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A RANKING OF CRITICAL ISSUES FACING AMERICAN FAMILIES

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In April 1990 a documented list of 33 Critical Issues Facing American Families was sent to a nationwide sample of 1,231 persons. This list identified and briefly overviewed various social concerns which effect the family as an institution. The sample was selected by State Extension Specialists serving the needs of families. Each specialist was asked to identify 20 people from their state. The sample included persons who were professional staff working for Extension, University teachers/researchers in a family-related discipline, public school educators, and other persons who had and had not used Extension Services in the recent past.

Each person in the sample was asked to read over the list of 33 critical issues and rate each issue on a scale from 1 to 10. The higher the rating the more critical the issue. There were 845 respondents resulting in a 69% return rate.

The data from the study indicated the following 20 issues as being the most critical in the United States. Each issue is briefly documented.

A complete list of the 33 unranked family issues are contained in a publication EC 435 "Critical Issues Facing American Families," available from Extension Publications, Utah State University, Logan, Utah 84322-5015. The cost is 75 cents. Bulk order prices available upon request.

1. *Coping with the causes of child abuse, neglect, and family violence.*

The major risk factors are: poverty, unemployment, early parenthood, substance abuse, inadequate housing, inadequate role modeling and high levels of family stress.

Upwards of six million children and three million spouses are seriously assaulted annually in America. Individuals in families where abuse is present are more likely to have psychological problems — even in the absence of personal abuse. Observing another family member being abused can cause emotional damage. (Straus, 1990).

Physical and sexual child abuse along with family violence have increased significantly in the past few years. Many of the existing local and state programs designed to repair the damage done by violent and abusive homes are overworked and inadequately funded (Children's Defense Fund, 1988).

The exact amount of abuse and violence is very difficult to measure since much of it occurs in the privacy of a home during the day-to-day activities of family relationships. Some experts suggest that while reported cases are still increasing, the actual rate of increase is

declining. Further, in recent years, what has been defined as abusive behavior has been expanded to encompass a wider range of abuse. Hopefully, some of the sharp increase is due to better reporting and greater public awareness (United Way, 1987).

Runaway children and youth represent the majority of "missing children." Most common reasons for youth running away are abuse, neglect and other family problems. A national study indicated that more than a third of the children and youth on the run were running from physical or sexual abuse at home (Children's Defense Fund, 1988).

2. Functional illiteracy is placing America's youth at risk.

Inadequate reading, writing, and math skills limit employment for approximately 60 percent of the nation's 17 year olds. Seven of 10 high school students have difficulty writing a letter, seeking employment or requesting information. Three of five 20 year olds are unable to read a map or total their lunch bill. One of eight 17 year olds has reading-writing skills below the 6th grade level (functionally illiterate). Illiteracy places youth at risk for other social problems: 68 percent of arrested youth, 85 percent of unwed mothers, 75 percent of welfare dependents, 85 percent of dropouts, and 72 percent of the unemployed are functionally illiterate (Making the Grade: A Report Card on American Youth, 1989).

3. Health care costs continue to rise faster than the family income.

Medical care spending by individuals is rising faster than the general economy and the national inflation rate. In 1986, health-care costs rose 8 1/2 percent above the previous year. If these increases continue, the battle between labor and management over employee health-care benefits will intensify and possibly bankrupt the current Medicare system. Millions of Americans, especially lower income and unemployed families, go without necessary health care. These families have no public or private

health insurance (United Way, 1987 and 1989). Fewer children are covered by health care policies (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). In 1965, health-care spending accounted for nearly 6 percent of the gross national product. In 1986, it was almost 11 percent and predicted to be 15 percent by the year 2000 (Rich, 1987).

4. Many of our nation's school age children are at risk of either failing or dropping out before graduating from high school.

Educators warn that nearly a third of our Nation's school-age children, based on their life's circumstances, are at risk of failing or dropping out of school. School dropouts are much more prone to be participants in crime, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, or being chronically unemployed during their working years (Vobejda, 1987).

