

The Causes of Recent Youth Violence in Japan and Possible Measures to Prevent Further Incidents

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ABSTRACT

Japan has recently been experiencing unprecedented rises in many types of youth crime. The causes of these increases are interpreted in terms of an interaction between the violent or inappropriate “software” portrayed by the mass media and the various social and technological changes which are increasing the stress on the individual with resultant increases in aggression and impulsiveness. Superficial interventions such as school searches of student bags and changes in the laws dealing with youth crime will likely prove ineffective. Various interventions are suggested which will address the root causes of youth crime.

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, 1997, and the early part of 1998 a dramatic increase occurred in youth crime in Japan. Student violence cases in 1996 reached a record 10,000, the highest total since the Ministry of Education began its survey in 1982 (23 Dec 1997, Japan Times (JT)). The early months of 1998 witnessed a rash of heinous crimes by youth unprecedented in the history of Japan.

The type of crimes which are currently proliferating in Japan have been common in the U.S. for a number of years. Unfortunately the origin of these crimes in the U.S. is much more complex and because of that complexity, it is much harder to identify the root causes. For example, a number of U.S. youth are born to drug addicts or alcoholics, are brought up in extremely stressful environments, often abused, or they are the victims of traumatic stress.

In Japan, the situation is very, very different. One could view it as growing a culture in a sterile medium. The result one gets is not contaminated by any other variables. Many children who have recently become involved in crimes are from normal homes, have had access to a good education, and have not suffered abuse or traumatic stress. Many of those currently being arrested have no prior record of delinquency (24 Oct 1997, JT). Because of the “sterile” nature of this environment, the current distressing trends in violence by and against youth give us insights into the origins of the phenomenon which cannot be so clearly seen within the complex milieu of the

American situation.

There is likely no one explanation for the current problem. It is the belief of the author that, although the mass media's role may be predominant, the phenomenon is due to the confluence of a number of social changes. The current paper will attempt to explain this increase in crime by and against youth as the result an interaction of "software" and "hardware" changes. That is, it will be explained in terms of technological and social changes interacting with the "hardware" of the human brain.

Before discussing the causes of the increases in crime, let us examine recent trends and events in Japan related to this problem. Although experts in Japan are currently focused on youth, the problem goes far beyond the problem of youth the same factors are likely operating in adult violence, crime, and suicides.

INCREASES IN CRIME BY YOUTH

As noted above, the number of cases of student violence surpassed 10,000 in 1996. Of these cases, 60 percent represented violence between students, 15 percent were against teachers and 22 percent involved objects. Violence against teachers in junior high schools increased by 48.2 percent (9 Aug 1997, JT). The cases of bullying in 1996 totaled 51,544.

In August of 1997, the National Police Agency (NPA) reported that the number of juveniles (defined as those between 14 and 19 years old) apprehended for murder, robbery, rape, arson, and attempts at those crimes rose to 1,040 in the first six months of 1997, an increase of 50 percent from the same period of the previous year (9 Aug 1997, JT). The NPA reported that in the first six months of 1997, robberies by juveniles increased 66 percent (to 780), sexual assaults rose 105 percent (to 178), and other violent acts increased 26 % to 8,460. Robberies by high school students increased 60 percent (to 236), triple the number committed in 1993. A total of 17,137 female minors were apprehended for violent crimes, theft, and shoplifting; this represents an increase of 37 percent from the same 6 months of the previous year.

By October of 1997, the number of minors arrested for heinous crimes such as murder, robbery and arson had topped the total for all of 1996 (1,496) (24 Oct 1997, JT). According to the NPA, the number of robbery cases, including those in the category "oyaji-gari" (literally meaning "hunt for middle-aged men") was up 50 % from the same period in 1996. Of the 1,590 people aged 14 to 19 arrested from January to September of 1997, 1,044 were involved in robbery (up 54.2 % from the same period of 1996), while 311 were held in sexual assaults against women with this representing an increase of 81.9 % from 1996 figures. The NPA reported that it is increasingly common for minors to be taken into custody for heinous crimes with no previous records of serious delinquencies (24 Oct 1997, JT).

. The youth crime figure continued to climb and by December 1997, the total number of youths investigated for serious crimes topped 2,000 for the first time in 16 years (20 Dec 97, JT). According to the NPA report issued in December of 1997, 139,867 minors were investigated in the first 11 months of 1997. Of this total, 1,535 were investigated

for robbery (58.2 % increase from 1996). Of these robbery cases, 70 % were committed by groups of minors. The same report indicated that some 5,910 minors were investigated for alleged intimidation (a 13.7 % increase from 1996).

INCREASES IN CRIME AGAINST YOUTH

Not only has crime by youth increased in Japan, but crimes *against* youth have also increased. The National Police Agency reported that the number of elementary school children who became victims of crimes in 1996 rose 11.6 % from the previous year to 23,720 (20 June 97, JT). According to the NPA, in 1996, 17 children were slain, 6 were robbed, 92 were assaulted, and 101 were abducted, up 31.2 % from the previous year. There were also 293 cases of extortion involving children and 931 cases of child molestation.

By December of 1997, the NPA reported that robbery cases targeting junior high school pupils rose 36 % in the first 10 months of 1997 and those targeting high school students rose 15 percent. Overall, the number of schoolchildren victimized by heinous crimes such as murder, robbery, and sexual assault totaled 593 in the first 10 months of the year, up 18.4 percent from the same period in 1996 (5 Dec 1997, JT).

In addition, an increasing number of schoolgirls are becoming the victims of sexual assaults and molestation (5 Dec 1997, JT). While the number of reported sexual assault cases targeting adult women was down 6.8 % from the previous year in the first 10 months of 1997, those involving elementary, junior high, and high school girls rose 23.2 percent to 356. The NPA said that 2,019 schoolgirls—838 elementary school pupils, 438 junior high school girls and 745 high school students—were sexually molested, up 20.3 percent from the same period of 1996. This number was double that for adult victims.

EXPLANATIONS OF THE CURRENT INCREASE IN YOUTH CRIME

A. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - GENERAL

Various explanations have been put forth to explain the rise in youth violence and crime. A recent survey of junior high school teachers from schools in 25 prefectures attending a union seminar found that few blamed the education system. Most cited the family environment and parent-child relationships. Others cited the influence of the mass media including movies, the state of schooling, and the influence of society in general (24 Jan 98, JT).

B. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - THE MASS MEDIA

The teachers' concern regarding the mass media cited above is shared by many citizens and professionals (17 Aug 1997, Daily Yomiuri). The current author has examined this problem in detail (Nishio, 1995). The conclusion reached in the 1995 article was that while we tend to view the information presented through the various mass media as entertainment, it is having a far greater impact in that it is teaching us ways of behavior. Although the murders, bullying, and other heinous crimes are the

most obvious, it is also teaching behaviors and more subtle values which are the exact opposite of traditionally condoned behavior and values. This same phenomenon is occurring in almost every country in the world which allows in an unregulated, unedited, solely profit-driven mass media.

