

# ***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES***

## **The Role of Peer Group Influence on Juvenile Delinquency: A Case of Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe (2011-2014)**

**Gombarume Fungai Brian**

Lecturer, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Faculty of Commerce,  
Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe

**Chiangwa Nyaradzo**

Former Student, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies, Faculty of Commerce,  
Bindura University of Science Education, Bindura, Zimbabwe

### ***Abstract:***

*This study sought to investigate group peer influence on child delinquency and was confined to Harare Metropolitan Province. The study population was 120 participants composed of 50 juveniles and 70 adults whose duties involve dealing with juveniles. Data for the study was obtained using questionnaires and interviews. The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between peer influence and child delinquency. It also emerged that the rate of child delinquency is on the increase but statistics on the nature and extent of delinquency is scanty as police statistics are not very reliable to this effect. The major conclusion drawn is that the family has failed to take its centre role in properly nurturing the child. The study recommends introduction of family intervention strategies and youth empowerment programs to drive youths away from the streets.*

**Keywords:** Juvenile, delinquency, peer group, influence and Zimbabwe.

### **1. Background of the Study**

Until fairly recent times, there was little difference between adult and child justice system. Age was only considered in terms of appropriate punishment and juveniles were eligible for the same punishment as adults which included death penalty (Ramirez, 2006). In Zimbabwe, the country introduced a pre-trial diversion program in 2011 for juvenile offenders targeting the below 21 years' age group who will have committed petty offences attracting sentencing of 12 months and below. Hess and Drowns (2010) opined that if the offences committed by juveniles are not brought under control, the juveniles will graduate into seasoned criminals. To the contrary, Kasser (2011) opines that all children if properly nurtured are possible future leaders. Corsaro and Johannesen (2007) agree when they say children should be allowed to interact with their environment to demonstrate and reinforce their creative power. Children also require requisite guidance and direction to be conditioned to good modes of conduct so as to refrain from destructive ways of life (Nukunya, 2003). According to Borbour and Scully (2002) juveniles often joins a group that readily accepts them when the need for affiliation and closeness is greater than the need to do the right thing. Peer group influence has been recognized as a powerful socializing agent from the traditional societies to the modern day ones (Tizifa, 1993). Peer group influence is a common source for the involvement in negative activities for adolescence and friends influence is a major factor in the adolescence involvement in juvenile delinquency (Berndt, 1996).

### **2. Research Questions**

1. This study was guided by the following research questions:
2. Is peer group pressure to blame for juvenile delinquencies in Harare Metropolitan province?
3. What is the nature and extent of juvenile delinquency in Harare Metropolitan Province?
4. How does juvenile delinquency impact on its perpetrators?
5. What strategies can the authorities in Harare metropolitan Province adopt to curb juvenile delinquency and its impacts on the juveniles?

### **3. Literature Review**

Studies from across the social and developmental sciences have long agreed that peers and peer relations are developmentally significant in the lives of the youth and the young adults (Sussman et al 2007). The youth's developmental trajectory may be explained by his or her peer group (Crosnoe and Mc Neely, 2008).

### 3.1. Theories of Delinquency

#### 3.1.1. Social Learning

Akers (1973) opined that the social learning behavior produces both conforming and deviant behaviors.

#### 3.1.2. Differential Association

This is achieved through direct association and interaction with others who engage in certain behaviors as well as indirect association and identification with more distant reference groups (Akers and Sellers, 2004). Sutherland (1939) argued that young people develop their attitudes and skills necessary to become delinquency through their sustained contact with other individuals who harbor the norms of delinquency. This is an indication that adolescence exposed to delinquent attitudes and skills increases in their propensity to emulate such behaviors with the passage of time (Bandura, 1997). The exposure to delinquent peer's increases during the adolescence, and this increased exposure to delinquent peers results in a sharp increase in the adolescence's own delinquent behavior (Elliot and Menard, 1991; Babour and Scully 2002).

