

# JT News

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September 26, 1986

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\*\*\*\*Surgeon General's Conference on Violence  
will address many types of violence

DALLAS -- America is a violent country, says Houston, Texas, police chief Lee Brown. Brown, whom many have credited with turning around a major metropolitan police force that in the past has been considered part of the problem in that city, is a tight man with words, but he's willing to speak out on this subject.

"If you don't believe me, just look around," he says. "People have different ways of responding to things. Responses the police have to deal with have to do with people's doing something bad to other people--or to themselves."

The chief, who achieved national attention at the time he headed the Atlanta, Ga., department during the time of the Atlanta child murders and further celebrity status when network TV presented a dramatization of the case, divided violence into two classifications. They are intentional violence and unintentional violence. Police departments, he says, have to deal with both.

Brown will be one of the participants in a five-state conference entitled "Violence in America: Southwest Regional Conference," to be held under the auspices of the U.S. Surgeon General's Office this fall. The conference, which will be held at the Plaza of the Americas Hotel in Dallas, is slated for Nov. 6-8.

Host institution for the meeting is The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas. Other sponsoring institutions and organizations include The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston; the U.S. Public Health Service, Bureau of Community Health Delivery and Assistance, Maternal and Child Health; the U.S. Public Health Service, Region VI; the National Institute of Mental Health; the Office of Minority Health, Department of Health and Human Services; Family Advocacy Programs, Department of Defense; the LBJ School of Public Affairs; the Centers for Disease Control; The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work; The University of Texas at Arlington Graduate School of Social Work; The Dallas County Medical Society; Texas Woman's University; and Sigma Theta Tau, Inc., Beta Beta Chapter.

The major address will be given by C. Everett Koop, surgeon general, U.S. Public Health Department. Other featured speakers will include Lois Haight Herrington, assistant attorney general, U.S. Department of Justice; Dr. Shervert Frazier, director of the National Institute of Mental Health; Dr. Herbert Nickens, director, Office of Minority Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and Dr. Mark Rosenberg, assistant director of science, Division of Injuries, Epidemiology and Control, Centers for Disease Control, Atlanta, Ga.

Chairman of the steering committee is Dr. Robert McGovern, professor of pediatrics and director of its Division of Ambulatory Care. Program chairman is Dr. Annette Zimmern, assistant professor in clinical psychiatry at UTHSCD. Zimmern is an expert in substance abuse.

Brown, who has a Ph.D. in criminology, says that he has seen an escalation of violence in the 26 years he has been "in this business. Today there is more violence -- and more senseless violence." He points out that in the past the perpetrator and the victim knew each other in 90 percent of the violent acts. Today statistics show that that is the case in only 70 to 75 percent of the reported violent acts.

The pragmatic police officer, who has been in the news again recently with his internal cleanup efforts that resulted in conviction of department employees for brutality to prisoners, says he doesn't know why there has been an escalation in senseless violence. However, he does point out that a great deal of the violence in the city of Houston today is related to narcotics.

"If I could close down the narcotics business today, it would go a long way in ridding the city of much of its violence."

(more)



A difference in the way family violence is being handled by the Houston Police Department is among the changes Brown has instituted. Now when there is evidence of physical abuse, such as blood, police are required to make an arrest. Brown has changed the policy from treating spouse abuse as a "family episode" to treating it as a crime. In addition to the change of policy, he says that training courses have made Houston officers more sensitive to this kind of violence.

Another major conference participant who deals with family violence is Dr. Blair Justice, professor of psychology at The University of Texas School of Public Health, UTHSCH. Justice, along with his wife, Dr. Rita Justice, is known internationally as an expert on child abuse and incest. A former police reporter and science writer at major Texas newspapers, Justice became interested in the problems of violence in our society because of his encounters with crime through reporting and from learning about the workings of the brain and the mind in his years on the science beat, which included medicine and human behavior.

For the past several years, Justice has been studying "programs that work" in the area of child-abuse prevention, which he feels is a major priority for our society. Much of his own research is also involved with this topic, including work on incest.