A recent study conducted at Tokyo University by Yoshiaki Hashimoto, an assistant professor at the Institute of Socio-Information and Communication Studies found that television programs can, to some degree, affect how viewers form ideas about public issues. The impact of TV goes far beyond influencing opinions as illustrated by the case of a young mother who contacted experts for advice because she was worried that her baby's urine was not blue as seen in TV commercials for disposable diapers. Also reported by the same article (17 Aug 1997, Daily Yomiuri) was the case of a female college student who went to the doctor out of concern that something was wrong with her body because her sanitary pad was red from blood, instead of blue as shown in commercials.

Japan was shocked in 1997 by the murder and mutilation of 11-year-old Jun Hase. In the suspect's room, police found a stack of horror videos and books on past murder cases including one dealing with the U.S. serial killer of the 1960's nicknamed the "Zodiac Killer" whose letters to police were mimicked in a note the killer sent to the media (3 July 1997, JT).

C. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - DECLINE IN VALUES

The Director General of the National Police Agency, Yuko Sekiguchi, has explained the recent increase in youth crime on the decline in juvenile morals which he views as reflecting problems on the part of adults (9 Aug 97, JT). This opinion is similar to that Expressed by Professor Minoru Tada in an article in July of 1997 after the murder of the 11-year-old Kobe boy (4 July 1997, JT). He notes that in the late 1970's, popular television personality "Beat" Takeshi played a major role in eroding traditional morals noting that he used to say "Down with the rules, ordinary good sense and morals. Let's do what we like to do." Tada goes on to say, "Parents gradually fell silent before the power of television." He comments that parents pushing their children in the academic rat race have neglected to teach the following "Life is precious, family love is important, do not resort to violence, do not steal, do not tell a lie, help your friends, and keep your promises." He notes that the people who failed to learn those lessons are now parents today. Professor Tada concludes that restrictions on movies featuring sex and violence should be considered and that it is imperative to rebuild social morals in the home, school, and society.

D. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - HOME INFLUENCE

Others place the blame for the current youth violence on the home environment (4 Sept 1997, JT) citing the absent or weak father and the "koyoiku mother", that is, the "education mother" who drives her child to succeed academically with study time cutting out interactions with friends and physical exercise.

E. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - THE SOCIETY

Still others speak vaguely of the influence of society in general (24 Jan 1998, JT).

F. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - THE LAW

Particularly following the murder of 11-year-old June Hase, many have criticized the lenient laws applied to juvenile crime. For example, the 14-year-old who beheaded the 11-year-old Jun Hase had his name protected by law and would face a maximum sentence of just two years at a juvenile correction center for the crime. This contrasts with Britain where two 11-year-olds were sentenced to 15 years in prison for the murder of toddler James Bulger in 1993 (3 July 1997, JT). Media interviews with a former teacher of the suspect in the Jun Hase case supposedly revealed that when the boy was 12-years-old, he was caught firing an air gun at toddlers in a local park. When admonished, he is quoted as saying, "Since I'm only a child, I wouldn't have to go to jail, would I?" In an article entitled "Quit coddling young criminals" (15 July 1997, JT), Prof. Susumu Oda suggested concrete amendments to the law such as applying adult law to minors aged 13 through 18 and abolishing the existing clause forbidding criminal punishment.

G. EXPLANATIONS OF RECENT YOUTH CRIME - THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Some people have blamed the education system (26 Aug 1998, JT) particularly focusing on its repressiveness, citing the Kobe killer's complaint in an anonymous letter sent to the newspaper about how compulsory education forced him to live an "invisible existence," driving him to take revenge through the murders (9 July 1997, JT; 24 Jan 1998, JT).

YOUTH CRIME INCREASE AN INTERACTION OF "HARDWARE" AND "SOFTWARE"

Though the current author feels that each of these explanations has some degree of validity, no one explanation is sufficient to explain the recent increases in crime by and against youth. An explanation of the phenomena can best be understood by using the analogy of the computer, that is, computer "software" and "hardware." In the present case, the "hardware" applies to the human brain and our "hardwired" responses. "Software" applies to learning and information input. Particularly important in our consideration of the brain's "hardwired" responses are those responses that occur as a result of stress.

Stress is a very vague term, but the effects of stress on the mind and body are very concrete and very real (see Nishio 1998 for a detailed review). As will be discussed later, the source of stress may be very different, sometimes the opposite, for two different people. When stress occurs in animals or humans, the brain automatically secretes various hormones and neurotransmitters. As a result of this secretion, multiple changes occur in the body which are meant to protect the person. Two highly

predictable consequences of stress hormone and neurotransmitter secretion are aggression and disinhibition. Here the term “disinhibition” refers to a decreased ability to inhibit actions and words. Another term which could be applied to the same phenomena is impulsiveness. The aggression is thought to be mediated by noradrenalin and the impulsiveness or disinhibition is thought to be mediated by serotonin. These two responses, greater aggression and greater impulsiveness, likely made sense in terms of the survival of the individual organism as the more aggressive and quicker reacting entity was probably more likely to survive. However, though increased aggression and disinhibition may save our lives in dangerous situations, both can prove disastrous for society as a whole resulting in a number of social problems, particularly when these urges merge with inappropriate “software” as appears to be currently occurring.

RECENT EVIDENCE OF DECREASED ABILITY TO INHIBIT IMPULSIVENESS AND AGGRESSION

Figure 1 lists some of the potential consequences for society of increased impulsiveness and increased aggression. These include increases in bullying, violence, suicide, murder, arson, rape, and robbery. Other behavior which may have its roots in the same phenomena are increased truancy and drug use.

A. INCREASE IN TRUANCY & HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

All of the phenomena shown in Figure 1 have been increasing in Japan recently. According to an article on truancy in August of 1997, the number of elementary and junior high school students absent from school for 30 days or more in fiscal 1996 hit a record high of 208,380 students (10 Aug 1997, JT) with this representing an increase of 11 percent over the previous year. Those absent for psychological reasons including “a

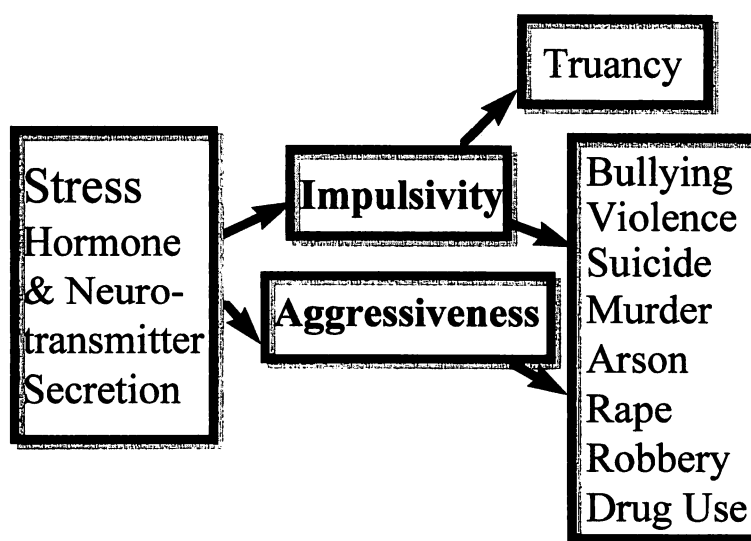


Fig. 1 Potential social impact of stress-induced hormone and neurotransmitter secretion.

dislike for school” rose by 2,919 to 19,488.