Premised on the belief that delinquency is determined by the association with the significant ones and the contacts supporting it are more than those opposing it then the juvenile is likely to be delinquent (Regoli et al 2008). Therefore, when adolescents maintain association with their deviant peer compatriots, the relationship provides a fertile ground for them to also develop and maintain delinquent behaviors (Keijsers et al, 2010). Agrew (1992) views exposure to a delinquent role model as a significant factor influencing adolescents' disposition to delinquents and predicts that adolescence facing exposure to delinquent peers and peer pressure will be more likely to respond to strain with delinquents than youths that are insulated from these peer influences.

Akers and Sellers (2004) postulate that definitions of attitude and values are learned and reinforced through the process of differential association. Imitations also influence juvenile behavior in a positive or negative way (Donnertsein and Linz, 1999; Mc Gloin and Shermer, 2009). Imitation has been found to be more important particularly in the initial stages and performance of novel behavior than in its maintenance or cessation of behavioral patterns once it has been established (Akers and Sellers *ibid*).

However, young people can develop these deviant attitudes without any prior exposure and then seek out peer groups with similar attitudes and behaviors. Other authorities such as Siegel and Mc Cormick (2006) argue that an individual's propensity to crime which is often exemplified by low self-control is stable throughout the life course and that it is only the opportunities to commit crime that do change.

#### 3.1.3. The Social Development Model

The social development model posits that individuals adopt beliefs and values of the social unit to which they are bonded. Puzanchera (2012) believes juvenile crime is rampant at this stage of their development and as such parents are concerned with this increase in juvenile delinquency. The social unit could be the individual's family, school or their peer group (Catalano and Hawkins, 1996). Lipsey and Derzon (1998) noted that for youths between 12 and 18 years a key variable to delinquency is pressure from anti-social peers. This peer pressure on delinquency is magnified when the juvenile has little interaction with their parents (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005). Poor self-control and deviant peer association were found to independently increase adolescences' chances of engaging in delinquent acts. According to Agrew and White, (2002) there is a positive interaction between strain and delinquent friends.

### 3.2. Nature, Extent and Consequences of Juvenile Delinquencies

Fox and Hogan (2008) believe that juvenile crimes are on the increase. Several studies carried out worldwide on self-reporting reveal that it is common for juveniles to do things that if officially recognized would be called criminal (Savoie,2007; Sprott and Boob,2004; Chandler et al,2008). Various media reports point out that violence in schools and also gun shooting is on the rise (Lawrence and Mueller, 2003). Delinquency may even have future consequences on the adolescent's future at college and also on their career choices. Thornburg et al (2003) discovered that gang membership in the early teen years has severe future consequences such as dropping out at high school. Putting delinquent juveniles in correctional homes puts the delinquent into a relationship with other delinquencies who may be more sophisticated and more influential and they will end up having higher recidivism rates (Harry, 2000). Drug taking delinquency if repeated several times by the juvenile may lead to brain disorders (Society for Neurosciences, 2008).Oconnell (2009) argue that repeated alcohol taking may lead to boredom, depression and frustration leading to the desire to wanting to take even more alcohol. Barrel (1998) observed that this has a consequent of causing a juvenile to lose self-control.Resultantly, juveniles end up committing repeat offences such as theft Farrell and Pease (2003). Bonuce and Oconnell (2004) postulate that juveniles with these disorders have diminished abilities to plan among other negatives such as hallucinations and changes in their abilities to concentrate. Murray (2002); O'Connor,(2012) posited that juveniles mostly commit property crimes such as shoplifting and less of violent crimes such as murder and rape.

## 4. Research Methodology

In this study, the researchers adopted a case study approach to get to the bottom of causes of juvenile delinquency in Harare metropolitan province covering the period 2011-2014. A case study approach was adopted due to the availability of data at organizations dealing with juveniles. A sample of 36 was adopted from a population of 120.The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw the participants in this study. Questionnaires and interviews guides were used as data collection instruments.

### 5. Data Presentation and Discussion

From the study, 67% of the respondents opined that juveniles were committing crime. Puzzanchera (2012) agrees with this conclusion when he states that misbehavior among young people has been of concern to the parents as crimes within this age group has been rampant. 61% of the respondents opined that the crimes committed by the juveniles were much higher than the statistics revealed due the dark side of crime as a lot of crimes go unreported to the police. The results of the study tallies with the findings of Sprott and Doob (2004) and also those of Chandler et al (2009) who postulates that a lot of juvenile crimes go unreported.

