Chapter Summaries

1 Children Living In A Violent World?

Summary

- Defining violence is not straightforward because what is considered to be violent changes over time, across cultures, according to context and according to whose voices matter in defining what is legitimate, normalized or abuse.
- What counts as crime and as violence has been largely defined by adults so that official statistics tend to measure and report on crimes that concern adults.
- Children's experiences of violence and crime need to be understood developmentally, taking into account the dependency and power relationships that often exist between the perpetrator and victim.
- Risks of abuse and victimization for children and young people from different perpetrators vary across the life course. However, peers and known adults are more frequently perpetrators than are predatory 'strangers'.
- Information on crimes by children and young people tends to be collected separately from information on experiences of victimization, yet, as will be shown in later chapters, bullying research suggests that young people do not always fit neatly into the distinct groups of being either a victim or a perpetrator. Practitioners need to be alert to the overlapping aspects of experiences of violence and abuse.
2 Why Are Some Children Violent?

Summary

- Crime is strongly linked with youthfulness and masculinity but the majority of children and young people are law-abiding and children are more victimized than victimizing towards others.
- Only a minority of children and young people break the law. Most offences are trivial and not repeated.
- The 4 per cent of young people who are prolific offenders have lived with a high level of poverty, disadvantage and abuse. Maltreatment in childhood has a greater impact on subsequent delinquency and violence by females than it has on males.
- A range of different approaches have developed to explain the causes of crime, violence and aggression in childhood. These vary in their focus on explaining the development of criminal behaviour, the process of criminalization and the social construction of childhood violence.
- Recent approaches in developmental criminology take a more integrated approach, tend to be less deterministic and emphasize a range of different risks and protective factors known to be associated with persistent, prolific offending.
3 What Causes Child Maltreatment?

Summary

• Single-factor explanations of the causes of child maltreatment cannot explain adequately why some children and young people experience abuse and victimization while others do not, although psychological and socio-psychological research such as research on attachment has practical value in its potential to support loving and secure relationships between parents and children.

• Integrative theories have helped us to understand the complexity of individual children’s experiences of maltreatment and these can provide a useful framework for assessment of the child’s needs, vulnerabilities and protective factors in the network of social relationships. Ending child abuse however will require more than tackling a list of individual and environmental risks.

• Structural factors, such as the status of children, poverty, inequality and gender, create conditions in which maltreatment flourishes. Awareness of these factors is highly relevant to intervention and professional practice.

• Child maltreatment is not a historically new invention but our efforts to control it can contribute to the problem.
Summary

- Victimization and maltreatment in childhood can have short-term and lasting adverse consequences for health, mental health and well-being that continue into adulthood.
- It is the emotional and psychological impact of victimization rather than the physical injuries which most often debilitates and disadvantages individuals.
- In the context of developmental and structured dependency, where there are material and emotional ties between the perpetrator and victim, victimization and maltreatment can be difficult for the person affected to name and to position as abusive.
- Children and young people who experience physical violence, child maltreatment or sexual abuse are vulnerable to re-victimization and to polyvictimization so that they experience victimization at home, in the school and in the community. Children who are polyvictims have the highest levels of trauma impact.
- Almost half of all maltreated children show no psychopathology in childhood and nearly one-third show no signs of mental ill-health in adulthood.
- Children’s ability to overcome adversity and trauma varies according to the interaction between individual, family and community factors that are protective assets (coping strategies, emotional and social support, the availability of love and care from an adult, etc.) or vulnerabilities, risks and disadvantages.
- Emotional support, friendships, sense of self-worth and achievement and adopting a ‘survivor’ perspective are important aspects in overcoming adversity and trauma.
- Research with children and young people shows that there are barriers to disclosure; however, when children do tell adults, adults do not always hear, listen or act appropriately, and this can increase feelings of isolation, stigma and powerlessness.
5 Villains and Victims

Summary

- Research shows that the general public perceive the youth rates of violence, crime and antisocial behaviour to be higher than the rates reported to the British Crime Survey.
- The media and campaigning organizations have influenced public perceptions of violence and young people by focusing on rare and sensationalist events such as homicides or extreme cases of child abuse.
- Representations of children and young people as victims or villains has consequences for the well-being of children and young people—their experiences of violence are misrepresented, and over-simplified accounts of the causes and consequences hinder progress in policy and practice.
6 Behaving Badly

Summary

• Public policy responses polarize children as either villains or victims so that children and young people who are both victimized and victimizer may have their needs overlooked.
• Media coverage of youth violence generates emotive responses from the general public which have been exploited by politicians and helped to create an increasingly punitive approach to young offenders.
• Balancing the welfare and needs of offenders with justice for victims and public protection is inherently difficult. Mixed objectives in youth justice responses have made it difficult to identify impact and measure outcomes.
• Adult concerns about the commercialization and sexualization of childhood have brought new efforts to regulate. It is important that decisions about improving safety in cyberspace are made in consultation with children and young people, and draw upon research about the risks and impact upon young people's lives.
Summary

- Much of the recent history of child protection has focused on delivering services rather than on what it means for children to be safe. Child well-being measures provide an opportunity to look at being safe from a child’s point of view.
- Maltreatment can be identified from physical, developmental or behavioural indicators, a child’s disclosure or a report made to an agency such as the police or children’s social care. A number of barriers operate against identification including poor recognition and information sharing between agencies that are collectively responsible for providing services.
- In contrast to media and campaigning messages about children and violence it is the complexity and uncertainty of working with maltreatment that has been a major area of concern for social work. Problems with under-recognition and misdiagnosis have been regular features of child protection enquiries.
- The focus of children’s policy in England has expanded from protecting children from harm to include safeguarding and promoting welfare, to tackling social exclusion, prevention and ensuring that children have a ‘good childhood’.
- Cross-national research shows a convergence in approaches to children’s welfare policies across Europe and a stronger emphasis than before on promoting children’s rights.
- Measuring the impact of policy on children’s safety from harm is difficult and the focus has been mostly on quantitative measures and performance monitoring. Despite good intentions these seem to have had a detrimental effect on practice.
- Recent policy provides an opportunity for a much greater level of participation by children and young people themselves in defining needs and having a say in services.
- There is scope to build on learning about what needs to be done to work with children and young people to build social support, social capital and to create the conditions and relationships that foster trusting and safe communities.