Another likely related increase is the increase in the number of high school drop outs. In the fiscal year 1996, this reached a record 2.5% of high school students. Of those who dropped out, 42.7 percent cited a change in career direction, while 31.4 percent cited maladjustment to school life or schoolwork (27 Feb 1998, JT).

B. INCREASE IN YOUTH DRUG USE

Related to the issue of decreased ability to inhibit is the recent increase in student drug use. A student may have learned that drugs are harmful and will eventually harm the person or cause him/her to harm others, but the youth may be unable to suppress the urge to use the drug. Drug use among minors has been steadily increasing in recent years. The Health and Welfare Ministry's 1995 Narcotics White Paper reported that the number of minors arrested on drug charges increased by 30.2 percent in 1995 over the previous year (25 Oct 1996, JT). A November 1997 article (10 Nov 1997, JT) reported that according to the National Police Agency, girls accounted for 60 percent of the high school students booked for alleged violation of the Stimulant Drugs Control Law. According to an NPA official some female students purchase drugs with money earned through engaging in prostitution known as “enjo kosai” (“compensated dating” where a young woman “dates” a middle-aged man for money).

According to NPA reports, the number of high school students taken into custody in stimulant drug arrests has been rising since 1994, quadrupling in the period from 1994 to 1996 (29 Nov 1997, JT). The same article describes how gangsters have come to view teenage girls as a major market.

The NPA investigated a total of 26,834 drug cases in 1997, of these, 19,722 were stimulant drug cases. The stimulant drug use figure is reported to be “the worse this decade” and according to the NPA, may represent a “new era of drug abuse” (31 Jan 1998, Japan Times).

C. RECORD INCREASE IN ARSON PROBES

The 1997 annual report of the Home Affairs Ministry reported that the number of suspected arson fires hit a record 12,110 in Japan in 1996 (13 Dec 1997, Japan Times).

RELATIONSHIP AMONG AGGRESSION, IMPULSIVENESS, AND LOSS OF CONTROL OF AGGRESSIVE IMPULSES

Central to the current discussion is an understanding of the relationship which exists among aggression, impulsiveness, and the loss of control of aggressive impulses. It has been suggested that serotonergic dysfunction could be the neurobiological basis for explosive personality disorder since it has been found that impulsive violent criminals diagnosed using DSM-III criteria as having explosive personality disorder have low cerebrospinal fluid 5-hydroxyindoleacetic acid (CSF 5-HIAA) levels (Linnoila et al. 1983).

Increases in mouse killing behavior in the rat have been induced by lowering the

activity of the serotonergic system by various methods including dietary reduction of the serotonin precursor tryptophan, by drugs eliciting selective axonal degeneration of serotonin-containing neurons, and by blocking tryptophan hydroxylase, the rate-limiting enzyme for serotonin synthesis (Applegate 1980; Gibbons et al 1978, 1979). Aggression was also induced in mice by social isolation (B.L. Miller et al 1979) and by administration of alcohol (Krsiak et al. 1977)

Although evidence concerning the role of serotonin as an inhibitor of aggression in a large number of animal species has been available since the 1960's, the role in human aggression has taken longer to investigate. A trivariate relationship between low cerebrospinal serotonin, suicidal behavior, and aggressiveness has been found in several studies (GL Brown et al 1979; Linnoila et al 1983). Linnoila has suggested that "impulsiveness" was the common factor explaining the relationship found between suicidal behavior and aggressiveness, and low serotonin. Low serotonin linked with aggression has been observed in a group of children and adolescents diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder, oppositional disorder, or conduct disorder (Kruesi et al 1990). Leckman et al. (1990) found low serotonin levels in two patients experiencing intrusive thoughts about violence and fear of acting on these thoughts. Reduced CSF serotonin levels were found in a group of 20 Finnish male arsonists who set fire impulsively (Virkkunen et al 1987). Low levels of tryptophan (the precursor of serotonin) have been found in abstaining alcoholic patients with histories of assaultive behavior (Branchey et al 1984).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REDUCED SEROTONIN LEVELS AND STRESS

Although the initial response to stress is increased release of serotonin (Petty 1993), intraneuronal serotonin depletion eventually occurs (Petty 1992). As mentioned earlier, the stress induced by social isolation and by alcohol administration reduced serotonin levels and increased aggressiveness in mice (Miller et al 1979; Krsiak et al 1977).

RECENT INCIDENTS IN JAPAN OF AGGRESSION AND IMPULSIVENESS

Japan has recently experienced a series of unprovoked random acts of violence, with perhaps the majority of these crimes committed by people with no previous history of delinquency or trouble with the law. In many cases the victim did nothing to provoke the attack. A good example of this type of crime is the stabbing of a pregnant woman in April of 1997. The 25-year-old-man who stabbed the pregnant woman is quoted as saying "I saw a woman walking down the street when I came out of a pachinko parlor. Because I was on edge at the time and her posture from behind looked so happy, I stabbed her in the back" (17 Apr 1997, JT). Although this 29-year-old woman survived the attack, she lost the 8-month-old fetus which she was carrying.

This same combination of spontaneous violence and impulsivity was also evident in the murder of Jun Hase in Kobe in May of 1997. The 14-year-old male accused of the crime is quoted as saying he felt "irritated". Interestingly enough, this same word "irritated" or "on edge" appears in other accounts of youth crime. On 21 October 1997,

a 17-year-old youth employed in an engineering firm and a 16-year-old senior high school student brandished knives and tried to rob a bank in Mito, Ibaraki. They later told police that they were "irritated" and "wanted to cause some disturbance at the bank" (23 Aug 1997, JT).

Although there is insufficient data about the lives of the above perpetrators of these crimes, they appear to have all been experiencing high levels of physiological arousal or, worded differently, high levels of stress hormone and neurotransmitter secretion. As reviewed in a previous paper (Nishio 1998), this increased secretion of stress hormones and neurotransmitters often results in aggression and disinhibition, both of which likely have survival value during danger.

