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MEDIA RELEASE

Child neglect: Its causes and its role in delinquency

Child neglect is more likely to lead to juvenile delinquency than drug use or poor school performance, according to a review of the national and international evidence on family factors and juvenile delinquency released today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

The review highlights the fact that (among family factors) the most powerful predictors of juvenile delinquency are poor parental supervision of children, parental rejection of children, rejection of the parent by a child and little parent-child involvement.

The review also highlights a number of parenting factors which, it says, have been found to contribute to the risk of child neglect. These include economic hardship, inadequate housing, parental substance abuse, lack of parental education and parental psychiatric disturbance, particularly depression.

However child factors also appear to play some role in shaping the risk of neglect. The risk of child neglect is higher, for instance, among families with children who are physically handicapped, drug-exposed or who are seen by their parents as difficult and/or antisocial.

The strength of a parent's social network appears to play an important role in reducing the risk of child neglect. Parents who can call upon relatives, friends and neighbours for support are less likely to neglect their children than parents who lack a strong social support network.

The Bureau's review argues that Government investment in services designed to reduce the incidence of child neglect should be an essential part of any long-term strategy for reducing the rate of initiation into crime.

The goal of long term crime prevention policy should be to:

- improve the economic well-being of families, particularly those with several dependent children,
- reduce the burden of child care and increase the availability of practical support,
- reduce social isolation,
- enhance parental skill in coping with the stresses of infant and child care, especially where the child has been drug exposed or suffers some form of disability.

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