The psychologist says that in reviewing successful prevention programs in the area of infant abuse around the country, he has discovered that they all have several things in common. First, a health or social work personnel officer helps in understanding the needs of the new baby and how to care for it, as well as answering any personal questions the mother, who is usually very young herself, may have. It seems to be necessary that the "teacher" have a proven track record as a parent personally in order to be effective. Second, the parent education and personal contact must not stop just because the mother and baby leave the hospital, says Justice. "The helper must keep in touch, visit with the new mother, continue support and be an available liaison on community resources." Third, the professional taking the role of teacher or friend must be an effective role model.

Justice says it is important that this kind of service be offered to all young mothers, not just those expected to be at high risk. And when this approach is taken, he says, there will be far less child abuse than in the control groups that receive no extra help in parenting. Interestingly enough, "bonding programs," in which child and parent often "roomed-in" together and in which the mother had much of the responsibility for the care of the newborn while they were still in the hospital, have not proved out well in long-term testing in cases where the mother is very young herself. "These young mothers may need mothers themselves at that time," says Justice. "Instead of nurturing, they may need to be nurtured."

Understanding the causes of child abuse in our society is important, says Justice, because without understanding there can be no real prevention or intervention. The psychologist believes that much family violence -- including child abuse and incest -- may be caused by someone who is looking to another member, or members, of the family to meet personal needs that he or she doesn't know how to fulfill. These include the need for warmth, caring and "good strokes."

"And, of course, a small child can't fulfill a parent's needs this way. A child has needs of its own," he says. "Often these people will have very poor coping skills." Also, there is often alcohol involved, as there is with any situation in which someone "feels bad" and may be self-medicating.

Stress, says Justice, is often blamed for child abuse. However, his research shows that, while stress may be involved in some incidents, stress is not itself the cause of child abuse. There must be other elements present such as symbiotic behavior, that is the dependency on the child to meet the adult's emotion needs, lower coping skills and usually a history of violence as a way of solving problems, often a carryover from the abuser's own family life as a child.

He also has found other factors important in looking at the abusing family and has identified the following similarities:

- \*The family that is abusive is less cohesive than most family groups.

- \*The family that is abusive seems to exhibit more need for control within the family group.

(more)



\*There seems to be less willingness for family members to be independent: If other family members are independent, then the needy one won't get his or her needs met, and also they may fear abandonment.

Dr. Larry Hebert, a pediatrician on the faculty at the medical school in Baton Rouge, La., will address child abuse as a medical problem, a belief he has in common with Brown. Through visits with Dr. Roger Bulger, president of UTHSCH, the Houston health science center has established a standing committee on violence with representation both from the school and the community.

Hebert, who has 15 years of emergency-room experience seeing badly abused children, has become an advocate of the physician's intervention in the problem. Along with McGovern, also an academic pediatrician, he believes that physicians themselves must take more responsibility in recognizing the signs of abuse in children that they see professionally and taking steps to see that the helpless child is saved from an ongoing situation.

Besides diminishing violence in individual cases, Dr. Kenneth Altshuler, chairman of psychiatry at UTHSCD and a program participant, is interested in diminishing the amount of violence in society. "If we can minimize the factors we know are often associated with violence, then we can minimize the total amount of violence in our society." These factors, says the psychiatrist, include poverty, overcrowding and lack of sustenance. Also, statistically, we know some things about violence, such as the violent individual is more likely to be male, someone who has had previous violent episodes, have brain damage, have a low IQ or did not do well in school, have a history of battering others and may have been battered himself as a child, be from a broken family and/or have a history of alcohol or other substance abuse.

"We know that conscience and self-control are formed in the cradle of a warm family experience, supported by family example and consistent, but not overly harsh discipline," says Altshuler. "What we don't know is how to predict individual cases." Not everyone who is battered will become a battering spouse or parent. Not everyone who has been the victim of incest will turn for sex to his or her own children. However, certainly it is true that many forms of violence in our country are alcohol related, he says. "Many people have consciences that are soluble in alcohol--given enough of it."

For further information about the meeting, call Dr. Annette Zimmern's office at (214) 688-2913 or write to her at the following address: Children and Youth Project, 5323 Harry Hines, Blvd., Dallas, TX 75235.

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NOTE: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and the School of Allied Health Sciences.