In 1986 the dropout rate for schools in Washington, D. C. was 43.2 percent. Nine other states located mostly in the South to Southeast but including New York, Nevada, District of Columbia and Arizona had dropout rates between 34.8 percent and 38 percent. The High school dropout rates in some of America's larger cities approach 50 percent. Those rates can be improved as evidenced by such places as Minnesota who had a graduation rate in 1986 of 91.4 percent. Nine other states located mostly in the North to Northeast had graduation rates between 81.2 percent and 91.4 percent (World Almanac, 1989).

The proportion of the population completing high school and college continues to rise. The proportions finishing high school have increased more rapidly for blacks than whites (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987; Lyke, 1987). The percentage of Americans with at least a high school education has greatly increased within the last 40 years. Currently one American in five holds a college degree (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987).

Despite the trend to get more education, 25 percent of the youth do not complete high school. Less than three fourths of all students graduated from high school on time with their age cohorts in 1986. Most of the non-graduating youth are from households that are living below the poverty level, members of a minority group, or have parents who have not graduated from high school.

Hispanics, followed by blacks, have the highest dropout rate (Federal Register, 1986; Making the Grade, A Report Card on American Youth, 1989).

5. Teenage pregnancy and child bearing continues to be a significant problem for youth, their families, their children and society as a whole.

The consequences of teenage pregnancy for the female and her teenage male partner are very costly in terms of educational and emotional deprivation. Mothers who give birth during their teen years tend to be poor, less educated, and receive less prenatal care. Their children are more likely to be born at low-birth weight, grow up in disadvantaged neighborhoods, be involved in accidents, attend lower quality schools, and have a greater chance of growing up in a single-parent family (Children's Defense Fund, 1987).

Nearly one-half million teenagers give birth to a child each year. Four in 10 teenage females, 14 years of age, will have at least one pregnancy before their 20th birthday. Six out of every 10 women presently receiving public assistance had a child during their teenage years (Federal Register, 1986). Although the actual number of teenage births is declining, this decline results from fewer youth in the teenage years and a wider use of abortion as a means to resolve the pregnancy. The rates of unmarried teenage births for both black and white teenage youth have showed substantial increases during the 1980s. The number of out-of-wedlock births to teenagers has increased by 270 percent since 1960. Approximately 42 percent of white teenagers and 89 percent of black teenagers who gave birth were unmarried (Moore, 1986).

Unmarried parents, many of which are teens, accounted for 21 percent of all births in 1986. These same trends hold true for child raising. In 1986, 6 percent of all children under age 18 were being raised by mothers who had not married. The problem is greater in black families where 25 percent of all families are headed by a never-married mother. Children from never-married mothers face a multitude of problems. They are more likely to have parents with little education who are at high risk for unemployment or low income, and parents who depend on governmental assistance. The growth of unmarried

parenthood has continued into the 1980s, but appears to be slowing (U.S. Children and Their Families, 1987).

One half of all teenage mothers will not complete high school nor marry before the birth of their child, and most will live in poverty. Approximately three fourths of all teens who give birth will be on public welfare within a 4 year period. Teenage pregnancies cost the U. S. in welfare expenses alone over \$19 billion annually (Making the Grade: A Report Card on American Youth, 1989).

6. Majority of mothers are in the workforce yet adequate child care for children of working parents remains a problem.

Approximately three fourths of all women 18 to 44 years of age are involved in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1987). Eighty-two percent of the married women who are presently working indicate that they would continue to work even if finances were not an issue. Nearly 7 out of every 10 women who are not gainfully employed indicated they would prefer to be working if there were adequate child-care facilities near their home or place of work. About one-half of these nonworking women would prefer part-time work at home (Harris, 1987; U.S. Children and Their Families, 1987; United Way of America, 1989).

In 1983 36 percent of mothers in families with incomes lower than \$15,000 indicated they would seek employment if child care were available at affordable costs. There are many indications that this situation has not improved. In 1986, studies showed one-fourth of all California homemakers and unemployed parents (including one-half of all single parents) were unable to work and attend training meetings due to inadequate child care arrangements (California Governor's Task Force on Child Care, 1986). Many employees who have children report high levels of stress related to making suitable quality child care arrangements for their children (Galinsky and Freidman, 1986).

Nearly half of the women who bear children are involved in the labor force. Half of all children under the age of 6 and 60 percent of all children 6-17 years of age had mothers working full or part-time or looking for work in

1986. The proportions of mothers in the work force have markedly increased from 1970. The largest growth has been in the proportion of mothers with children under age three. About half of all married mothers with infants under age two were involved in the work place in 1986 (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987).

