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**Teens and Crime**

What is the cause of the horrific increase in teenage crime? In recent years, the crime rate among the youth has been a major factor in society. It is almost impossible to pinpoint exactly why teens are committing more crimes than they used to, but, it is definitely possible to explore the different possibilities. It seems as if the youth is becoming more violent and active in crime related activities than they have ever been before. I want to find out why this is happening and if there is any way that the teenage crime rate will/can lower.

The first thing that came to mind when I thought of teenagers committing crimes was music and video games and the impact that they have on young people. In today’s world, hip-hop/rap is made famous by the younger generation. This genre of music is what majority of teenagers have begun listening to in the last five years or so. The most famous artists in this genre are always putting out material with horrible lyrics that talk about robbing, raping, and killing in almost every song. The minds of the youth are constantly being overloaded with all these thoughts of crimes because they hear it in their music and think it’s cool because their favorite “artists” are representing it. This can cause teens to take the same path and destroy their values by brainwashing their own minds. Another form of entertainment for teenagers is video games. Many teens, usually males, play video games that expose a very high level of violence. When playing these games, people get so involved and into it that they don’t even notice the brutality of the content that lies right before their eyes. Some of the most popular video games among the youth are *Call of Duty*, *Assassins Creed*, and *Grand Theft Auto*. You can tell by the titles that these games probably do not contain the best content for kids or teenagers. I personally have experienced all of these games and I have seen the graphic material in them. *Call of Duty* is an action-packed game that consists of intense gunfire and killing a countless number of people throughout the entire campaign. In *Assassins Creed*, you play the role of an assassin back in the renaissance time and go around killing your targets with a large array of weapons, usually blades. *Grand Theft Auto* is probably the worst one of them all. You could name every crime you could think of and I can guarantee you that it is in this game. The whole point of the game is to go around stealing cars, robbing stores, doing drugs, and murdering people. Some people would say that when you play a violent video game you are just in a fantasy land and that there’s no way that it could transfer over to real life. However, Vincent P. Mathews, a professor of radiology at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis, told reporters from science daily, “Our study suggests that playing a certain type of violent video game may have different short-term effects on brain function than playing a nonviolent but exciting game.” He came to this conclusion after performing experiments in which he and his colleagues randomly assigned 44 adolescents to play either a violent video game or a nonviolent video game for 30 minutes. The researchers then used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to study brain function during a series of tasks measuring inhibition and concentration. This is just once source that provides information about the impact of violent video games on adolescents. With the majority of teenagers using corrupt music and video games as entertainment, it is almost impossible to say that these two things are not factors in the increase of the teenage crime rate.

Similarly, television and magazines can also mesmerize the youth. For example, a magazine ad will show a celebrity surrounded by luxuries and riches, which can cause a teenager to start to think that that’s how they should be and that they too should also possess all those luxuries. At a young age, it is merely impossible to become rich and have everything you want, so adolescents develop stealing habits which can lead to more criminal activities. Likewise, television also shows these luxuries and reveals how great everything is when you are rich. But, television does more than just that. Movies and television shows display a high act of violence which can relate to the videogames. The only difference is that in movies and TV shows you are watching the onslaught instead of controlling it. An article found on Yahoo entitled *Why is There An Increase in Crime Amongst Teenagers Today?* discusses the influences that movies have on the youth. The author of the article is unknown, but there is a part of the text that reads, “Movies such as `The Goodfellas', `The Untouchables' and `The Godfather' trilogy all show how murder and extortion can bear fruit in the form of beautiful women, lots of cash and a string of Ferraris. Although most of the characters are killed or jailed in the end, teenagers are still in awe of the risk-taking and the exhilaration that it brings, even if it is just for a moment. Having seen such movies, teenagers have `heroes' to emulate. An innocent viewing of a movie can have a deep subconscious influence if not handled properly, especially with more violent and explicit films of today.” This quote is helpful in supporting one’s understanding of how violent TV shows and movies impact the young society. When all these things tie in (video games, music, television, magazines, etc.), it creates one enormous ball of negative influence. To me, it’s like the mass media is filling water balloons with as much negative and bad influence as they can and they are popping them on every teenager, soaking them all one at a time.

In essence, the “water balloon” concept has resulted in a higher population of mislead teenagers. These teenagers who have fallen under the influence want to convince their friends to follow their same ways, and this is where peer pressure is introduced. Although peer pressure has always played a factor in a teenager’s life, over the last few years there has been more peer pressure because of the actual increasing teen crime rate. To put it differently, if an individual has more friends that are adolescent criminals, then the chance that they too will take the same path increases. This troubling situation has formulated a strong chain of bad behavior and it has become popular to the youth. It has reached the point to where even the best behaving teens (whoever that may be) have begun rebelling, and their parents have been stricken by it. *Peer pressure stokes kids’ criminal intentions,* an article written by Prashant Thakor on May 12th, 2012, reviews the effect that teenage peer pressure has on crime. Within the article, a section of the text reads, “The arrest of teenagers involved in damaging cars at night have sent a chilling message across parent circles of impending waywardness from wards owing to peer pressure. Psychologists, who believe that these teens are just one step away from becoming hard core criminals, have sent warning signals among all parents to nip destructive mentality in its bud.” Thakor discusses how the kids were peer pressured into damaging the cars and stealing items out of them. He then expresses how shocked the parents of the teens were involving this specific act of crime. According to psychologists, these teens are on the verge of becoming hardcore criminals. This would mean that there is a large amount of adolescents out there that have the potential to become hardcore criminals, which is an enormous danger to parents and their youth. The damaging of cars circulated in this article is just one form of crime committed by teens and peer pressure. More often times, teens are peer pressured intro drugs and alcohol. Generally, the drugs and alcohol will then lead to further crimes.