Driving factors	Strongly Agree		Agree		Indifferent		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
	1		2		3		4		5			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
Interaction with bad peers	24	66.7	8	22.2	4	11.1	0	0	0	0	1.44	0.695
Learning through associations	22	61.1	8	22.2	6	16.7	0	0	0	0	1.63	0.769
Need to be accepted by bad peers	21	58.3	10	27.8	5	13.9	0	0	0	0	1.56	0.735
Crime definition by peers and the society	20	55.5	9	25.0	7	19.4	0	0	0	0	1.69	0.808

Table 1: The role of peer group pressure on juvenile delinquency

Source: Primary data  
(n=36)

From the respondents, a mean value of 1.44 and a standard deviation of +or -0.695 was obtained suggesting that the respondents were in agreement with the belief that peer groups influenced delinquency amongst juveniles. Aker and Sellers (2004); Babour and Scully (2002) opined that peer groups have a long lasting influence on juveniles. Further, Elliot and Menard (1991) argue that juvenile's exposure to delinquency peers, increases during adolescence. Imitation of bad behavior from friends was found to be a major cause of delinquency amongst juveniles by Mc Gloin and Shermer (2009). Adolescence can engage in delinquency to be accepted by peers engaged in similar shenanigans. From the respondents, a mean variable of 1.56 was obtained and a SD of + or -0.735 suggesting that juveniles are committing delinquency for the sake of being accepted in a particular peer group. This position was also postulated by Catalano and Hawkins (1996).

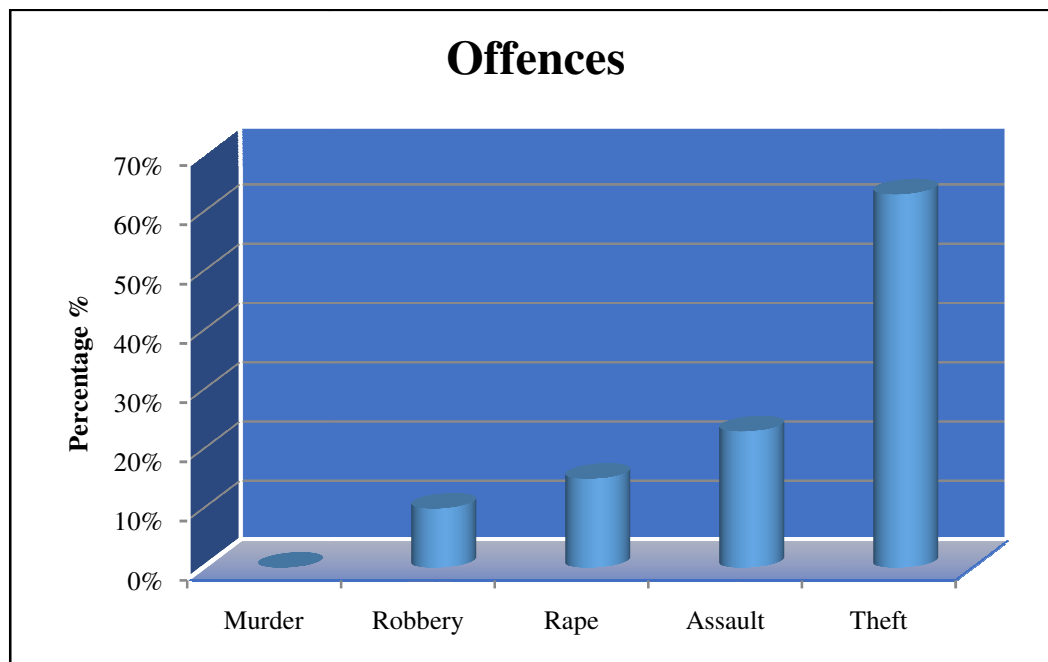


Figure 1: Nature and extend of offences committed by the Juveniles

Source: Primary data

From the data obtained in the study 64% of the respondents were of the view that juveniles were committing more of property crimes such as burglary and shoplifting. However, the remainder opined that to a lesser extent, juveniles were committing violent crimes like rape and robbery with 13% and 7 % respectively. O'Connor (2012) came up with the same findings in his study that more than half of the juvenile offenders were committing property crime. This was also alluded to by Murray (2002) who observed that juveniles mostly commit property crimes. These findings are however different from the findings of Lawrence and Mueller (2003) who postulated that media reports indicated that juveniles were committing violent crimes such as gun shooting in schools.