Child care for many working parents is catch-as-catch-can. The working mother does most of the child-care selection (U.S. Children and Their Families, 1987). Twenty-five percent leave their children in the care of relatives; and 21 percent of the couples have flexible or differing work hours so they can trade with each other in caring for the children. Ten percent take their children to commercial day-care centers. Another 10 percent solicit the services of a friend or neighbor. Seven percent stay with older siblings, 6 percent tend themselves, and 5 percent attend a nursery school (Harris, 1987).

In recent years, for children under age five who have working mothers, the most common type of care has shifted from care in the child's own home, to care in the home of another, or to group care (U.S. Children and Their Families, 1987).

7. *Strengthening the role of parents needs to become a national priority.*

Many problems related to individuals and society originate or are compounded by dysfunctional family relationships. In order to combat societal problems, there needs to be a national effort to prioritize and strengthen the family in its role (Olson, 1990).

Many things are known to be aggravated by dysfunctional families such as substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, family violence, childhood and adolescent depression, runaways, early teen sexual acting out, civil disobedience, and other family and societal problems.

Attitudes expressed by people in the 1980s have shown an increased emphasis for meaningful, fulfilling, interpersonal relationships. This focus will likely continue in the following decade. This type of fulfillment is sought more within the family than in other societal institutions.

8. *The majority of those living in poverty are children.*

Poverty is more likely to be present in families with children. Twenty percent of the families with children under age 18 are living in poverty, contrasted to 5 percent of adults without children (Harris, 1987).

High poverty coincides with the high rate of single-parent households in minority racial groups (Children's Defense Fund, 1989; U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987; United Way of America, 1989). The childhood poverty rate has increased significantly within the past two decades. In 1970, 15 percent of all children were living in poverty compared to 21 percent of children under 18 and more than 22 percent of children under 6 in 1987. Poverty has a greater impact on black and Hispanic children (United Way, 1989).

One in four Hispanic families is poor today. Among Hispanic female headed families 51.8 percent are poor. Two in five Hispanic children live in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, July 1989).

The income of young families has declined over the past decade and a half. This income decline hit young families harder than any age group. Early financial strain is a predictable part of the life cycle of young families, but the gap between young versus other American families has widened by nearly one third in the last two decades. There seems to be an increasingly less likelihood of young families catching up to the generation that preceded them--resulting in most young families working more to take home less. This decline in take home income is reflected in the quality of housing they are able to purchase, the education they attain, and the health care they purchase.

The poverty rate in 1986 was 25 percent higher for all families but nearly doubled for young families. Minority and single parent families under 25 were being hit the hardest (The Forgotten Half, 1988).

9. *Illegal substance abuse causes death, increases the crime rate, and destroys families.*

The nature, extent and control of illegal drug use in America has been a topic of much debate. Drug use rates tend to vary by time and location. Obtaining an accurate reading of the extent of use at any one point of time is very difficult.

According to a recent Harris Poll, marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug, and white males aged 12-17 are the most prone to use it. Although overall drug abuse has increased, marijuana use has decreased slightly. Most high school seniors have tried alcohol and half of college students have experienced heavy drinking bouts. The use of cocaine among youth has gone up in the last 10 years. An encouraging note, however, is that over 90 percent of youth surveyed indicated a disapproval of regular use of illicit drugs, along with alcohol and cigarette smoking (Harris, 1987).

There are only a small number of employers who use drug screening tests. The following percentages of employees tested positive to drug use. The rates of usage in retail 24 percent, wholesale 17 percent, mining 13 percent, construction 12 percent, manufacturing 12 percent, service 10 percent, transportation 10 percent, financial 7 percent, and communication and utility 6 percent. More and more employers are just saying "no" to drug screening due to widespread casual drug use. Overlooking the transgression is becoming more common among employers due to widespread drug familiarity. Thirty eight percent of adults admit using drugs at least once (U.S. News and World Report, October 30, 1989).

A recent survey of issues illustrated that substance abuse, followed by AIDS, wages, then benefits as being the rank order of major areas of concern to the corporate executives (USA Today, December 6, 1989).

