Trends in Childhood Adversity and Trauma

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University of New Hampshire

Maine Child Welfare Education Annual Conference

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We analyzed 53 years of mass shooting data. Attacks aren’t just increasing, they’re getting deadlier.

The validation process is self-sustaining. Like genre conventions in movies and pop culture, mass shooters today are conforming to expectations of what mass shooters do. They post their pet ideologies on the internet, use similar-style assault rifles, and try to top the death count of those who came before.

We too are conforming. Politicians and civic leaders offer thoughts and prayers. The media feature the victims’ families, cover the funerals and probe the killers’ backgrounds. And we try to “harden” targets, putting children through rituals of lockdown drills and equipping them with bulletproof backpacks for school.

Studies estimate that in the aftermath of their attacks, mass killers receive approximately $75 million in free media coverage, a level professional athletes and Hollywood actors would envy. For men who feel angry, alienated and anonymous, the incentives to perform are appealing. And bigger body counts mean bigger headlines. One recently thwarted shooter posted that, “A good 100 kills would be nice,” and another wanted to “break a world record.”

And, as we wrote in another L.A. Times op-ed last month, contagion is only one part of the complex mass shooter story. At a time when childhood trauma is rising, more young men are angry or in suicidal crisis, and access to highly lethal firearms has never been easier. Lots of research has gone into copycat suicides and how to prevent them. We should treat mass shootings the same. In this case, suicide and homicide are different sides of the same coin.

Mass shootings are growing in number and impact but they are not an inevitable fact of American life. They demand action. We must challenge any rhetoric that endorses hate and violence, change the blueprint we are handing our children, and step-by-step, rewrite the U.S. violence script.

James Densley is a sociologist and professor of criminal justice at Metropolitan State University. Jillian Peterson is a psychologist and professor of criminology and criminal justice at Hamline University. They run the Violence Project.

“The epidemiologic shift, signified by the increasing number of children with obesity, ADHD, asthma, and other less severe chronic conditions, seems to be associated with a shift in the social ecology of childhood. This changing ecology includes exposures to higher levels of toxic stress...”
High Toxicity Adverse Experiences with 20 Year Trend Data

- Parental death
- Parental illness, incapacity
- Sibling death
- Parental substance abuse
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Family poverty
- Parental divorce
- Parental incarceration
- Serious childhood illness
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Bullying
- Exposure to community violence
Maternal Death, 1900-97

Down 99%

Tuberculosis Deaths, 1900-2010

Sibling deaths, 1832-2016

Child mortality
Shown is the share of children (born alive) who die before they are five years old.

Source: Gapminder (2017) & UN IGME (2018)
Alcoholic Liver Disease, 1910-2006

Alcoholism: Cirrhosis deaths 1970-2009

Figure 3. Age-specific death rates of liver cirrhosis, United States, 1970–2009.

ED visits involving misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals more than doubled from 2004 through 2011, while ED visits involving adverse reactions remained level during the past few years after increasing about 80 percent from 2005 through 2009. ED visits involving use of illicit drugs were relatively stable from 2004 through 2009, but increased about 25 percent from 2009 through 2011.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Drug Abuse Warning Network, 2004–2011

https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhcs/ED_Substance_Abuse_Factsheet.PDF
Trends in Incarceration to 1980

About half of all inmates have at least one child.

7 percent of children under age 18 have experienced the incarceration of a parent with whom they live.

Figure 8. Percentage of Children Ages 0-17 in Poverty, Using the Alternative Poverty Measure, 1967-2012

Note: Transfers include SNAP, housing subsidies, school lunch, LIHEAP, WIC, EITC and stimulus payments, cash welfare, SSI, Social Security, unemployment insurance, worker’s compensation, and veteran’s payments.

Trends in Child Poverty to 2018

Figure 5.
Poverty Rates Using the Official and Supplemental Poverty Measures by Age Group: 2009 to 2018

- Traditional income questions
- Redesigned income questions
- Updated processing system

Under 18 years

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<td>2018</td>
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Exposure to Domestic Violence, 1990-2013

Figure 2

Recent Trend in Divorce to 2018


Trends in Hospitalization, 2000-15
(excludes newborns)

18-44
Under 18

Physical Abuse, 1990-2017

Physical Abuse Substantiations CPS: 1990-2017

Physical Abuse:
53% Decline

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Updated%20trends%202017_ks.pdf
Corporal Punishment, 1975-2014