Puzzanchera (2012) observed that violent crimes committed by juveniles of less than 18 years were actually on the increase. From the respondents, 69% opined that drug and alcohol abuse had negative effects on the health of the juvenile. This was also the position arrived at in the studies carried out by O’connell (2009); Bonuce and O’connell (2004); Society for Neuroscience (2008).

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Indifferent		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Mean	SD
	1		2		3		4		5			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%		
A large portion of crime is committed by youths.	18	50.0	7	19.4	4	11.1	5	13.9	2	5.6	2.06	1.308
The rate of youth crime is increasing	11	30.6	14	38.9	5	13.9	5	13.9	1	2.8	2.19	1.117
Juveniles commit more serious crimes than adults	0	0	2	5.6	16	44.4	8	22.2	10	27.8	3.72	0.944

Table 2: Rate and seriousness of crimes committed by juveniles.

Source: Primary data

About half of the respondents (50%) strongly agree that juveniles are responsible for a large number of crimes being committed. However, the other 50% has different perceptions as shown above. This is similar to what was discovered by Fox and Hogan (2008) when they argued that juveniles commit a disproportionately large number of serious personal and property offences. However, strictly speaking this may actually not be true as it refers mostly to crimes that will have been reported to the police and cleared by the police. This means the dark side of juvenile crime remains unaddressed. Gamon and Mihotean (2005) observed the same when they reported that many juvenile offences go unreported and thus they do not become part of the national statistical picture.

5.1. The Impacts of Delinquency on Juveniles

This study showed that a mean variable of 1.69 was obtained and a SD of 0.808 on the question on whether imprisonment was more desirable than rehabilitation. This agreed with the findings of Burrell (1998) who posited that juveniles will lose their freedom as a result of delinquency after they get imprisoned. This position is at variance with the observations of Hess and Drowns (2010) who argues that if juvenile delinquency is not brought under control the juvenile will graduate into criminals. This supports the views of Harry (2002) who postulates that putting juveniles in correctional homes leads them into meeting more sophisticated juvenile criminals who may harden them in juvenile delinquency. Delinquent juveniles may end up running away from their parents fearing punishment if they discover delinquent acts by the juvenile exposing them to even more danger of committing offences as they move away from parents (Gardner and Steinberg, 2005).

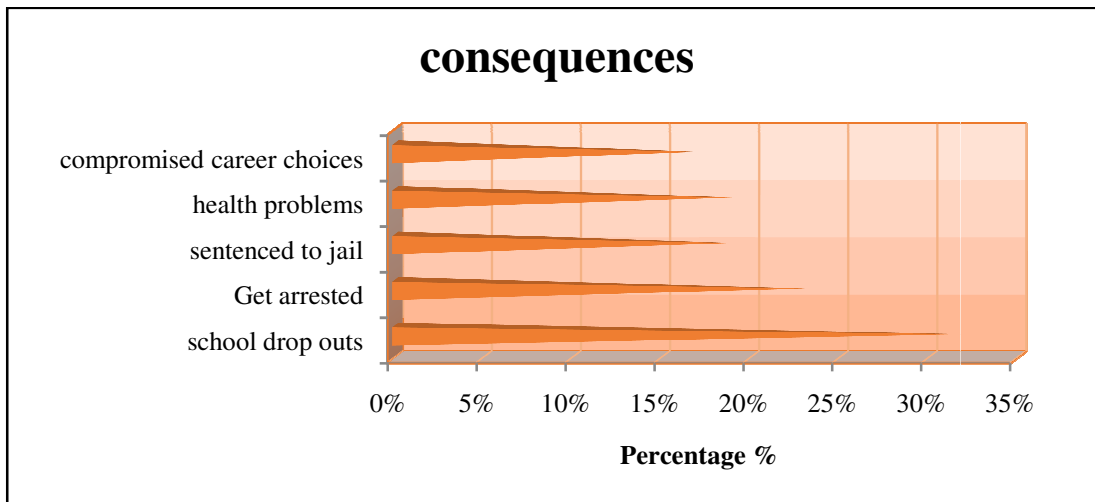


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of respondents' perception on the consequences of juvenile delinquency on its perpetrators.

