There are ways to reduce violence -- let's use them

http://www.frirelight.cn 2007-05-30

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[摘要] May 29, 2007. The death of 16-year-old Blair Holt marked yet another loss of a Chicago Public School student to gang violence -- the 20th brutal murder of a Chicago student at the hands of gangs since September 2006. The headlines are chilling enough. Still more devastating, of course, is the toll the murders are taking on our families, schools, and communities -- a reminder of our war at home.

[关键词] violence;families;schools

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the 20th brutal murder of a Chicago student at the hands of gangs since September 2006. The headlines are chilling enough. Still more devastating, of course, is the toll the murders are taking on our families, schools, and communities -

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Such incidents are merely the tip of a massive iceberg, underneath which lays a string of interconnected social problems that plague our inner cities: poverty, crime, violence, psychological distress, poor academic achievement, gangs and high rates of youth HIV infection.

In my interviews with nearly 600 African-American Chicago high school students, I found that roughly one-

fourth reported being a victim of a robbery or mugging, nearly half witnessed a gang-

related injury or death, and 85 percent received news of the serious injury or unexpected death of someone close to them. Nearly one in three witnessed a dead body in their community. How many of us can say that?

Few would argue that such violence can challenge the physical and psychological well-

being of youth. In such an environment, it's hard to focus on school. Exposure to violence is linked to psychological distress, which in turn is linked to low school achievement. After all, how can a teenager concentrate in school when he is surrounded by the prospects of random violence on his way to, in and from school? What does living constantly on high alert do to one's psyche?

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that African-

American youth are twice as likely as white youth to drop out of school and have lower grades. Incidentally, 30 percent of males in the Chicago research study reported some involvement in gangs. Although gangs are frowned on by the larger society, for many of these youth, they, ironically, provide protection in violent communities, as well as money

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making opportunities where few exist and a sense of belonging or status. It is a sadly telling statistic that this many young men have turned to gangs.

How long before we bring an end to this war? Granted, this is a problem with no easy remedy. We cannot expect simple answers to a problem whose source is lodged deeply in race and class, in neighborhoods socially isolated from the mainstream, with few signs of hope for its youth, and in places where youth find more solidarity with a gang than in school or at home. But we can demand that our leaders take action before another killing leads the

There are proven ways to reduce community violence, but it requires action on multiple levels. Communities must limit the availability of drugs, alcohol and weapons, and clean up visible signs of decay -

-- vacant lots, boarded-up houses, drug-

dealing dens. Families must increase parental monitoring and supervision of youth, reduce severe and inconsistent punishment of their kids, and, of course, eliminate parental involvement in violent behavior. In schools, steps must be taken to intervene early to address aggressive and problematic behaviors (Virginia Tech recently reminded us of this) and promote the value of achievement. We can draw hope from successful examples like the Midw

Arne Duncan, CEO of Chicago Public Schools, is right to ask whether such acts would be tolerated in affluent school districts. We cannot relegate inner

city children to the sidelines of life. In the end, it costs us all. Families lose another child to violence, and society incarcerates another youth. When African

-American males in their 40s are more likely to have served time in prison than go to college or enlist in the military, something is sadly wrong.

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