

rec'd 7/12/96

183491

FAMILY LIFE DEVELOPMENT CENTER
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Program Report

4 June 1996

**"A FIELD INITIATED RESEARCH PROGRAM FOR
THE EVALUATION OF A CHILDHOOD VIOLENCE
PREVENTION PROGRAM"**

SPONSOR: OJJDP
GRANT # 95-JNCX-0021

James Garbarino
Principal Investigator

CONFIDENTIAL

The purpose of this report is to describe the progress made to date on the OJJDP Field Initiated Research Program #95-JNCX-0021, to note any revisions to the original proposal thereof, and to justify the continued funding of this program through its originally proposed closing date.

The original proposal for this program called for the introduction of a violence prevention program, titled *Let's Talk About living in a World with Violence* (Garbarino, 1993), into schools in Tompkins County, New York, and Chicago, Illinois. It was hypothesized that this program would reduce children's legitimacy of aggression and aggressive behavior, through a combination of cognitive restructuring and behavioral rehearsal, as assessed through a structured series of data collections. Although notification of the OJJDP award was not received until June of 1995, the first rounds of program delivery and data collection were begun in Tompkins County in January of 1995, in order to adhere to the schedule requirements of the public school semester. During the period of operation from January 1995 until June of 1995, all expenses were paid out of Family Life Development Center operating funds. These expenses consisted mainly of printing costs for the *Let's Talk About Living in a World with Violence* activity books, printing costs for the data collection instruments, and the salary of the graduate research assistant James Darcy (75% of which was paid by the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, in which he was enrolled). During this period, projected expenses for data collection and data entry in Tompkins County were subsumed under the salary of Mr. Darcy, who completed these tasks while additionally utilizing approximately 65 volunteer hours. Project time was also contributed in Chicago by Kathleen Kostelny.

In June of 1995, when notification of the award was received, work began on coordinating program delivery and data collection in Chicago. Work also continued

(now funded by the award money) on data entry from the Tompkins County sample, and planning of data collection in Tompkins County for the coming Fall 1995 semester. Although notification of the award was received, projected expenses for data collection and data entry for the Ithaca sample continued to be subsumed under the salary of James Darcy, and minimized through the use of an additional 200 volunteer hours. During the fall 1995 semester, program delivery and data collection were completed for the Tompkins County sample. Program delivery and data collection were begun in the Chicago area, and are expected to be completed in June of 1996.

Remaining will be the substantial tasks of completing data entry for the Tompkins County sample (estimated at 50 hours remaining), performing all data entry for the Chicago sample (estimated at 200 hours), performing data analysis, and reporting on results. Under the rubric of data analysis are the tasks of testing all proposed hypotheses and exploring relevant related questions, confirming reliability and validity of measures employed, assessing the appropriateness of statistical models employed, and testing the assumptions implicit to those models. It is projected that a thorough and responsible treatment of all of these issues will require the major part of the remaining grant period, which ends in February of 1997. It is therefore requested that project funding be continued from July 31, 1996 through the end of the grant period in February 1997. Specific projected expenditures for the remaining term of the award are described in the enclosed budget justification, but all fall well within the projections of the original proposal's budget.

The design originally described in the proposal narrative has been revised in several minor way, in some instances to be more responsive to pragmatic constraints upon our methodology, though in most cases as a means of improving or refining the original design. These revisions are detailed below.

1.) Sampling

The original proposal called for the use of subjects from a variety of settings, including schools, community centers, and after-school programs (see page 11 of the narrative). In Tompkins County, it was only possible to include subjects in school classrooms, because groups of subjects in community centers and after-school programs would have been too small (3-6 subjects) to have been considered in the statistical analyses employed. It should be noted that, even though no data was collected on these groups, they were nonetheless offered copies of the *Let's Talk About Living in a World with Violence* activity book, provided at the expense of the Family Life Development Center.

2.) Measures

a.) The original proposal called for adults delivering the intervention to complete the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1983) at each data collection period, in order to assess their perceptions of children's problem behavior (see page 16 of narrative). However, this measure was replaced by the Hightower Teacher-Child Rating Scale. The Hightower Teacher-Child Rating Scale (Hightower et. al., 1986), or T-CRS, is a 38-item checklist designed to solicit teachers' perceptions of a student's problem behaviors and competencies. Compared to the Achenbach CBC, The T-CRS is an equally well-validated measure which assesses problem behaviors, but is easier and much quicker to complete.

The first section of the T-CRS contains 18 items, asking teachers to rate on a 5-point scale the degree of seriousness of various problem behaviors the child may exhibit (from 1 = "Not a Problem," to 5 = "Very Serious Problem"). This section contains three empirically derived subscales. The first, *Acting Out*, assesses aggressive, disruptive, and

impulsive behaviors. The second, *Shy/Anxious*, measures withdrawal, introversion, and dependent behavior. The third, *Learning Skills*, assesses deficits in skills required for academic success (such as work habits, following directions, etc.).

