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Media Release  
The Vancouver Board of Trade

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## **HOW WE GROW CRIMINALS: KIDS ‘N’ CRIME REPORT URGES EARLY PREVENTION OVER LATER INTERVENTION**

A new report by The Vancouver Board of Trade (The Board) looking at how criminal tendencies develop says Canadians can either pay now, and develop a committed and coordinated approach to addressing the factors children face that could lead to criminal development, or pay much more later when dealing with the consequences of these children growing up to become criminals.

The report, called “Kids ‘N’ Crime: Report on Development of Criminality Among Children and Youth,” outlines a number of harmful factors children face from birth to adulthood, which contribute to criminal development including: poor reading skills, poor nutrition, learning disabilities, illicit drug use, adolescent peer pressures and poor parenting. Factors typically fall into five categories: prenatal environmental factors, postnatal environmental factors, education and learning factors, transition-to-adolescence factors, and substance abuse factors.

“While each of these types of developmental risk factors could lead to chronic criminal activity, they really need to be seen as a continuum,” said Dave Park, Assistant Managing Director and Chief Economist, The Vancouver Board of Trade. “The more risk factors are present, the more likely that child will become a criminal. Take a look at our prison population and you’ll see an overwhelming overrepresentation of these factors. We need to focus on prevention and deal with these negative influences as early as possible in each child’s life.”

The Board is calling for greater emphasis on interdisciplinary research and discussion to address criminal development from many perspectives throughout youth and adolescence, as well as research on outcomes for combinations of risk factors. In addition, The Board is also calling for a review of delivery of support at all levels (family, community, government) so a more coordinated approach among service providers, characterized by earlier intervention, treatment and risk mitigation, can be developed.

“While there are many risks in childhood and adolescence, thankfully, there are many opportunities to minimize those risks,” said Park. “The benefits of risk reduction go beyond a drop in criminal activity to include more cohesive families, better-functioning schools, a larger skilled workforce, and less reliance on health services and social services. The positive impact of risk reduction is far-reaching and needs to be a priority.”

Kids ‘N’ Crime was prepared by Alasdair Maughan, a UBC Psychology graduate and MBA candidate, under the direction of economist Dave Park. To view the full report, visit [www.boardoftrade.com](http://www.boardoftrade.com).

**Contact:**

Dave Park  
Chief Economist and Assistant Managing Director  
The Vancouver Board of Trade  
604-641-1254

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# **KIDS 'N' CRIME**

## **Report on the Development and Prevention of Criminality Among Children and Youth**

### **KEY FINDINGS:**

- Factors impacting children from before birth to adulthood can have serious psychological effects.
- Drug and alcohol use during pregnancy can have lasting serious consequences for children.
- Birth to age three is the most crucial developmental period.
- Children's learning patterns become set before they begin their formal education.
- Skilled readers have the best chance of lifelong success.
- Home environments affect academic achievement.
- Having a variety of parent-child activities has numerous benefits.
- Low socio-economic status rather than poverty itself contributes to poor development.
- Educated parents typically provide better stimulation, nutrition and access to activities.
- Young children are susceptible to neighbourhood social problems and unemployment.
- Children benefit from access to early learning resources.
- Children benefit from quality institutional childcare independent of home environment.
- Identifying children at risk of low language and literacy development is critical to fostering literacy skills in preschool children.
- Beyond Grade Three, the school curriculum does not accommodate students who cannot read.
- Increased educational attainment is positively correlated with every important life outcome.
- Childhood to adolescence is a significant period in a child's life, where they're transformed neurologically, hormonally, cognitively and socially, affecting self-image and social interaction.
- The most effective interventions during adolescence are those addressing parenting behaviour.
- Adolescents experiencing high stress, low parental support and/or low academic competence are more likely to experience problematic gambling, drug abuse, or be involved in the sex trade.
- With all aspects of youth development, early intervention is easier and less costly than later attempts.
- Prevention is preferable to intervention.

### **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Educate youth about parenting skills.
- Provide parenting education during pregnancy.
- Conduct home visits to identify and remediate potential problems.
- Improve literacy of parents.
- Ensure children have access to a nutritious diet.
- Provide parents with early learning resources for use at home.
- Provide access to quality childcare.
- Enhance educator's ability to detect learning disabilities.
- Enhance opportunities for immigrant children to develop core language skills.
- Enhance parents' understanding of the dynamics of adolescence.
- Educate teens regarding risk reduction and parenting techniques.
- Improve high school graduation rates.
- Reduce gambling and drug use among teens.
- Improve access to treatment for youth involved in gambling, drug use and sex trade.