Nevertheless, there are other reasons that teens commit crimes. Our country is currently going through a recession and times are getting tough. People are losing jobs left and right, money has become a problem in everyone’s life, and there are more people living in poverty now than ever before. This has caused families to steal necessities, and who would be a better candidate for the crime than a teenager who won’t have to suffer as bad of consequences? In other words, thousands of families are in need of items that they cannot afford and more often than not those families look to their young children to steal and rob because the worst case scenario would be that they just get a fine or go to the juvenile detention center for a few weeks. Unfortunately, adolescents are also resorting to joining gangs. They are joining gangs for many reasons, one of them being for protection and family-like support. Teens that live in poverty and are not raised well feel like they are obliged to join a gang because they think it is their only way of survival. They give themselves up to gangs because they know that they will be protected and also looked after. Some teens don’t even know any other way of life besides being in a gang because many generations before them lived that kind of lifestyle. It’s almost as if some children are born into gangs. The life that gang members live is always a struggle. They are required to buy/sell drugs, rob people/stores, and sometimes murder all in the pursuit of money and reputation. Gang members are always on the lookout for new recruits to join the gang because the more members a gang has the more powerful it will be. Usually the hardest thing after joining a gang is getting out. Once you are initiated, in most cases by a vicious beating, you are in the gang until you die. More teenagers are joining gangs now than ever because of poverty and the recession, and this is another one of the contributing factors in the increasing teenage crime rate.

As I previously wrote, the recession has placed a solid portion of families into some type of struggle. Parents are dealing with a lot more additional stress than usual, and have tightened up their schedules. Sadly, this has eliminated a lot of time that families are supposed to spend together, causing some teens to feel a powerful neglect from their guardians. In desperation of attention from their parents or sympathy from society, these neglected teenagers start to commit crimes. Even after teens draw their much needed attention, they still possess criminal habits that do not usually disappear.

An adolescent experiencing the divorce or separation of their two parents is also known as one of the ingredients in young criminal behavior. Amy Desai, author of *How Could Divorce Affect My Kids?* on *www.focusonthefamily.com*, sums it up the best when she states, “Kids whose parents divorce are substantially more likely to be incarcerated for committing a crime as a juvenile.” Her reasoning for this is the when there is a broken commitment to the family by the parents, teenagers usually become less communicative and angrier. Teens who endure the breakup of their parents often feel that it is necessary to become independent and less involved in their families. Without guidance, teens could easily fall victim to the peer pressure of friends, or even decide to perform bad behaviors on their own. According to [*www.divorcerate.org*](http://www.divorcerate.org)*,* the current divorce rate for first marriages in America in 2012 is at a record high and rising %50. The majority of divorces tend to be young couples between the ages of 20 and 24. With divorce rates going up, leaving millions of kids in resentment of their families, it is hard to believe that divorce has not been one of the main components in the rising teenage crime rate.

All things considered, there are many viable elements that can be reported as an impact on the rising crime rate among adolescents. Music, television, video games, magazines, and everything else that involves the media have been hypnotizing the youth for years and it is just now beginning to show. On a day to day basis, teenagers casually laugh and joke as they control a massacre at the tip of their thumbs through the fantasy world that is video gaming. Young kids’ ears are being exposed to treacherous music and are reciting the corrupt lyrics as they proceed through their day. Teenagers are starting to think that if you do not share all the same luxuries as celebrities then you are at a disadvantage in life. The majority of teenagers have all these things involved in their lives, and are failing to realize what is happening to them and their minds. Adolescents who have been living up to high standards all their life are now more vulnerable to suffer under peer pressure of their friends. They assume that they won’t be cool or popular unless they do what everybody else is doing. Children experiencing the divorce of their parents have become angered and resentful. Adolescents going through the split up of their parents have taken up independence from their family which has led to criminal behavior. When it comes to a community with lower standards of living, teen crime is at the same level as those who have a higher standard of living. People living in poverty are having their youth commit crimes to support for their families. Unsheltered teens are being appointed directly to gang activity because they need protection and family-like support. The recession has put many families in a struggle, and generated an outburst of criminal activity among the youth. With every aspect of the mass media and the recession/poverty linked together, I can conclude that all of the elements within this essay are the cause of the recent increase in teenage crime.

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