The link of crimes to stress is probably clearer in the following examples. In November of 1996, Takeki Kagawa, a 53-year-old retired public official of Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo, used a metal baseball bat and suffocation to kill his sleeping 14-year-old son because of the son's violence against the family (4 Feb 1998, JT). In this case, the defense argued that Kagawa became mentally ill because of his son's domestic violence and was not of sound mind when he killed the youth.

Stress-induced impulsivity and violence were likely operative in the case of a stabbing in Takaishi, Osaka on 3 December 1997. In this case, the 14-year-old son had stayed up till 4am studying for an end-of-term examination. When he returned home, his father yelled at him for "only playing" and threw away one of his videotapes. The son then punched a hole in the wall in response to which the father hit him. The son then stabbed his father with a kitchen knife (5 December 1997, JT). In this case the provocation of his father likely combined with the disinhibition which is known to occur as a consequence of sleep deprivation.

The role of stress can also be seen in the 15 January 1998 case of a 63-year-old woman who strangled her bed-ridden 89-year-old mother. She reportedly told police that "I was exhausted from looking after my mother and I felt sorry for her" (16 January 1998, JT). The stress of caring for a mother suffering from senile dementia may have played a role in the 3 February 1998 murder-suicide case of 44-year-old Eiichi Aoyama who used a kitchen knife to stab to death his wife (36), their two sons (10 and 12), and ailing mother (73) and then commit suicide (5 Feb 1998, JT). A similar case occurred in Imaiichi, Tochigi Prefecture 8 February 1998 when 65-year-old Yoshio Ikezawa strangled his bedridden wife Yoshiko, also 65, who had been suffering from rheumatism and who had supposedly pleaded "let me die" (9 February 1998, JT).

Cao Shichun, a 35-year-old Chinese man, who stabbed to death a 12-year-old boy in Hiroshima 29 Jan 1998 had recently returned from China where his wife had told him not to come back (31 Jan 1998, JT).

RECENT CRIMES OF DISINHIBITION

In an article which examined the recent rise in youth crimes in Japan, the results of a 1996 survey by the Research Institute for the Advancement of Living Standards were reported (4 Sept 1997, JT). This survey found that more than 30 % of junior high school

subjects surveyed said that they often felt "exasperated for no apparent reason." More than 50 % confessed that they have had "a desire to go on rampages."

Other crimes both adult and juvenile which involve violent acts inappropriate to the immediate situation and which could be considered the result of a combination of aggression and disinhibition include the following. On 7 January 1997, 31-year-old Shuichi Yoshikawa stabbed a 32-year-old man living above him. Yoshikawa later told police that "Anger inside me just blew up because I was annoyed by the sounds of footsteps and the loud volume of the television" (9 January 1997, JT). A senseless killing occurred in Fukuyama, Hiroshima Prefecture on 19 January 1998, when 62-year-old Seikon Tei stabbed 75-year-old Takao Nakashima to death when she tried to mediate over a garbage disposal dispute (19 Jan 1998, JT).

Another attack provoked by a seemingly trivial incident was the case on 30 January 1998 of a 16-year-old senior high school boy in Mito, Ibaraki who assaulted and slightly injured a 16-year-old girl in his class with a kitchen knife supposedly because he was angered because "he could not sit at his seat during a recess as some girls had gathered there" (1 Feb 1998, JT).

CRIMES OF AGGRESSION AND DISINHIBITION - RESULT OF INTERACTING HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

As mentioned earlier, the current crime increase probably has no single explanation, but is likely the interplay of "hardware" and "software." Japan is currently in the middle of a silent social revolution. The country's doors have been opened to a multitude of changes in diet, changes in values, changes in ways of doing business, and these changes are all contributing to the current increase in violence. Let us now look at recent changes which are increasing stress on Japan's youth and possibly thus increasing aggression and impulsivity.

Figure 2 shows these factors divided into four categories - events in the student's individual life, social changes, life habits, and the influence of the mass media and other machines. Factors in the student's life include exam pressure, bullying, materialism (a desire to own namebrands, certain clothes, make-up), increased belief in the concept of romantic love and emphasis on male-female relationships. The negative influence of materialism can be seen in the October 1997 case of a 17-year-old high school girl who was arrested for prostitution through a date club. The girl confessed that she engaged in prostitution because she "wanted to buy brand-name goods" (7 Oct 1997, JT). It can also be seen in the case of a 19-year-old boy who broke into a store to steal CDs, but who ended up stabbing a policeman to death. Prosecutors are now requesting a life term for his crime (3 Mar 1998, JT). In February of 1998, two girls aged 14 and 15 kicked to death an old man who had befriended them because he would not give them money to spend on dining and shopping (22 Feb 1998, JT). A recent example of murder resulting from a male-female relationship gone wrong is the 8 March 1998 slaying of Eri Katsuragawa, a 15-year-old junior high school student, by a 19-year-old boy who said that he strangled her because she wanted to end the relationship and he did not

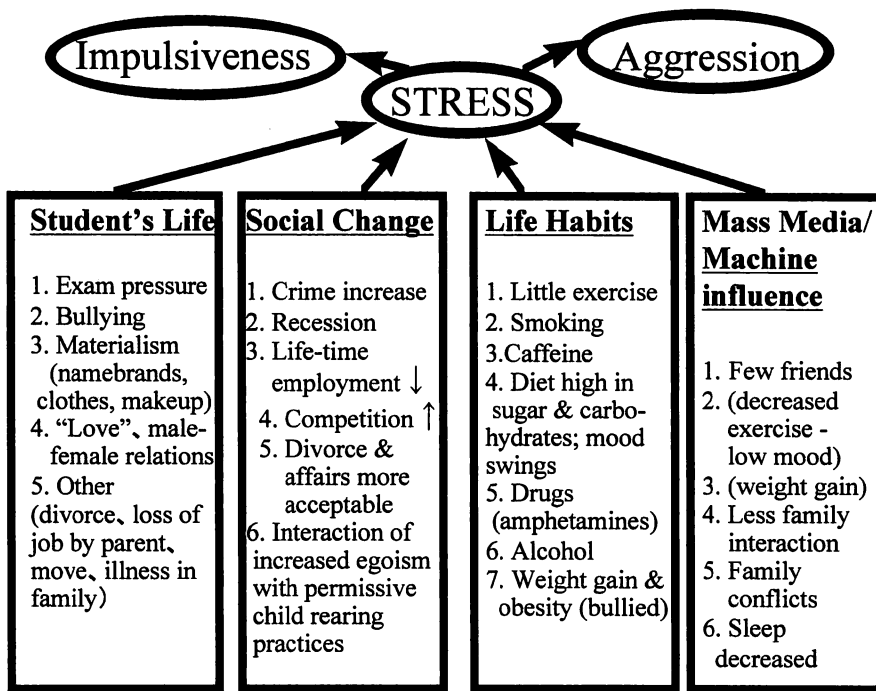


Fig. 2 Possible sources of youth stress.

want to break up with her (10 Mar 1998, JT).