Source: Primary data.

The results indicate that perpetrators of juvenile delinquency also suffer from their acts in several ways. Burrell (1998) stated that as a result of incarceration delinquent youths miss out on the development of social skills such as self-control and conflict resolution as compared to those who remain outside jails and rehabilitation homes. Those delinquent youths who abuse drugs end up with mental disturbances and other health problems, Wolfe (2012).

6. Summary

It emerged that social interaction of peers with delinquent ones can lead to criminal behaviors amongst juveniles. Some juveniles are born delinquent whilst others are socialized into delinquency through socialization with bad peers.

Crime or delinquency is defined by the society in which one lives in and therefore it is relative from one society to the other. Generally, it is agreed that juvenile delinquency is on the increase though the actual statistics are debatable due to the principle of the dark side of crime.

Perpetrators of juvenile delinquency suffer long after their committed crimes due to lost opportunities whilst in incarceration or in rehabilitation homes and may actually end up developing health damaging habits such as addiction to drugs.

### 7. Conclusions

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that juveniles are committing both property and violent crimes such as rape and murder.

Juvenile delinquency is on the increase and that more juveniles are committing similar juvenile offences resulting in higher recidivism rates among juveniles.

Police statistics on juvenile delinquency are not reliable as there is the dark side of crime (unreported cases)

The study also concluded that although there is a strong relationship between peer pressure and delinquency, there are other factors that drive juveniles into crime.

It was also concluded that parents are no longer playing a central role in nurturing their children resulting in them being delinquent through association with bad peers.

### 8. Recommendations

From the above findings, the researchers proposed the following recommendations:

There is need to come up with a vibrant youth policy that will keep youth occupied meaning that the youths will have less time to commit crime as they will be productively occupied most of the time.

Harsh policies like incarceration should not easily be resorted to. However, other crime management tools in the form of psychological treatment therapies such as Scott Henggler's Multi System Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) are recommended.

Early intervention programs should be put in place to detect delinquency and address it in its infancy before it becomes deep rooted amongst the youths.

An integrated approach to the management of juvenile delinquency should be adopted to fully address the expectations of the criminal justice system.

Restorative justice system is also advocated for which aims to make good the loss suffered by the victims. Here there are more of family engagements in the management of juvenile delinquency in managing losses suffered by the victims of juvenile delinquency.

### 9. References

- i. Agnew, R. : Foundations for a General Strain Theory of Crime and 1992 Delinquency. *Criminology*, 30(1), 47-87.
- 1999 : A General Strain Theory of Community Differences in Crime Rates. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 36,123-155
- ii. Agnew, R., and: Why do they do it? An examination of the intervening mechanism White, W., Tbetween "social control" variables and delinquency. *Journal of 2002Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30(3), 245-266.
- iii. Akers, R., L(Eds) : *Deviant Behaviour: A Social Learning Approach*. Belmont, CA: 1973 Wadworth Publishing Company.
- iv. Akers, R., L and: *Criminological Theories: Introduction, Evaluation and Application*. Sellers ,C., S(Eds) Roxbury Publishing , Los Angeles. 2004
- v. Bandura, A. (Eds) : *Social Learning Theory*. Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1977
- vi. Barbour,C., : *Peer Group Influence*. <http://www.education.com/reference/>
- vii. Barbour,N., and article/peer-group-influence. Retrieved on 28/03/14 Scully, P., A. 2002
- viii. Berndt, T., : *Effects of friendship on achievement motivation and classroom 1996 Behaviour*. Report of All Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. <http://www.findarticles.com> Retrieved on 07/08/13
- ix. Bonnie, R., and : *Reducing Underage Drinking: A collective Responsibility*. The O'conell, M., E (Eds) National Academic Press. Washington DC. 2004
- x. Burrell, S.,: *Crowding in Juvenile Detention Facilities: A Problem Solving DeMuro,P., Manual*. National Detention Association and Law Centre Dunlap, E., and Waboys, L., 1988
- xi. Catalano, R., F and : *A Review of Predictors of Violence in Serious and Violent Hawkins, J., D Juvenile Offenders: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions*. 1966 Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- xii. Chandler, K., : *Students Report of School Crime*. US Department of Justice.
- xiii. Chapman, C., D Washington DC. R and, M., R and Taylor, B.,M. 2008
- xiv. Corsaro, A., W and : *The Creation of New Cultures in Peer Interactions*. Cambridge Johannesen, O., B(Eds) *Hand Book of Sociology*, 444-459, Cambridge University. 2007
- xv. Crosnoe, R., and: *Peer Relations, Adolescent Behavior and Public Health and McNeely, C., A Practice*. *Family and community Health*, 31, 71-802008
- xvi. Donnestein, E., and: *The Media in JO Wilson and Petersilia crime*, 237-266. Institute Linz, D.,of Contemporary Studies Press. San Francisco.1995