One out of 35 Americans has been a victim of an attempted or completed violent crime in the following categories: Assault, robbery, and rape. In 1987 the victim rate for 16-24 year-olds was about 1 in 15, which is triple that of the 35-49 year-old age group. Youth are more likely to take self protective measures in violent crimes and are more likely to sustain physical injury. Much of the

increase in crime is attributed to drug trafficking (Wetzel, 1989).

10. *Single parenting is a principal contributor to the growing number of children and women living in poverty.*

The divorce rate during the 1980s stabilized; however, the actual numbers of persons divorcing continue to increase due to size of the 18-45 age cohort which are the most prone to divorce. There is a direct relationship between female and children impoverishment and divorce (Day and Bahr, 1986).

The largest increase in any one family type is the single-parent household headed by the mother. The number of households headed by a female has doubled since 1970 and is expected to increase 23% to 25% of all families by the year 2000 (Federal Register, 1986; Evans, 1987).

Twenty-three percent of all children under age 18 now live with only one parent, illustrating the rapid growth of the single-parent household (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1987). Recent projections suggest that 60 percent of today's 3-year-olds will spend some time as a member of a single-parent household prior to their 18th birthday (Vobejda, 1987).

Another large contributor to those living in poverty is the swelling ranks of unmarried teenage females who become parents. The actual number of births to teens is declining, but the percentage of children born out-of-wedlock is increasing among women under age 20. The rate is considerably higher among black and Hispanic teens (Moore, 1986).

11. *Our nation's school systems are failing to prepare students to interface with the labor market.*

Many high schools are failing to prepare students to interface with the labor market. Surveys show that high school counselors place securing a job for students low on
(continued on page 8)

National, Regional, and State Rankings of CRITICAL ISSUES FACING AMERICAN FAMILIES

Coping with the Causes of Child Abuse
Functional Illiteracy Among Youth
Health Care Costs Rise
25% of Youth Drop Out of School
Teenage Pregnancy
Inadequate Child Care & Working Mothers
Strengthening the Family Should be a National Priority
Children: Poverty's Most Frequent Victim
Substance Abuse Destroys Individuals & Families
Single Parenting Increases Poverty
Inadequate School Preparation for Labor Market
Public Resources Declining Puts People at Risk
Homeless Families With Children Increasing for Young Adults
Youth Suicides Continue to Increase
Elder Care: A New Family Stressor
Latchkey Youth: A Problem With Few Solutions
Alcoholism Effects One in Three Families for Elderly
Inadequate Health Care
Other: See Bottom of Page
Total Respondents