Other possible factors impacting juveniles include divorce, loss of employment by a parent, relocation, illness in the family, etc.

Social changes impacting the level of student stress include the increase and the perceived increase (as reported by the mass media) in crime, the current economic recession and increasing unemployment (28 Feb 1998, JT), the decrease in life-time employment and student concern in regard to this, the current trend in Japan toward greater acceptance of divorce and affairs with this acting to destabilize the family, and the interaction of increased egoism/individualism with relatively permissive child-rearing practices. Researchers were alarmed by a recent poll (3 Feb 1997, JT) which found that even children who lead relatively relaxed lives in rural areas suffer from social stress and are losing confidence in themselves. More than one third of the elementary and junior high school students surveyed thought they "should never have been born."

Recent changes in life habits affecting the stress levels of the young include a decrease in rates of exercise. Exercise elevates mood and increases the individual's ability to control one's self. A survey conducted recently by the Education Ministry found that the physical strength and fitness of young people has declined considerably in the last decade (11 Oct 1997, JT).

Other factors increasing stress hormone and neurotransmitter secretion (and subsequently increasing aggression and impulsivity) include smoking (nicotine stimulates

noradrenalin secretion), caffeine intake ("Coke", coffee, "Pepsi"; increases nora-drenaline secretion), and a diet high in sugar and carbohydrates. Japan's young people are consuming more and more junk food. Unfortunately this type of diet often results in extreme mood swings.

Unfortunately drug use, particularly of amphetamines, is on the increase (24 Oct 1996, JT; 10 Nov 1997, JT, 29 Nov 1997, JT; 31 Jan 1998, JT). Drug use can often end in crime. For example, in Osaka, a 14-year-old female and a 30-year-old male robbed love hotels after injecting amphetamine (7 October 1997, JT). In a separate case in Osaka in January of 1998, a 19-year-old male stabbed a woman and two children after sniffing thinner (9 January 1998, JT).

Other factors likely include alcohol which appears to stimulate stress hormone/neurotransmitter secretion (Nishio 1997) and which has long been associated with aggression and disinhibition. Lastly, weight gain and obesity resulting from reduced exercise in combination with increased high calorie food intake creates its own stress, and can also lead to bullying.

The mass media's considerable impact on human "software" will be discussed in detail further on. However, the mass media is having a direct impact on stress levels in various ways. For example, long hours watching TV, using the computer or virtual pet ("Tamagochi") and computer/TV video games often reduces time spent with friends while at the same time depriving the child of the physical exercise necessary for good mental and physical health. The many food commercials and food related programs on television encourage over-eating as well as promote the consumption of many junk foods high in sugar and carbohydrates leading to roller coaster emotions and energy. Long hours are spent in front of the TV often accompanied by repetitive, "robot-like" eating of high calorie snack foods. The time spent with the mass media also cuts down on the time for meaningful interaction and communication with the child's family such as conversation over dinner. And finally, conflict often arises when parents try to limit TV viewing time or edit the type of programs to be viewed.

MASS MEDIA'S IMPACT ON "SOFTWARE"

Although some of the trends mentioned above are new (i.e. high calorie snack foods, increased caffeine consumption), stress is not new. The character of crimes has changed and this phenomenon of heinous crimes committed by children is occurring world wide. How can we explain this increase? The belief of the author is that our "hardware" is currently interacting with our new "information society." The mass media has become the most effective "teacher" to date in the history of the human race. The problem is not that it is teaching, but *what* is being taught.

When I speak of "software" in this paper, I am speaking of routines of behavior, how we react in certain situations, what we think about certain things, what we say and do when faced with certain situations. Before the advent of the mass media we learned behavior, values, and ways of responding from parents, siblings, teachers, those in our immediate environment, and from books. The situation is now quite different. We have

allowed the ultimate “Trojan horse” into our midst. We have accepted the gift of “entertainment”, but hidden within that “entertainment” are powerful lessons which are altering our traditional ways of thinking and behaving. The influence of this “Trojan horse” goes far beyond the influence on crime to the very basis of most of the cultures of the world. If we do not soon wake up to the tremendous impact which the mass media is having on our thinking and behavior, we will become the fictional people and the fictional situations we see in our shows of “entertainment.” Much of the change in behavior and thinking can be considered retrogression in the evolution of humanity.

Figure 3 shows some of the ways in which the mass media is influencing our “software.” For example, the concept of harmony (“Wa”) has been important for hundreds of years in determining behavior in Japan and in Asia in general. Past generations in Japan have acted in ways that avoided conflict. Unfortunately a large percentage of the current mass media content, particularly videos imported from the U.S., portray conflict resolution through aggression and violence.

Japan has been heavily influenced by Buddhism which teaches that the source of all suffering is material goods and possessions. Unfortunately this way of thinking is dying as the mass media teaches that the way to happiness is through short-term materialistic goals and possessions. The message is “If you only possess those clothes, that jewelry, that fast sports car, those Nike sports shoes, you will be happy.” The irony is that the more we pursue these goals, the less happy we are.

Actors and various people who appear in the mass media provide role models for

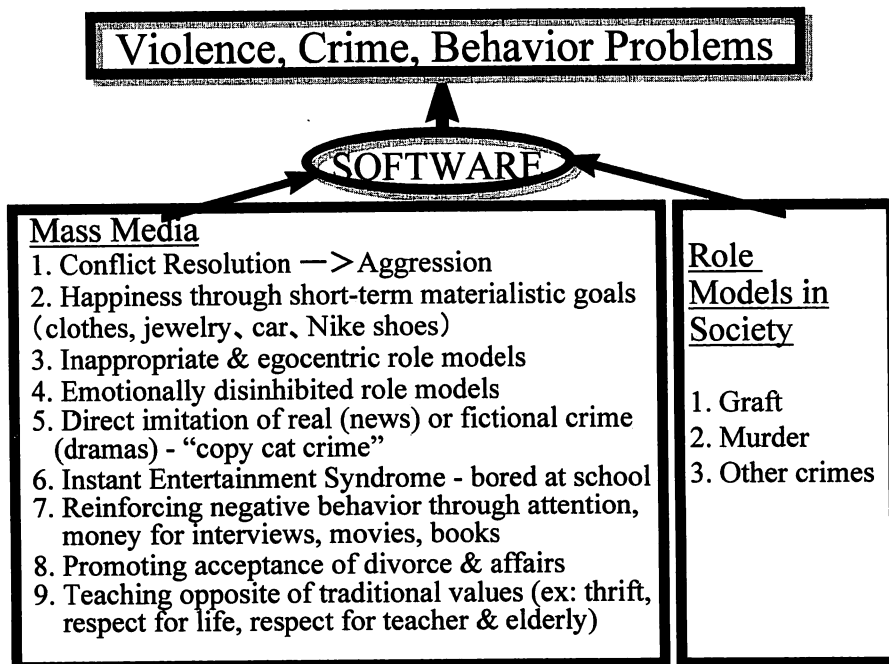


Fig. 3 How mass media and social role models influence “software” leading to violence, crime, or behavior problems

impressionable young minds. Unfortunately these people are often egocentric, behave inappropriately, and are often emotionally disinhibited. This is in stark contrast to a culture which has traditionally valued self-sacrifice, "gaman" (forebearance), and control of emotions. The most dramatic incidents of direct imitation of the mass media are the suicides and "copy cat crimes" (to be discussed later) which occur either following fictional portrayals or real crimes in the news.

