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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2003 annual meeting, "Research to Policy," June 12-14, 2003

PRESCHOOLERS AT RISK: CAN PREVENTION PROGRAMS IMPROVE THEIR LIVES?

Study Examines Impact of Prevention Program on Parenting and Preschoolers' Social Behavior

- Will families of "juvenile delinquents" participate in and accept a prevention program for their preschoolers?
- Can prevention science help parents create more supportive home environments for children?
- Do changes in parenting and home environments result in better social-emotional functioning for children exposed to multiple risk factors for negative outcomes?

A growing number of prevention researchers are studying ways to help young children who are at risk of developing behavioral and antisocial problems. This program of research is the only prevention program that targets younger siblings of youths who have already been adjudicated in the family court system. Children from families with few resources and high levels of stress are at high risk for developing conduct problems. Having an older sibling who has had trouble with the law places these children at even greater risk for negative outcomes.

Initial results from a study with preschool-aged siblings of "juvenile delinquents" are being presented at the Society for Prevention Research annual meeting. The families participating in the study all have one child who has been adjudicated for "delinquent" behavior and another who is a preschooler. The families are primarily African American and Latino and most live in neighborhoods with high crime rates, limited resources for families, and high levels of community violence. The children and their families experience many of the risk factors identified by researchers as placing them at risk for conduct problems, as well as other mental health problems and academic underachievement. These risk factors include: parents who use harsh punishment and inconsistent discipline strategies, parental depression and anxiety, parental stress, poor prenatal environments, and exposure to community violence. In two papers, researchers will present data on how prevention programs can influence parenting behavior and home environments and increase social competency of children. The papers will show that parents with limited resources and multiple life stressors can create nurturing and supportive environments for their children and prepare them to meet future social challenges. This type of family-based program has the potential to change the lives of children who experience multiple risks for conduct problems and academic failure.

Sources: Laurie Miller Brotman & Kathleen Kiely Gouley, New York University.