REGIONS

TOP TEN RANKINGS

National Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		845	
Western	1	4-5	3	2	4-5	7	6	8	10	9												221	
No. Central	1	3	2	4	8	6	7	5	9	10												205	
North East	1	2	4	5	7	3	9	6			8			10								180	
Southern	3	1	5	2	4	7	6		8	10	9											239	
AL	3	2	1	6	7	4-5			4-5		8							9-10	9-10			23	
AZ	5	1		4	6	7		8	3	2	10		9									13	
AR	9-10	3	5	4	2	9	1		6	8	7											9-10a	31
CA	1		6		9	2	7	4	8		10		3	5									16
CO	3	4-5	1	2					9-10		4-5				8	9-10	6					7b	19
CT	3-4	5-6	1	8-9	7	10		3-4				5-6		2								8-9c	15
DE	3-4	10		5	1	7	2	3-4	6		8	9											18
DC	8	4	9-10	6	1	7			3		2				5								9
FL	3	4	6	5	9	2		10			7-8	7-8										1d	22
GA	2	3-4	9-10	1	3-4	9-10	8	7		6	5												19
GU	2	3	4	9	6	7-8	1					10				5						7-8e	16
HI	2	4	6		10	1	7	9		8			5					3					19
ID	8	5	4	2	1	3				6	7						9					10d	20
IL	4-5	8	6	1			3	2	4-5	7		10	9										22
IN	6	1	3-5	3-5		7-8	2	7-8				10	3-5					9					22
IA	7	3-4	2	6		3-4	8	1		9			10					5					21
KS	1	2	4-5	3	6	7	8	9		4-5				10									18
ME	5	2-3	1	4		6-7		8-9		6-7	8-9		2-3		10								15
MA	1		7	3-5		9-10		2					3-5	3-5						8		6b,9-10c	14
MI	1	7	10	6		8-9	2	5	3		4	8-9											20
MN	2	5-7	4		1	5-7	3	9		5-7	8											10a	12
MS	9	4-5	4-5	2-3	10		1		2-3							7			6			8a	16
MO	4-5	1	2	3	4-5	7		8	6		10				9								19
MT	2	5	4	9	8	7	6		3	1												10a	16
NE	1-2	5-6	1-2	4	5-6 ^a		3	7-8	7-8							10			9				21
NV	3	4-5	8	2	7			1				4-5	6	9								10c	16
NH	1	4-6		4-6		8-9	8-9			10	4-6	2		7					3				18
NJ	6	2	4-5	7	4-5	1	9	10							8							3a	21
NM	2	8		6	3	4	1	10	5		9							7					18
NY	4	7-8		7-8		2		5			10		1	6	9							3b	23
NC	4	8	5	7	2	1	3			9			10					6					20
OH	6	2	3	1	7	5	10	8-9		8-9	4												19
OK	6-7	4-5	3		4-5	8	2		1		10						9					6-7	24
OR	6	5	4	1-2	3		1-2	7-8	7-8			10								9			15
PA	1	6	2			8		4	7	10		5	9									3d	23
PR	4	9	1	7-8	2				3		7-8	10			5							6a	14
RI	1	2		7	3		8	9-10	6	4	5			9-10									17
SC	1	2-3	5	9	4		2-3		10	8	6											7a	17
SD	2		1		3-4	8-9	10							6	5	7		8-9		3-4			13
TN	1	4	6-7	2-3	5	8	2-3				6-7						9				10		15
TX	5-6	1	10	2	3	4		8		5-6			9					7					10
UT	1	8	6	3	2		4	9		7	5										10		19
VA	1-2	3-4	3-4	5	1-2	6		9		8	10							7					20
WA	1	6	3-4	3-4		9-10		2		9-10		5	8					7					15
WI	1	7-8	3		2	4-5	4-5	9-10		9-10		6		7-8									17
WY	1	7	4-5	8-10	2		4-5	8-10		6	8-10					3							18

*Note: AK, KY, LA, MD, ND, VT, and WV have been omitted from state ranking due to insufficient response rates.

- a = Aids
- b = Minorities Face Economic Uncertainty
- c = Single Elderly Women at Risk of Poverty
- d = Rural Poverty with Inadequate Support Services
- e = Home Ownership is Increasingly Difficult



their priority list. Often high schools are unaccustomed to cooperating with employers (Washington Post, 1989).

One half of America's young adults have no college education. In the next ten years, America will depend on this population for future leadership. However, a majority of those young people do not possess the basic reading-writing-arithmetic skills that are necessary for the more complicated jobs of the future. Major companies spend millions of dollars on training courses for their educated executive and managerial positions; but due to the surplus of unskilled workers, corporate America offers little or no upgrade training programs for the unskilled worker (U.S. News and World Report, 1989).

Many future jobs will require college or trade school training and that training is becoming increasingly more expensive, barring many from participation. Federal funds for college assistance are becoming less available. By the year 2000, 75 percent of all jobs will require some college education. However, the past decade has shown college costs to outstrip the rate of inflation. The U. S. is moving toward a two-layered education system where children of higher income families will be able to meet the financial challenges of education and lower income families will continue to be less prepared for future jobs.

Federal grant money has declined within the past few years while student loan volume has risen significantly. Between 1978-1983 college participation rate declined among students from families with income under \$20,000 while participation increased for students with families earning over \$30,000 (Children and Families - Key Trends in the 1980s, 1989).

When secondary educations' misgivings are combined with the economic troubles and forecasts for non-college bound youth, family survival for this forgotten half seems bleak (U.S. News & World Report, June 26, 1989).