Yet another impact of the mass media is the "instant entertainment syndrome" where fast changing and stimulating visual and auditory content constantly parades across the TV screen. It is extremely hard for teachers to compete with this level of stimulation resulting in students who are bored and wish they were back home in front of the TV and frustrated teachers who have trouble sustaining their students' attention.

Another very powerful influence on behavior is the current tendency of the mass media to reinforce negative behavior by paying attention to it. Unfortunately extensive media coverage is given to sensational or titillating topics (ex: serial murders, president's sexual activity). Considerable money is paid to criminals or people who accuse famous people of wrong-doing for interviews, and for book and movie rights. It is one of the fundamental principles of psychology that people will imitate behavior which they see rewarded. The mass media is rewarding all the wrong behaviors and thus increasing that type of behavior in society.

Another influence is by increasing the acceptability of divorce and extramarital affairs. Unfortunately with increasing divorce will come family destabilization and increased stress and possible mental dysfunction for both children and parents.

Though the mass media has tremendous power to influence our values in a positive direction, it is currently doing just the opposite. Traditional Japanese values such as thrift, respect for life, respect for teachers and the elderly, etc. are currently being reversed by mass media content.

Children are also heavily influenced by adult behavior. Unfortunately the news is filled daily with accounts of bribes (4 Mar 1998, JT), tax evasion (4 Mar 1998, JT), and other adult crimes.

HEINOUS CRIMES BY CHILDREN A RECENT WORLD WIDE TREND

Japan has been shocked recently by crimes committed by children. The most sensational juvenile case involved a 14-year-old boy arrested 28 June 1997 in Kobe on suspicion of murdering and decapitating an 11-year-old boy and killing a 10-year-old girl. The same boy is accused of attacking three other children (9 August 1997, JT). This phenomenon of children killing children or adults is not unique to Japan, but has been occurring in various countries over the past seven or eight years. For example, in 1992 two 10-year-old boys in England kidnapped and beat to death a 2-year-old child (11 Nov 1993, JT). In Norway in October of 1994, several 6-year-old boys kicked to death a 5-year-old girl (19 Oct 1994, JT). These cases and the case of a 23-year-old Korean youth who stabbed his parents to death and then set fire to their bodies can be

tied together by a common thread - all the perpetrators of the crimes appear to have been acting out scenes from videos or television. In the case of the 14-year-old killer of Jun Hase, a number of horror videos were found at his home. In the English case, the two boys are said to have watched the video "Child's Play 3" in the week before the slaying; the video is said to contain scenes eerily similar to the manner in which the 2-year-old child was slain (11 November 1993, JT). After the Norwegian slaying, the mother of one of the boys stated "This is terrible, but my son suffers too. He believes that people can get back up after being beaten down" (19 October 1994, JT). Following this incident, Norwegian TV removed the program "Mighty Morphin Rangers." In the parental murder case in Korea, the young man confessed that he used a method of murder which he had seen in a video while in the U.S. (14 October 1994, JT).

This imitation is not limited to the imitation of cartoons and horror movies. The series of "copycat" knife and "butterfly (folding) knife" incidents in Japan in January to March of 1998 testify to the power of the mass media to influence behavior. Table 1 lists these incidents.

The particularly noteworthy aspect of these crimes is the fact that they occur in such close temporal succession. The question which needs to be asked is "How many of these crimes would never have happened if the earlier crimes had not been extensively covered by the mass media?" Research has shown that in the case of both crime and

Table 1 Series of knifing crimes in Japan January - March 1998.

DATE	CRIME	REFERENCE
28 Jan 1998	14-year-old boy wounds another 14-year-old in fight at school	31 Jan 1998 JT
28 Jan 1998	13-year-old boy stabs English teacher with butterfly knife	29 Jan 98 JT 30 Jan 98 JT 31 Jan 98 JT
29 Jan 1998	35-year-old Chinese civil engineer trainee stabs 12-year-old male to death	31 Jan 98 JT
30 Jan 1998	16-year-old male stabs 16-year-old female student	1 Feb 98 JT
2 Feb 1998	Junior high boy and girl threaten 7-11 manager with knife when approached while shoplifting	3 Feb 98 JT "Knife-wield"
2 Feb 1998	15-year-old male with knife attacks policeman to try and steal his gun	3 Feb 98 JT
3 Feb 1998	44-year-old household head stabs 4 members of his family to death and then commits suicide	5 Feb 98 JT
3 Feb 1998	31-year-old male with mental history threatens newspaper office with two knives	5 Feb 98 JT
4 Feb 1998	High school male slightly injures another student with knife	6 Feb 98 JT
4 Feb 1998	19-year-old boy carrying butterfly knife arrested on stolen bike	6 Feb 98 JT
6 Feb 1998	13-year-old male stabs another student's bag and desk with camping knife	8 Feb 1998 JT
9 Feb 1998	Violent 18-year-old boy stabs policeman called by family with camping knife	10 Feb 1998 JT
10 Feb 1998	14-year-old twins stab woman with folding knife to avoid going to school	11 Feb 1998 JT
26 Feb 1998	15-year-old male tries to rob post office with kitchen knife	27 Feb 1998 JT
9 Mar 1998	13-year-old male murders another 13-year-old with knife after dirty trick	10 Mar 1998 JT

suicide, both increase after fictional and nonfiction incidents are televised. It is ironic that the news media diligently seek explanations for these crimes by youth when in fact, in many cases, they themselves are the source of the crimes. They provide the "software" and this is imitated, usually by people who are experiencing significant stress and turmoil in their lives.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE YOUTH CRIMES?

As mentioned earlier, the explanations offered to explain the increase in youth violence include changing values, society's influence, the repressive educational system, the influence of the mass media, the influence of the home, the leniency of the law in regard to youth crime, etc. Each has certainly played a role, however, it is the position of the current author that this phenomenon is best viewed multi-dimensionally. The phenomenon should be viewed as the result of an interaction between "hardware" and "software." The various factors which increase the level of youth stress have been considered as has the current "software" input, often of mass media origin, which is interacting with high stress levels. Let us now consider possible strategies for reducing youth violence. It should be noted that many of these same strategies apply not only to youth violence, but to adult crime as well.

