

A study by Dr. Dorothy Otnow Lewis and colleagues entitled “Ethics Questions Raised by the Neuropsychiatric, Neuropsychological, Educational, Developmental, and Family Characteristics of 18 Juveniles Awaiting Execution in Texas” has been peer-reviewed and published in the December edition of the *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* (32:408-29, 2004).

Researchers conducted “psychiatric, neurologic, neuropsychological and educational assessments” on “(e)ighteen males condemned to death for homicides committed prior to their 18th birthday.” They also reviewed “all available medical, psychological, educational, social and family data.” One of the purposes of the study was “to clarify the ways in which immaturity of their central nervous systems, traumas to their brains, predispositions to psychiatric illness and chaotic, violent and abusive upbringings may have diminished their judgment and self-control.” The research found that all but one subject experienced serious head traumas in childhood and adolescence, all subjects had signs of prefrontal brain dysfunction, fifteen had one or more severe mental illnesses and all but one came from extremely violent and/or abusive families.

This study was cited in the *amicus* brief of Juvenile Law Center, Children and Family Justice Center, Center on Children and Families, Child Welfare League of America, Children’s Defense Fund, Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles, National Association of Counsel for Children, and 45 other organizations as *amicus curiae* in support of juvenile offender Christopher Simmons. In the case, *Roper v. Simmons*, the United States Supreme Court will rule upon the constitutionality of the juvenile death penalty.

The study's findings are similar to those in a 1988 study conducted by Dr. Lewis and colleagues entitled “Neuropsychiatric, Psychoeducational, and Family Characteristics of 14 Juveniles Condemned to Death in the United States,” (*145 American Journal of Psychiatry* 584, 1988). Both of these studies strongly suggest that most of the juvenile offenders on America's death rows suffer from serious conditions which “substantially exacerbate the already existing vulnerabilities of youth.” (See p. 20 of the *amicus* brief in support of *Simmons* which was filed by the American Medical Association, The American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and others.)

A decision in the *Roper v. Simmons* case will be sometime before July, 2005.