- xvii. Elliot, D., S and : Delinquent friends and Delinquent behavior: Temporal and Menard, S., Developmental Patterns. Current Theories of Crime and 1991 Deviance. Sage Publications. Newbury, CA.
- xviii. Farrel, G and : Once bitten, twice bitten: Report on Crime Victimization and Pease,K., its Implication for Crime Prevention. Home Office. London. 2003
- xix. Gardner,M., and: Peer Influence on Risk Taking, Risk Preference and Risk Decision Steinberg, L., Making in Adolescents and Adulthood. An Experimental Study. 2005 Developmental Psychology, 41, 625-635. Harry, J.,: Costly Juvenile Prison Litigation for Louisiana. Corrections Today. 200062 (7) pp 23.
- xx. Hess, K., and: Juvenile Justice. Cengage Learning: Wardsworth. Drowns, R., W (Eds) 2010
- xxi. Kasser, T., : Cultural Values and the Well-being of Future Generations: A cross 2011 National Study. Journal of Cross cultural Psychology, 42, 206-215
- xxii. Keijers,L.,: Reciprocal Effects between Parental Solicitation, Parental Solicitation Branje, S., Parental Control, Adolescent disclosure and Adolescent Delinquency. Van der Valk,I., and Journal of Research on Adolescence, 28, 88-113 Meeus., W 2010
- xxiii. Lawrence, W., S and: Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising.
- xxiv. Mueller R., NUS Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Washington.
- xxv. 2003
- xxvi. Lipsy, M., W and : Predictors of Violence or Serious Delinquency in Adolescents. Derzon, J., H(Eds) In Serious and Violent juvenile Offenders, Risk factors and 1998 Successful Interventions. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications,
- xxvii. 86-105.
- xxviii. McGloin,J., M and : Self Control and Deviant Peer Network Structure. Journal of Shermer, L., O Research in Crime and Delinquency, 46(1), 37-72 2009
- xxix. Murray, C.,(Eds) : Beyond Probation: Juvenile Corrections and Chronic Delinquent. 2002 Sage Publications, Beverly Hills.
- xxx. News Day: Child Delinquency. <http://www.newsday.com>. Retrieved 10/05/12 2012
- xxxi. Nukunya, G. K., (Eds) : Tradition and Change in Modern Ghana: An introduction to 2003 Sociology. Accra, Ghana University Press.
- xxxii. O'connel, J.,: Our Homeless Children: Their Experiences. Sydney, HREOC. 2008 2009: The Adolescents brain and Substance use. Sacramentos, CA. California Department of Education. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/at/document/grfactsheet12.pdf>. Retrieved 21/05/15.
- xxxiii. Puzzanchera, C., : Juvenile Arrests: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency 2012 Prevention. Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice.
- xxxiv. Ramirez,F., L: Juvenile delinquency: Current Issues, Best Practices and Promising 2006 Approaches. Las Cruces, New Mexico.
- xxxv. Reed, C.,: AAP,ABA hail Hills reflections of media violence bill. Publisher 1999 Weekly, 246(25), 11