The current movement to lower the criminal age (11 Mar 1998, JT), to search student belongings (8 Feb 1998, JT), and to become generally more strict with youth crime (3 Mar 1998, JT) are merely band-aid solutions. Japan must aim its efforts at the underlying roots of the problem.

A. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - PRESSURE ON THE MASS MEDIA

The technological revolution has brought with it many positive advances. However, all countries of the world must be made aware of the way in which the mass media is radically altering the ways we think and behave and, as a consequence, how it is shifting societies and individual behavior in negative directions perhaps unprecedented in human history. The impact is perhaps seen at its most extreme in the U.S. where the mass media hides behind the shield of "freedom of speech." In Japan where the "well-being of the whole" has been the tradition, it may be easier to bring pressure on the mass media.

There are a number of ways pressure should be brought to bear (Figure 4). First of all, the mass media should portray values which are consonant with traditional Japanese values. In addition, rather than aggression in the face of conflict or frustration, appropriate ways of conflict resolution should be shown. Young people are heavily influenced by characters on television and in movies and should be encouraged by what they view to strive for appropriate goals. This means providing appropriate role models engaging in appropriate careers. Another important goal should be the portrayal of self control rather than impulsiveness. When the mass media selects items for the news and situations for programs, it should do so with the understanding that

there is a high probability that someone will imitate the behavior shown. Those doing programming and editing have the power to reduce the crime and suicides in society by reducing the number of such stories which they carry.

One could say that the mass media is the ultimate parent with the power to increase positive behavior by rewarding it and the power to decrease negative behavior by either punishing it or ignoring it. Unfortunately, it is doing the opposite. By spotlighting crimes and criminals, by making them “heroes”, by paying them for interviews or book or movie rights, it is encouraging that same behavior. Concrete cases of this have

<u>Mass Media Pressure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •“Teach” traditional values •Appropriate conflict resolution •Appropriate youth goals •Self control rather than disinhibition •Appropriate role models •Reduce crimes & suicides in programs and news •Reward positive behavior and ignore negative •Encourage healthy lifestyle •Programs with stable relationships •Select content from view of impact on society 	<u>Education Ministry</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Stress Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Stress’s impact (depression, aggression, etc.) * Factors affecting * Strategies for stress •Increase exercise time •Continue anti-bullying strategies •Reexamine current exam policy •Emotional intelligence important; Emphasize character development 	<u>Government Policy</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Anti-smoking movement •Education concerning alcohol’s impact on mental & physical health •“Active life” movement •Support life-time employment •Stop shift toward more competitive society
<u>Family Life</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Reduce Mass Media use (parent models) •Increase family interaction time, conversation •Understand importance of Emotional Intelligence •Encourage exercise and friendships •Support “Mass Media’s responsible impact on society” movement •Appropriate child rearing •Recognize stress in child & encourage appropriate stress-reduction techniques 	<u>Values</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Instruct parents about Mass Media’s impact on society •Divert society from current materialism •Teach values at home and school •Insure Mass Media values consistent with traditional values 	<u>Law Enforcement</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Anti-drug campaign •Anti-gun campaign •Measures against alcohol & nicotine consumption by youth

Fig. 4 Possible interventions to reduce youth crime.

been reviewed in a previous article (Nishio, 1996).

The mass media can have a tremendous impact on our health through how it portrays smoking, drinking, exercising, and eating behavior. Optimally it should encourage a healthy, balanced life-style thus reducing the likelihood of violence and increasing self control.

Though crime is the extreme end of the continuum, the mass media is changing the way we interact in far more subtle ways, for example, in its portrayal of how men and women interact, how families interact, etc. Programs should depict stable and supportive human relationships.

These are a few of the concrete ways in which changes in the mass media can decrease crime and social problems. The overriding principle is that the mass media must choose all content from the point of view of its potential impact on society before we become the distorted people in the fiction that has been created to entertain us.

B. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

One of the most important things which the Ministry of Education can do is to implement education programs dealing with the effects of stress early in the education system. Children need to understand that stress such as that which comes from being bullied, from losing a girlfriend, or from the divorce of one's parents can make one feel depressed or aggressive or can reduce one's control so that a person may do something they would ordinarily not do. Education should include information about how stress changes one's emotions and thinking, what factors increase stress (e.g. caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, lack of exercise, isolation, etc.) and what strategies can be used to reduce stress (e.g. aerobic exercise, sufficient sleep, balanced diet, friends, etc.). In addition, schools should provide for regular, if not daily, strenuous exercise.

The current strategies to decrease bullying at schools are appropriate. Although traditionally the Japanese education system has included character-building in its curriculum, the race to pass the entrance exams and the long hours of after-school schools ("juku") have cut heavily into the development of balance in students' lives. The current exam policy and the unbalanced emphasis on factual knowledge ("cognitive intelligence") should be rethought so as to provide a balance between "cognitive intelligence" and "emotional intelligence" and character education.

C. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT

An aggressive anti-smoking campaign can greatly improve the mental and physical health of the nation in general as can education concerning alcohol's negative impact on mental and physical health. Particularly with the recent changes in diet, the government should support an "active life" movement to encourage a healthier life-style in all ways.

Two other strategies which can help to increase mental and physical health are support of the "life-time employment" system and short-circuiting the country's shift

toward a more competitive society. Lastly, to some extent the current rise in youth crime may be related to the lack of a strong father figure in the home. The government may wish to encourage a balance between work and family life as opposed to economic competition alone.

D. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - THE FAMILY

There are a number of things which can be done at home to reduce student violence. The first is that parents need to reduce the amount of time children spend viewing the mass media as well as edit the content of that which the child views. Parents should also be role models for their children by entertaining themselves in ways other than the mass media; for example, through hobbies, entertaining friends and family, etc. In addition, a conscious effort should be made to increase the time spent together as a family and the time spent communicating with each other about problems and triumphs.

Parents should understand the importance of "emotional intelligence" (for a comprehensive review, see Goleman, 1995). They should be made aware that the farther they push their children toward "cognitive intelligence" and toward passing entrance exams, the less time that child has to develop "emotional intelligence." Parents should understand the necessary balance of emotional and cognitive intelligence and should encourage the development of friendships, participation in sports, and the development of a well-rounded child.

Another important and necessary role for parents is in bringing pressure on the mass media to take responsibility for the influence they exert on society. There have been several examples of the mass media policing themselves. For example, in February of 1998 following the series of knifing incidents described earlier, several Tokyo television stations exercised restraint in broadcasting scenes with knives in their programs. Fuji Television Network Inc. received calls of protest from viewers the second week in February 1998 when it aired a drama where a folding knife was used (14 Feb 1998, JT). These two cases illustrate both responsible self-editing and also how the public can positively influence the mass media through pressure. Another example of public pressure influencing a profit-driven mass media can be seen in the refusal of bookstores and kiosks to sell the issue of the magazine "Shincho" published by Shinchosha which identified the 19-year-old youth accused of stabbing to death a 5-year-old and injuring two people in Osaka in January of 1998 (20 Feb 1998, JT).

