**Illiteracy and Violence**

by Stephanie Cogeos

Illiteracy affects so many aspects of our society and violence and domestic violence is one of them. Millions of adults cannot read. Low-income families don’t have books, so their pre-school children do not read. Academic failure and delinquency, violence and crime are highly related to illiteracy. Children and young people who are illiterate have less opportunities to further themselves and they move toward violence and crime. The majority of juveniles who enter the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate and cannot read above a fourth-grade level. Poverty is usually the reason behind illiteracy in developed countries and in underdeveloped countries. Most people are unaware of this and if they are, feel that they cannot do anything about it.

Poverty, illiteracy and crime are a vicious cycle. The majority of adults in state prisons lack a high school diploma or have low literacy skills. There may be literacy programs in a state, but not all have access to it. Family literacy has the potential to create critical thinkers and lowering social conflict. Families play a very important role in developing reading and writing skills, clarity of ideas and communicating effectively. When parents know better, they can do better. Families who learn how to control their anger and resolve disagreements in a healthy manner, avoid hitting and spanking will pass that on to their children who will act in a similar manner.

People with lower reading and writing skills have less control over their lives, less understanding of their legal rights, lower self-esteem and ultimately are at a higher risk of committing violent acts. Juvenile incarceration reduces high school completion and increases the probability of incarceration later in life. High school dropouts are more likely to be arrested in their lifetime. Youth crime has been strongly linked to illiteracy and truancy. A lot of these individuals have also been victims of abuse and violence. When a person with low literacy levels feel threatened, they often do not have the skills to approach a situation in a nonviolent manner or they may have been a victim themselves. They use violence to maintain control. They are not in a position of strength or power.

The more people can effectively read, write, communicate, improve their situation, learn about their society, learn about their rights and feel as though they have options and ability to improve themselves, there is no reason to resort to violence. Violence tends to be driven by negative emotions such as anger or fear. People with low literacy skills tend to feel as though they have no control over their lives or less control than others, They may feel shame, they can have low self-esteem. There are different kinds of violence but it is clear that low literacy skills play a role in the prevalence of violence.

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