

**Read the following article and respond the questions**

*Remember to use your skimming and scanning skills*

## **NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS: A TEENAGE TIME BOMB**

They are just four, five and six years old right now, but already they are making criminologists nervous. They are growing up, too frequently, in abusive or broken homes, with little adult supervision and few positive role models. Left to themselves, they spend much of their time hanging out on the streets or soaking up violent TV shows. By the year 2005 they will be teenagers--a group that tends to be, in the view of Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox, "temporary sociopaths--impulsive and immature." If they also have easy access to guns and drugs, they can be extremely dangerous.

For all the heartening news offered by recent crime statistics, there is an ominous flip side. While the crime rate is dropping for adults, it is soaring for teens. Between 1990 and 1994, the rate at which adults age 25 and older committed homicides declined 22%; yet the rate jumped 16% for youths between 14 and 17, the age group that in the early '90s supplanted 18- to 24-year-olds as the most crime-prone. And that is precisely the age group that will be booming in the next decade. There are currently 39 million children under 10 in the U.S., more than at any time since the 1950s. "This is the calm before the crime storm," says Fox. "So long as we fool ourselves in thinking that we're winning the war against crime, we may be blindsided by this bloodbath of teenage violence that is lurking in the future."

Demographics don't have to be destiny, but other social trends do little to contradict the dire predictions. Nearly all the factors that contribute to youth crime--single-parent households, child abuse, deteriorating inner-city schools--are getting worse. At the same time, government is becoming less, not more, interested in spending money to help break the cycle of poverty and crime. All of which has led John J. Dilulio Jr., a professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton, to warn about a new generation of "superpredators," youngsters who are coming of age in actual and "moral poverty," without "the benefit of parents, teachers, coaches and clergy to teach them right or wrong and show them unconditional love."

Predicting a generation's future crime patterns is, of course, risky, especially when outside factors (Will crack use be up or down? Will gun laws be tightened?) remain unpredictable. Michael Tonry, a professor of law and public policy at the University of Minnesota, argues that the demographic doomsayers are unduly alarmist. "There will be a slightly larger number of people relative to the overall population who are at high risk for doing bad things, so that's going to have some effect," he concedes. "But it's not going to be an apocalyptic effect." Norval Morris, professor of law and criminology at the University of Chicago, finds Dilulio's notion of superpredators too simplistic: "The human animal in young males is quite a violent animal all over the world. The people who put forth the theory of moral poverty lack a sense of history and comparative criminology."

Yet other students of the inner city are more pessimistic. "All the basic elements that spawn teenage crime are still in place, and in many cases the indicators are worse," says Jonathan Kozol, author of *Amazing Grace*, an examination of poverty in the South Bronx. "There's a dramatic increase of children in foster care, and that's a very high-risk group of

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kids. We're not creating new jobs, and we're not improving education to suit poor people for the jobs that exist."

Can anything defuse the demographic time bomb? Fox urges "reinvesting in children": improving schools, creating after-school programs and providing other alternatives to gangs and drugs. Dilulio, a law-and-order conservative, advocates tougher prosecution and wants to strengthen religious institutions to instill better values. Yet he opposes the Gingrich-led effort to make deep cuts in social programs. "A failure to maintain existing welfare and health commitment for kids," he says, "is to guarantee that the next wave of juvenile predators will be even worse than we're dealing with today." Dilulio urges fellow conservatives to think of Medicaid not as a health-care program but as "an anticrime policy.'

## Questions

1. Young children are making criminologists nervous because

- (a) they are committing too much crime.
- (b) they are impulsive and immature.
- (c) they may grow up to be criminals.

2. The general crime rate in the US is

- (a) increasing
- (b) decreasing
- (c) not changing

3. The age group which commits the highest rate of crime is

- (a) 14 - 17.
- (b) 18 - 24.
- (c) 24 +.

4. James Fox believes that the improvement in crime figures could

- (a) make us complacent in the fight against crime.
- (b) result in an increase in teenage violence.
- (c) result in a decrease in teenage violence.

5. According to paragraph 3, the government

- (a) is doing everything it can to solve the problem.
- (b) is not interested in solving the problem.
- (c) is not doing enough to solve the problem.

6. In comparison with James Fox, Michael Tonry is

- (a) more pessimistic.
- (b) less pessimistic.
- (c) equally pessimistic.

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7. Jonathan Kozol believes that

- (a) there is no solution to the problem.
- (b) employment and education are not the answer.
- (c) employment and education can improve the situation.

8. Professor Dilulio thinks that spending on social programs

- (a) should continue as it is
- (b) should be decreased.
- (c) is irrelevant to crime rates.