As the emphasis on individualism increases in Japanese society, changes will need to be made in child-rearing practices. The methods of child rearing which were appropriate for a group-oriented society are not necessarily appropriate when more independence and autonomy is given to the individual. Parents need to understand the relationship between egoism and the spoiling of a child. This is particularly important in connection with male children. There may need to be some rethinking by Japanese developmental psychologists of "amae" and "amaeru."

In addition, parents need to understand the impact and origins of stress. They need

to be able to understand when their children are exhibiting symptoms of stress and they need to encourage appropriate measures to alleviate the stress. For example, a child who has spent many hours in front of the computer needs to get out of the house and get physical exercise. Parents need to be aware that stressed children who are not using appropriate methods of coping are more likely to become involved in problem behaviors or to try drugs as a way of escape (16 July 1997, JT).

E. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - VALUES

The importance of our underlying values in guiding behavior is often not fully appreciated until we cross cultures and see how great the impact of values can be on all our thoughts and actions. The underlying values of the Japanese people as well as those of many countries around the world are currently undergoing a dramatic shift as young people assimilate the distorted values being purveyed by a profit-driven mass media. It is extremely important for parents to understand the impact the mass media values are having, particularly on their children (Figure 4). Much of the world appears to be moving toward the acceptance of the concept of a "global economy." Unfortunately this includes the wholehearted acceptance of unbridled capitalism, materialism, and consumerism. The consequences of this supremacy of materialism can be seen in the cases of Japanese teenagers who rob in order to obtain brand name tennis shoes (22 Jan 1997, JT), who kick an old man to death because of a dispute over spending money (19 Feb 1998, JT; 22 Feb 1998, JT), and who risk AIDS by engaging in prostitution in order to buy goods they think will bring them happiness (7 Oct 1997, JT).

Not only should parents be aware of the importance of values, but they must make sure these are taught at home and at school. Finally, for the future of their children and of the country, parents and other concerned members of society should insure that the mass media is teaching values which are consonant with traditional values.

F. STRATEGIES AIMED AT YOUTH CRIME - LAW ENFORCEMENT

The current efforts of the National Police Force to prevent the proliferation of drugs and guns in Japanese society are extremely important. Unfortunately Finance Ministry statistics show that more guns and more drugs entered Japan in 1997 (27 Feb 1998, JT). When someone is heavily stressed, loses control, and becomes aggressive, they will make use of the available weapons to express that aggression, often imitating scenes portrayed in the mass media. If guns are available, they will likely choose this method as can be seen in the recent case in Japan of a father who killed his son and then himself with a shotgun intended for hunting and trapshooting (31 Aug 1998, JT). The recent series of murders and mass murders in the U.S. committed by teenagers who have lost control also testify to this (27 Apr 1998, JT; 17 June 1998, JT; 13 Aug 1998, JT). It should be emphasized, however, that guns are just a more "efficient" means of killing. As the events of January and February 1998 in Japan testify, knives can also be equally lethal though the death toll in one incident may be lower. Currently both Japan and the U.S. are trying to deal with poison as the weapon (27 July 1998, JT; 4

Aug 1998, JT; 15 August 1998, JT; 26 Aug 1998, JT).

One last way in which law enforcement can reduce crime is in preventing the consumption of alcohol by the young. The association between alcohol, aggression, impaired judgment, and mental imbalance is a strong one, particularly in the young whose frontal lobes (7 July 1998, JT) are not fully developed.

DISCUSSION

Human history has been a constant series of change and adaptation. We are currently faced with a pressing need to adapt. The new technology which has been in existence just a few short decades is rapidly altering the very basis of our cultures. The programs and news which are meant to entertain and/or “inform” us are altering our behavior in the direction of that which we are observing. Collectively these alterations are increasing the level of stress in our lives in the way of increased levels of crime, increased fear of our world and distrust in people, increases in suffering which arise from striving for inappropriate goals, increased suffering through imitation of inappropriate relationship patterns, etc. The consequences of stress and traumatic stress are multiple: increased accidents, decreased mental and physical health with an increased burden on the health care system, increased crime, increased alcoholism and drug use, increases in failed relationships, poor work performance, etc.

This is setting up a vicious cycle of traumatic stress which will feed upon itself (Figure 5). For example, a child is killed by an unstable teenager imitating a knife fight scene seen on television. The child’s parent then sinks into a depression and may commit suicide thus further traumatizing the surviving children who may, as a conse-

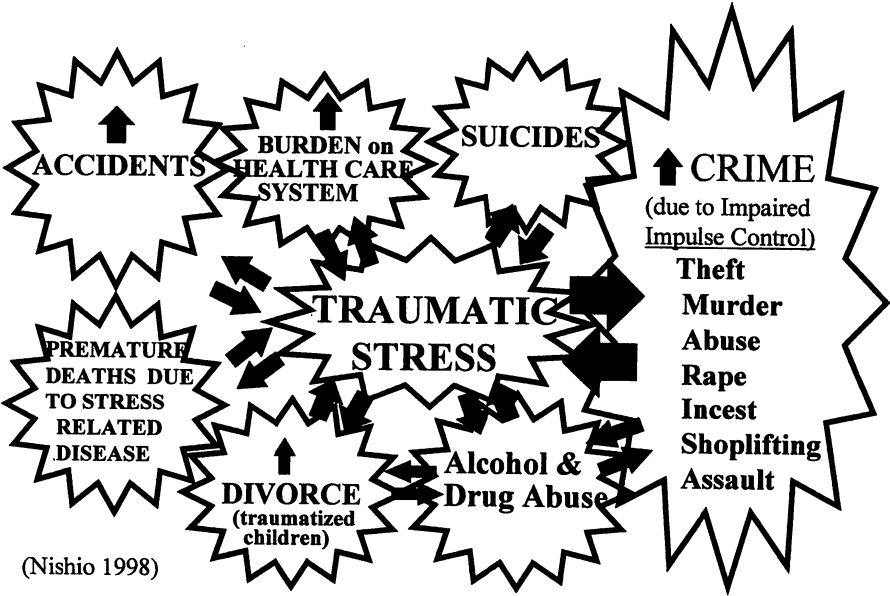


Fig. 5 How traumatic stress creates a vicious cycle of traumatic stress.

quence, become alcoholics or they themselves may commit a crime. And so the vicious cycle gains a life of its own and the number of victims and perpetrators continues to expand exponentially. This self-perpetuating vicious cycle can be clearly seen in the U.S. It is just gaining momentum in Japan.

If Japan is to avoid the situation as seen in the U.S., it must address the root source of the current crimes. A strictly profit-driven mass media will prove disastrous for human development and must either edit itself for its impact on society or this must be done by the people and/or by the government.

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