Figure 3. Trend in Past Year Spanking of 3-11 Year olds from 4 National Surveys

- 1975: Straus & Gelles (77%)
- 1985: Gelles & Straus (77%)
- 1995: Gallup (65%)
- 2014: NatSCEV (49%)
Corporal Punishment in Schools

Fig. 1.2 Number of states allowing corporal punishment in public schools by year. Note New Jersey banned school corporal punishment in 1867.
Sexual Abuse, 1990-2017

Sexual Abuse Substantiations CPS: 1990-2017

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Updated%20trends%202017_ks.pdf
Sexual abuse, 1992-2016

6th, 9th, 12th graders
Minnesota Student Survey

Down 56%

Been touched or forced to touch sexually against wishes by adult or other person outside family

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<tr>
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<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
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Down 45%

Been touched or forced to touch sexually by an older or stronger member of the family

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</table>
Neglect, 1990-2017

Neglect Substantiations CPS: 1990-2017

Neglect: 12%
Decline

http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Updated%20trends%202017_ks.pdf
Kennedy, R. Bullying trends in the United States: A meta-regression (Forthcoming). *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse.*
Exposure to Violent Crime, 1990-2017

Violent Crime Rate

Down 48%
Adverse Experiences: Summary

- Parental death
- Parental illness, incapacity
- Sibling death
- Parental alcohol abuse
- Parental drug abuse
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Family poverty
- Parental divorce
- Parental incarceration
- Serious childhood illness
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Bullying
- Exposure to community violence
Temporal trends in adolescents’ self-reported psychosomatic health complaints from 1980-2016: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Thomas Potrebny¹ *, Nora Wium², Margrethe Moss-Iversen Lundegård¹

¹. Centre for Evidence-Based Practice, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Hordaland

"broad operationalization of psychosomatic health complaints, i.e., measures of both psychological and somatic complaints"

"Some regions showed an increasing trend (Western Europe, Northern Europe and New Zealand and Israel), while others showed a more stable or decreasing trend (Eastern Europe, Southern Europe and North America). However, findings from the subgroup analysis only support a significant increasing trend in Northern Europe"

North America. 13 studies. OR = .98 (slight NS decline)
"For both children and toddlers, recent cohorts did not exhibit worsening of mental health symptoms. In adolescents, the burden of externalizing problems appear to be stable. However, the majority of studies report an increase in internalizing problems in adolescent girls."
Mental Health Trend Evidence is Weak

- Not a lot of data points
- Variety of measures
- Many measures are not validated to diagnoses
- Could be influenced by sampling biases
- Could be influenced by greater awareness
Youth Suicide, 1975-2015


Suicide Up 72% Since 2007
Child Suicide down 10% in 2019

Child Suicide 2007 - 2019

Deaths per 100,000

2007: 1.13
2008: 1.33
2009: 1.43
2010: 1.36
2011: 1.53
2012: 1.59
2013: 1.70
2014: 1.83
2015: 1.90
2016: 2.08
2017: 2.42
2018: 2.50
2019: 2.25

Crude Rate

david.stein@email.cz
U.S. Suicides Declined Over All in 2020 but May Have Risen Among People of Color

Despite dire predictions, the number of suicides fell by 5 percent over all. Still, smaller studies suggested the trends were much worse among nonwhite Americans.
Attempts up 14%

Percentage of Students in Grades 9 through 12 Who Report They Thought Seriously About Attempting Suicide, Attempted Suicide, and That Their Suicide Attempts Required Medical Attention: 1991-2017

- Thought Seriously About Attempting Suicide
- Attempted Suicide
- Suicide Attempt Required Medical Attention

1 In the last 12 months.
Trend in Delinquency, 1980-2017

Note: Rates are arrests of persons ages 10-17 per 100,000 persons ages 10-17 in the resident population.

Trend in Serious Assault, 1980-17

Note: Rates are arrests of persons ages 10-17 per 100,000 persons ages 10-17 in the resident population.

Percentage of High School Students Who Were in a Physical Fight, *1991-2017†

*One or more times during the 12 months before the survey
†Decreased 1991-2017, decreased 1991-2011, decreased 2011-2017 [Based on linear and quadratic trend analyses using logistic regression models controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade (p < 0.05). Significant linear trends (if present) across all available years are described first followed by linear changes in each segment of significant quadratic trends (if present).]
Note: This graph contains weighted results.

