

Crime Impacted Children
Restorative Justice Conference
Dalhousie University, Halifax

Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW

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www.robertswright.ca

Bellemare & Wright, 2007

- Drug Endangered Children: A Unique Child Protection Issue
- Presented at Grand Rounds at the IWK Nov. 2007

Drug Endangered Child

“A drug endangered child is a person, under the age of 18, who lives in or is exposed to an environment where drugs, including pharmaceuticals, are illegally used, possessed, trafficked, diverted, and/or manufactured and, as a result of that environment: the child experiences, or is at risk of experiencing, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; . . . , medical, educational, emotional, or physical harm, including harm resulting or possibly resulting from neglect; or the child is forced to participate in illegal or sexual activity in exchange for drugs or in exchange for money likely to be used to purchase drugs.”

Federal Interagency Task Force for
Drug Endangered Children (2010)

Wright, 2013

- Impact of Race and Culture on Crime – a presentencing assessment of an African Nova Scotian

Criminally Impacted Child

A child who lives in or is exposed to an environment which is a centre for the planning and commission of criminal activities or who resides with caregivers who are significantly engaged in criminal behaviour such that the child experiences or is at risk of experiencing physical, sexual, or emotional abuse including exposure to violence; the child experiences, or is at risk of experiencing, medical, educational, emotional, social, or physical harm, including harm resulting or possibly resulting from neglect; or the child is forced, socialized or encouraged to participate in criminal activity as a means of supporting themselves and their families or in support of a criminal organization.

Robert S. Wright, 2013

Criminally Impacted Child - 2

In addition, children in such environments are often missing the kinds of supports and care that nurtures the earliest building blocks of psychosocial development: attachment, emotional stability, impulse regulation, initiative and industry (the building blocks of self-esteem), ability to manage peer relationships, and ability to manage and appropriately meet sexual and relational needs.

Robert S. Wright

9 Years in the Life of a Meth Addict

1996



1997



1998



1999



2000



2001



2002



2003



2004



2005



Imagine the Life of the Child in Her Care

Child Protection Considerations

- Drug Use/Production/Distribution and other Crime does not necessarily result in CP concern
- Observable connection between drugs and legislative CP concerns must be established

Inadequacy of CP Response

- Child welfare legislation rightly places a high threshold on the level of evidence required to intervene
- DE/CI children are often ignored until they exhibit the behavioural signs of chronic emotional harm: Criminal, violent, sexually aggressive, self-abusive, suicidal, sociopathic, etc.
- Behaviour attributable to trauma, neglect and social deprivation is often mis-diagnosed as ADHD, conduct disorder, etc.

Inadequacy of Current Response

- These children should not be invisible to us. Pre-natal, maternity, postnatal, immunization, early childhood, public schools; all well attended.
- Unfortunately social stigma and punitive response causes such families to hide from service providers

Harm Reduction/Social Engagement

- Given that DE/CI children and their families regularly interact with health and education services, these children and their families could be readily served if engaged
- This would require a restorative rather than punitive approach

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