12. *Public resources for children and youth are declining while problems are growing.*

Seventy-four percent of Americans feel the problems facing today's children are worse than those faced by the previous generation. The resources and attention given to

the problems of children and youth have declined. Sizable numbers of Americans feel that the problems of children and youth have not been adequately addressed by local, state, and national governments; nor have parents, religions, and other community resources addressed the problems to the extent they should. Examples cited include: educational institutions being unable to attract quality teachers, increases in school dropout rates, child kidnapping, child pornography, and substance abuse, declining emphasis in government-sponsored child care, cuts in the funding of school lunch programs, campaigns against sex education in the schools, failure to provide birth control services for sexually active teenagers, and declining budgets for immunizations for children. The public is asking for dynamic leadership in addressing the needs of children and youth (Harris, 1987).

13. *Poverty; fifteen percent of the total population are living below the poverty level.*

The income poverty level in 1988 for a family of four was \$11,650. About 34 million Americans including 8 million families lived below this level. The poverty rate rose to a high of 15 percent in the 1980s compared to 11 percent in the 1970s. Of those in poverty, 40 percent are white, 34 percent black, and 26 percent are Hispanics. Of all black families 30 percent live below the poverty line compared to 8 percent of all whites. Living below the poverty line places the individual at risk for malnutrition, inadequate health care, less educational opportunities and becoming a victim of crime along with many other social disadvantages (United Way, 1989).

14. *Homeless families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.*

Families with children are the fastest growing homeless group in America making up one third of the homeless population. Millions of Americans experience hunger at some point monthly. Every night there are 100,000 children excluding runaways, throwaways, and abandoned

children who have no home (National Academy of Sciences, 1988). Inadequate education, nutrition and medical care are among the many problems confronting the homeless family.

15. *Access to health insurance is a critical need for many young adults.*

One-fourth of young adults (age 19-24) in the U.S. have no health insurance coverage, according to the Institute of Health Policy Studies at the University of California in San Francisco (McManus, P., et al., 1989). Analysis of data from the National Health Interview Survey, conducted by the Census Bureau in 1984, gives the first national look at the health insurance status of this age group.

When asked why they had no health insurance, 60 percent said they could not afford it. Those in the lowest income categories were more likely to have coverage than the "working poor." Many young adults work in low-paying jobs where employers do not offer insurance benefits. Buying private insurance is not top priority in an already-pinched budget; yet, the employee's income is too high to qualify for Medicaid.

Young adult women were 9 percent more likely than men to have some form of insurance coverage. It is expected this is due to the availability of Medicaid to women with children. White young adults were more likely than Blacks and Hispanics to have insurance. Only 50 percent of young adults with a grade school education were insured, compared to 88 percent with a college education.

Young adults living in the Northeast or Midwest were more likely to have some type of coverage than those living in the South or West. This is probably due to the availability of broader public health insurance in the Northeast and Midwest and more unionized jobs requiring health insurance benefits (McManus, Greaney, and Newacheck, 1989).

16. *Youth suicide rates are three times higher than in 1970.*

Reported youth suicides have increased by 300 percent in the past 20 years and is the second leading cause of death among youth in the 15 to 24 year-old age bracket. Male youth commit suicide five times more frequently than females; but females attempt suicide five times more frequently than males. The differences are attributed to the more lethal methods used by males. Thirty to 50 percent of high school students have considered suicide during their high school years, going as far as planning how they would commit the act (Suicide Prevention Program, 1987).

Suicide rates for youth have slowly but progressively increased since the 1950s. Experts and lay persons associate increased suicide rates with: competitive pressure for success, decline of nuclear family, and an increased sense of aloneness and depression in our society (Wetzel, 1989). Reports from medical examiners indicate a strong correlation between substance abuse and suicide. Nearly a third of the deaths and 37 percent of the emergency room treatments for drug problems in 1986 involved suicide attempts. Frequently these attempts involved the mixing of alcohol and drugs (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1986).

17. *Elder care: an increasing stressor for adult children and grandchildren.*

The population of the elderly continues to rise and stress on family caregivers is inevitable. Long-term retirement locations are expensive and many elderly are financially incapable of meeting expenditures for these types of residences. This leaves the family members with the responsibility of providing care for many of the elderly. Increasing longevity comes simultaneously with an increased female labor force participation. Historically women have been the primary caregivers of the elderly. They are becoming increasingly unavailable because of workplace responsibilities. Education, training and counseling are needed for family care givers (Force, 1990).

