over 10,000 cases of documented juvenile witnessings of violence in Jacksonville, Florida from 1995–2003.
- Specific numbers of juvenile witnesses of violence broken down by specific zip code, race and gender of juvenile witnesses.
- Uses US Census tract data to further profile highest frequency juvenile witness areas, by race and gender of witness, per capita income of highest frequency census tracts, % high school dropout in highest frequency census tracts, % college enrolled in highest frequency census tracts, and subsequent arrest percentages.⁶
- Average Age of Jacksonville juvenile witnesses of violence, 1995 - 2003: 9.92 yrs.
- Investigates the relationship between witnessing violence and subsequent arrest.

⁶ Subsequent arrest data first appeared in: Goldman, Cathy C., Michael D. White & Michael A. Hallett (2003). "Innovations in Early Interventions for At-Risk Kids: A Prosecutor's Perspective." Paper presented at the 2003 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences Meeting, Boston, MA.

VI. Findings

- Juvenile witnesses of violence in Jacksonville are disproportionately African-American and live in neighborhoods with comparatively lower per capita incomes.
- As a whole, male and female children are roughly equal in the overall number of witness incidents, however, gender proportions of witnesses vary dramatically by zip code.
- Children who witness 3 or more instances of violence have a higher subsequent arrest rate than children who witness 1-2 instances of violence.
- Generally in the data, as per capita income goes up, the number of juvenile witnesses goes down (based on US Census tract data for highest frequency street addresses in zip code).
- Generally in the data, as percentage of population enrolled in college goes up, the number of juvenile witnesses goes down (based on US Census tract data for highest frequency street addresses in zip code).
- Generally in the data, as percentage of 16 – 19 year olds with no high school diploma and currently not enrolled in school (“high school dropouts”) goes down, so too does the number of juvenile witnesses to violence (based on US Census tract data for highest frequency street addresses in zip code).

VII. Conclusion & Two Primary Recommendations

As the US Department of Justice puts it, research documents that “the emotional consequences of viewing or hearing violent acts may often have the same lasting effects on children as being a direct victim of violence.”⁷ In sum, children who experience violence—especially those who experience it repeatedly—suffer from a greatly elevated risk of arrest and other negative outcomes such as poor school performance, teen pregnancy, and drug

⁷ Kracke, Kristen (2001). *Children’s Exposure to Violence: The Safe Start Initiative*. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Justice.

abuse.⁸ Findings from this study parallel those from research conducted elsewhere in the country.

Recommendation 1:

Due to the dramatic difference in arrest rates between juveniles who witness 1-2 instances of violence as compared to those who witness 3 or more, specific effort and attention should be devoted to early intervention with these highest frequency witnesses. These children should become a top priority for the H.A.R.K. program and for the City of Jacksonville. Focus group interviews with community leaders and residents from these areas should be the first part of this initiative.

Recommendation 2:

Because the highest frequency witnesses are disproportionately concentrated in five (5) of the thirty (30) zip codes examined, it is probable that a relatively modest investment targeted at these five areas would disproportionately lower the rate at which juveniles witness violence in Jacksonville—and also the rate at which these children are subsequently arrested. Results of these efforts can be easily measured in a follow up evaluation conducted by the City.

Steps For Additional Research on Jacksonville HARK Data

- Assess the impact of participation in H.A.R.K.: Answer the question: “Do children who participate in H.A.R.K. program have lower arrest rates, higher school performance, etc.?”
- More thorough examination of timeline of witnessing violence and subsequent delinquent behavior.
- Investigate types of subsequent arrest (e.g., person, property, drug, etc.).
- Understand and control for group differences in race and gender.

⁸ *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect* by Cynthia Crosson-Tower. (2002) 5th Ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. pps 114-115