Trends for Youth in Custody, 1997-2015

Juveniles in Residential Placement per 100,000 Population, by Race and Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1997-2015

- Total
- Non-Hispanic white
- Non-Hispanic black
- Hispanic

Down 57% for all, 55% for blacks

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1 The Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement collects data from all juvenile residential custody facilities in the United States, asking for information on each youth assigned a bed in the facility on the last Wednesday in October. Residential facilities include detention centers, shelters, reception/diagnostic centers, group homes, boot camps, ranch/wilderness camps, residential treatment centers, and long-term secure facilities.

2 Rates are calculated per 100,000 juveniles ages 10 through the upper age of each state’s juvenile court jurisdiction.

Trends in Alcohol Misuse, 1976-2017

Percentage of Students Who Report Binge Drinking, by Grade: Selected Years, 1976-2017

- Eighth grade
- Tenth grade
- Twelfth grade

Down 59%
1981-2017

1 Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a row at least once in the prior two-week period.


Percentage of Eighth, Tenth, and Twelfth Graders Who Report They Used Any Illicit Drugs Other than Marijuana\(^1\) in the Past Year, by Grade: 1975-2017

- Eighth grade
- Tenth grade
- Twelfth grade

Down 59% from ‘82
Down 36% from ‘02
Trends in Reading and Math Test Scores

Summary

- More improvements than deteriorations in ACE type traumatic experiences
- Little improvement in self-report MH symptoms
- Recent increase in suicide and related measures
- Big declines in delinquency
- Big declines in teen alcohol and drug misuse
ACE reduction is a worthy accomplishment

Whether or not

It produces evident mental and physical health benefits
New Popular Presumed Child Trauma Culprits

- Technology
  - Cyber-bullying
  - Declining face-to-face social interaction
  - Fear of missing out (FOMO)
  - Sleep deprivation

- Achievement pressures
- Helicopter parenting
- Nature deficit
- Income inequality
- Too much empty praise

- Less well operationalized, often not measured
- Lacking existential threat qualities
  - Loss, abandonment, fear of death, overwhelm of coping resources
Technology as Culprit: the Claim

• “Between 2011 and 2018, rates of depression, self-harm, and suicide attempts [survey self-report measures] increased substantially among U.S. adolescents. Although technology use is not the cause of most depression, increased time spent on technology and the technological environment may be causes of the sudden increase in depression since 2011.

• Twenge, J. M. (2019). Why increases in adolescent depression may be linked to the technological environment. *Current opinion in psychology.*
Technology as Culprit: the Counter

- Social-media use did not predict depressive symptoms over time for males or females. However, greater depressive symptoms predicted more frequent social-media use only among adolescent girls Heffer, T., Good, M., Daly, O., MacDonell, E., & Willoughby, T. (2019). The Longitudinal Association Between Social-Media Use and Depressive Symptoms Among Adolescents and Young Adults: An Empirical Reply to Twenge et al.(2018). Clinical Psychological Science, 7(3), 462-470.

- We found that social media use is not, in and of itself, a strong predictor of life satisfaction across the adolescent population. Social media’s enduring effect on adolescent life satisfaction A Orben, T Dienlin, AK Przybylski - Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2019

- There is little clear-cut evidence that screen time decreases adolescent well-being. Screens, teens, and psychological well-being: evidence from three time-use-diary studies A Orben, AK Przybylski - Psychological science, 2019

- Cyberbullying accounted for a very small share of variance after adjustment for offline bullying and other covariates Cyberbullying and adolescent well-being in England: a population-based cross-sectional study AK Przybylski, L Bowes - The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health, 2017
Why Pessimism Prevails
Influences that Bias Intuitions about Adversity Trends

• Media bias to problems and deteriorations
• Social problem entrepreneurs
• Techno-panic “juvenoia”
• Innate parental protectiveness
• Domination of clinical perspective in social science
Where child mortality is above or below average

From 2001 to 2010, the child mortality rate (for ages 1 to 19) in the US was significantly higher than the combined average of all 20 wealthy OECD countries in a recent study. Here is a look at where each country ranks, compared with that overall average.

The table below ranks 29 developed countries according to the overall well-being of their children. Each country’s overall rank is based on its average ranking for the five dimensions of child well-being considered in this review.

A light blue background indicates a place in the top third of the table, mid blue denote the middle third, and dark blue the bottom third.

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Lock of data on a number of indicators means that the following countries, although OECD and/or EU members, could not be included in the league table of child well-being: Austria, Belgium, Chile, Cyprus, Ireland, Japan, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and Turkey.
Where US Lags Internationally

- Infant and child mortality
- Child poverty
- Low birthweight
- Childhood obesity
- Reading & math scores
- Teen pregnancy
The End

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www.unh.edu/ccrc