The second section of the T-CRS contains 20 items describing a child's possible social and academic strengths, and asking teachers to rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which the descriptions of those strengths apply to the child in question (from 1 = "Not at All," to 5 = "Very Well"). This second section contains 4 empirically derived subscales. The first, *Frustration Tolerance*, assesses a child's ability to deal with limitations imposed by self or others. The second, *Assertive Social Skills*, measures a child's ability to take a strong, confident role in dealing with peers. The third, *Task Orientation*, deals with a child's ability to be academically productive. Finally, the *Peer Social Skills* subscale assesses the child's popularity among peers.

Norms are available on all subscales for boys and girls from urban, suburban, and rural communities, allowing for the possibility of percentage ranking of subjects within each of those classes. The mean of alpha reliabilities for all subscales (calculated on three samples of third, fourth, and fourth through sixth grade children, respectively) is .912. Individual alpha coefficients for subscales range from a low of .84 on the *Shy/Anxious* subscale when tested on the third-grade sample, to a high of .97 for *Peer Social Skills* when tested on the fourth-grade sample.

b.) The original proposal called for subjects to complete the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence (Richters and Saltzman, 1990), in order to assess exposure to various types of violent incidents (see page 17 of the narrative). Ultimately, the child version of this measure, called Things I Have Seen and Heard (Richters and Martinez, 1990), was used instead. Things I Have Seen and Heard assesses exposure to the same violent incidents as the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence, but presents items

and elicits responses in a much more developmentally appropriate fashion. As with the Survey of Exposure to Community Violence, validity and reliability are high.

c.) The original proposal called for assessing the motivation and competence of the professionals delivering the intervention, through the use of blind observer ratings during the training of those professionals (see page 19 of the narrative). It was ultimately decided that this rating system would not be sufficiently objective, reliable, or indicative of the variables of interest. Instead, we have used a combination of teacher-completed measures and structured observations of the professionals using the intervention. Teachers complete a survey which assesses many specific sub-domains of their delivery of the intervention and teaching style in general. Results of these survey data are compared with observers' scaled ratings of the same aspects of intervention delivery and teaching style. By using this two-step approach, it is possible to obtain both quantitative (categorical and ordinal) data about professionals' use of the intervention, and qualitative data which gives a general picture of the ways in which intervention delivery may have varied across the sample. It is felt that this approach is much more relevant, and retains much greater ecological validity, than the originally proposed assessment of motivation and competence.

d.) The original proposal called for subjects to complete the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus and Gelles, 1988) (see page 17 of the narrative), to assess the ways in which they and their parents/guardians deal with conflict in their homes (thereby also providing a picture of exposure to violence in the home). Although this is a well-validated measure which has been used extensively, early experiences with the CTS revealed a number of problems. Generally, data collectors reported that children were very confused by the scaling system employed in the CTS (even though this had been re-structured to make it more child-friendly), and were also confused by the content of items, even after

explanations were provided. Children were often surprised or amused by some items (e.g. "How many times have you used a gun or a knife in a disagreement with your parents"), though there were no reports of children being upset by the items. An attempt was made to modify the CTS even further, focusing only on the parents' behavior, and asking for ordinal ratings of "how often" an event generally occurred, instead of the original version's queries for raw frequency data within a specified time period. Although the revised version created less confusion, children still seemed to have difficulty completing this measure, were still frequently amused or surprised by it, and were returning highly erratic and contradictory data. We were considering further revisions when it was reported to us that two children had appeared to become upset as a result of completing the CTS. At that time, it was decided for reasons both ethical and pragmatic that we should no longer use the CTS. It was determined that there was sufficient overlap between Things I Have Seen and Heard and the CTS to gain the information we needed from the Things I Have Seen and Heard data alone.

REFERENCES

- Achenbach, T. and Edlebrock, C. (1983). Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist and Revised Child Behavior Profile. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry.
- Erdley, C., and Asher, S. (1993). Linkages between children's beliefs about the legitimacy of aggression and their behavior. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Garbarino, J. (1993). Let's Talk About Living in a World with Violence. Chicago: Erikson Institute.
- Hightower, A., et. al. (1986). The Teacher Child Rating Scale: A brief objective measure of elementary children's school problem behaviors and competencies. School Psychology Review, 15, 393-409.
- Richters, J., and Martinez, P. (1990). Things I have seen and heard: An interview for young children about exposure to violence. Rockville, MD: National Institute of Mental Health.
- Richters, J., and Saltzman, W. (1990). Survey of children's exposure to community violence: Child report. National Institute of Mental Health.
- Straus, M., and Gelles, R. (1987). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The conflict tactics (CT) scales. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 41, 75-88.