In 1987 about one in eight Americans were in the elderly category (29.8 million). The sex ratio was 14.6 women to every 10 men. Seventy-seven percent of older men and 41 percent of older women were married. Forty-nine percent of older women were widows. There was a ratio of 5 to 1 of widows to widowers. Eighty-two percent of older men and 57 percent of older women lived in families. About 30 percent of all non-institutionalized elderly lived alone in 1987. Ninety percent of the elderly were whites, 8 percent black, and 2 percent were other races. Eight states: California, New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan represented 49 percent of all elderly population. The poverty rate for the elderly in 1987 was 12.2 percent. Ten percent of whites, 39 percent of black and 27 percent of Hispanic elderly were poor (AARP, 1988; Bureau of the Census 1987). The question is often asked: "As the population continues to grow, how will America address the increasing number and concerns of the elderly?"

18. *Latchkey youth: many are not ready for self care, but few alternatives exist.*

No one knows exactly how many children are currently termed "latchkey children." Conservative estimates indicate that from 2 to 6 million children between the ages of 6 and 13 leave home after their parents go to work and return before their parents. Many of these children also care for younger brothers or sisters.

Estimates suggests that by 1995 there may be over 35 million children in self care. Although it is difficult to determine adverse effects of self care, there is evidence that some children who spend out-of-school hours without adult supervision are at a higher risk for delinquency, substance abuse, sexual misconduct and other personal and developmental difficulties. A study of latch key youth shows 32 percent of male and 41 percent of female children were worried when they had to stay home alone (Zill, 1980). These children are also more susceptible to abusive treatment from older siblings (mainly brothers) and their friends (Coolsen, Selignson, & Garbarino, 1985).

A statistical portrait of America's children who started in formal schooling in 1986 indicates that between one-fourth and one-third are defined as latchkey children (U. S. Department of Education, 1986). In 1987, a Louis Harris

survey indicated that teachers say the number one problem in education is children returning home from school unsupervised (Project Home Safe, 1987).

19. *Alcoholism--a disease found in one of three American families.*

Approximately 32 percent of America's households have someone with a drinking problem. People living in the West are the heaviest drinkers, followed by the South, Midwest, then the East. Persons under the age of 30 experience the most problems with alcohol, followed by the 50 to 64 age group. The highest users of any age group are the 18 to 20 year olds. Men have higher rates than do females in all categories; and more women than men report their lives being impacted negatively by a family member who is drinking excessively. Approximately 21 percent of all youth 14 to 17 years old have a problem with uncontrolled alcohol use (Federal Register, 1986).

Alcoholism has the most impact on young, middle-income families. It destroys health, individual productivity, and families. Current trends provide some hope because of wide public support for corrective measures to curb the abuse of alcohol. This is evidenced in raising the age for consumption and stiffer penalties for offenders who drink and drive (Harris, 1987).

There are 28 million children of alcoholics in the United States. Research has shown children of alcoholic parents have a greater risk of becoming alcoholics themselves. However, most children of alcoholics do not become alcoholics, but are at an increased risk of many other health problems. Children of alcoholics use medical and hospital facilities more than other children. They are also more likely to have school problems and become involved in substance abuse. Their mental health problems follow them into adulthood (Public Health Reports, 1988).

In 1988, 92 percent of high school seniors had tried alcohol. Nearly two thirds of seniors had taken a drink within the past 30 days and 4 percent had done so each day for the past 30 days. In 1988 nearly 90 percent of college students had used alcohol within the previous year. Heavy drinking bouts (5 or more drinks on one occasion) were reported by about half of college men and one third

of college women. (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1988). Although youth consumption of alcohol is high, there has been a modest decrease since the late 70s (Wetzel, 1989).

20. *The quality of health care for the elderly does not keep up with the need for services.*

The elderly use more health care services than other age groupings. The costs for health care for the elderly have shown marked increases. Various strategies have been tried to contain increasing costs. Medicare programs have been credited with the greatest cost containment; however some feel the new cost containment practices are discharging elderly people from hospitals "quicker and sicker." This early discharge program has created the need for more in-home care or day care for the elderly; yet, in-home and day care are only minimal assistance programs from Medicare. Because of the high costs, Americans are not getting the care they need to enjoy good health. As the proportion of elderly grows in society, this problem will become worse (United Way, 1987 & 1989).

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