

Re: Mental Health Services

To the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this subject. Like most, I am not a psychologist but I think that my life experience and research can be brought to bear on the issues of mental health and its relationship to violence in our society.

It's clear to me that over time, certain things have changed, while others have remained fairly constant. Since the advent of TV, most Americans have always had exposure to visual acts of violence on a daily basis. We had shows with cowboys and war movies where violence was quite prevalent. At the same time, we also had a society where children would carry their rifles to school right on their backs to shoot on the school shooting team or go hunting with friends after school. We played "army", "cowboys and Indians" and "cops and robbers" quite often. We shot up a lot of "bad guys" too. Despite this, we didn't have children shooting up their friends with real firearms. We didn't have kids going into malls and movie theaters and shooting innocent, unarmed victims in order to satisfy their need to feel powerful and in control. There was easy access to firearms years ago also. You could go down to a local hardware store or a Sears and get one. Access has actually become more restricted over the years with over 20,000 laws and regulations on the books from coast to coast.

In short, I don't think it's TV, movies, video games or firearms that are causing our mental health problems here. I have seen the movies, played all the games and am a firearms owner. Quite frankly, the thought of pointing a firearm at an innocent person is abhorrent... to say nothing of shooting them. I would add however that exposure at an age where the child cannot discriminate between "real" and "make-believe" can cause that person to become desensitized to violence. I base that on Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's book "On Killing"... parts of which I agree with and some parts I do not.

So what has changed? Two things I believe:

-We live in a society where we now coddle children and bring them up to believe that they are perfect, never wrong and that they are entitled to the all the trimming that come with success, without having to earn those things. As they move toward adulthood, reality begins to hit home and they are not prepared for it. They have not developed the mechanisms to cope with the realities of the world, which is far from perfect and holds many challenges and sometimes, disappointments. In response, they begin to lash out. ...violently at times.

-The mass dispersal of mind altering medication (as well as prescription pain meds) is in my opinion, one of the greatest threats to our country as we know it. Let me say that I understand that they do help some people. Conversely, I have personally seen these drugs ruin multiple lives. The listed side effects on many drugs speak for themselves, let alone the list of people who have carried out acts of violence while on these types of medication. I have personally seen somebody stab themselves with a steak knife and claim it was an accident in order to obtain more prescription pain medication. These drugs are that strong. Medications with chemicals,

produced by a corporation for profit, are not the method we should be “teaching” our children to cope with the realities and challenges of life.

I think that we need to get children, and quite frankly all people in general, back to a mindset that reflects the positives of hard work, sacrifice, respect and the value of life. Unfortunately, I don't think that this is something that can be done by the government alone. It must start in people's minds and in their homes. However, identifying and treating people who have developed serious mental illness is something that is critical and that I think the government can be involved in but it is far outside my area of expertise.

Thank you,
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