

A STUDY TO DESCRIBE, IF ANY, THE DIFFERENCES IN CAUSATIVE
FACTORS OF VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS AS PERCEIVED
BY STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND THE COMMUNITY

By

Mark S. Lind

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Masters of Science Degree
With a Major in

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Dr. Ed Biggerstaff, Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
July, 2000

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Lind, Mark S.

(Writer) (Last Name) (First Name) (Initial)

A STUDY TO DESCRIBE, IF ANY, THE DIFFERENCES IN CAUSATIVE FACTORS

(Title)
OF VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS AS PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, PARENTS,

AND THE COMMUNITY

MS in Education Dr. Ed Biggerstaff July, 2000 31

(Graduate Major) (Research Advisor) (Month/Year) (No. of Pages)

American Psychological Association (APA) Format

(Name of Style Manual Used in this Study)

Violence in our schools is an issue that has long been a concern in educational institutions in America. Historically, violence has always existed in schools. With the recent and frequent assaults on students and staff that draws the attention of the media, the issue of violence has moved to the forefront.

There has been a movement from simple "bullying" and verbal assaults to more violent acts such as murder. As is the case, with other issues, many schools ignore the fact that these acts are occurring right in our own back yards. The truth of the matter is that these acts need to be dealt with. The success or failure of our educational systems relies on that fact.

Given the fact that there is violence in our schools, and given the fact that it is becoming more frequent and severe, educational systems need to be conscientious of the violence and must be willing to do something about it's causes so that we may create an educational environment conducive to learning.

To generalize this concern back to the entire school population is not taking into account the differences that may exist. Geography, economics, environment, structure of the schools, and the family, among other influences, all play a role in the development of our children. These influences on our students' lives play an important role in how they behave in society and in controlled atmospheres.

There are several questions that need to be answered in the search for an educational environment where students feel safe and where actual learning takes place. By answering these questions based on what the students, parents, and community believe, we as educators would hope to improve the educational process and thus make schools a safe learning environment for all. We need to pay special attention to the issues that surround and affect us locally. We need to answer questions about violence as they affect our children and school personnel. What's more, we need to use the information that would be collected to implement a model violence prevention program. We would continue to monitor and revise the program in an effort to provide students with a safe school environment that would promote active learning.

The purpose of this study is to perform a comprehensive review of the literature and to analyze and critique causes of violence in the school as perceived by students, parents, and the community and to formulate a set of recommendations for the prevention and remediation of violence in schools.

Acknowledgements

It is with a great deal of pride that I have finished my Project Paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Masters Degree in Education through the University of Wisconsin-Stout. There are three people that I am grateful for in the pursuit of my degree. First, I would like to thank my wife of 25 years for being patient with me and also for sharing our computer. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Ed Biggerstaff of the University of Wisconsin-Stout for his encouragement, support, energy, and his advice during the completion of this project paper. Finally, I would like to thank Robert Brenner for his help in making this entire masters program possible. You are all appreciated very much--thank you.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	I
Table of Contents	II
Chapter I Introduction	2-6
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Definition of Terms.....	5-6
Chapter II Review of the Literature	7-22
Nature and Scope of Violence in Schools.....	8-12
Student Perceptions of Violence.....	12-15
Parent Perceptions of Violence.....	15-17
Community Perceptions of Violence	17-22
Chapter III Critique, Conclusion, and Recommendations	23-27
Critique	23
Conclusion	24-25
Recommendations.....	25-27
Bibliography.....	28-31

Chapter I

Introduction

In schools across America, violence is fast becoming a major concern of students, parents, and the community. The media seems, at times, to be calling attention to the violence that plagues schools. The media journalized these events making everyone curious about what has happened and what is being done about it. More often than not, the suspect(s) are not around to tell their story or when they are apprehended, they never actually tell us the real reasons for the violence. Half a century ago, students in our schools could be relatively sure that their time spent at school would be somewhat free of violence. This is not to say that violence did not exist but it was less frequent, and generally less violent. The subject of what causes violence is moving to the forefront of a long list of concerns for the schools. Concern about school violence, crime, and victimization has permeated the education system since the 1950s (Asmussen, 1992). It seems as though every time we turn around, schools are being mandated to make changes. These mandates can result in unrest for faculty and administration. For example, congress mandated a national survey of the prevalence of school crime, the factors associated with its perpetration, and the effectiveness of existing measures to improve student victimization. This mandate resulted in the Safe Schools Study (National Institute of Education [NIE], 1986), which revealed some disturbing trends in the nation's schools.

First, there is an ongoing interest concerning the types of school crimes being committed. Crimes can range from something as minor as the theft of an instructor's pen to something as severe as taking someone else's life. A significant number of youth were victimized by robberies, aggravated simple assaults, and larceny at school (Toby, Smith, & Smith, 1985). Committing a crime, regardless of what it is, is an issue that requires attention. There is also interest as to the severity of the crimes and violence in the schools. Violence as it was known in the past, would typically consist of yelling and screaming, possibly an occasional pushing and shoving match, and, perhaps even a fistfight. Today, violence takes on a whole new meaning. In schools throughout the United States, students are faced with extreme acts of violence. Aggressive or violent children and adolescents may assault other students and staff, commit sexual harassment, or may be guilty of possession of weapons. Results from a recent National School Board Association survey (NSBA, 1993) showed that more than eighty percent of school districts reported that violence had gotten worse during the previous five years. Schools also reported an increase in the number of students bringing weapons to schools, incidents of student assaults on teachers, shootings or knifings, drive-by shootings, and on-campus rapes. As with many other issues, it is assumed that this type of violence only happens elsewhere. Problems were not limited to urban school districts, but occurred with increasing frequency over the past five years in suburban and rural schools as well (Rossman & Morley, 1966). Is the

Princeton School District typical or will there be some differences as to the type and severity of violence being committed elsewhere? Is the environment the same? Is the structure the same?

A second issue resulting from school crime is the psychological impact upon students and their parents, teachers, staff, and the administration. Students used to feel comfortable coming to school; they had a sense of being secure. However, today is a different story. Bastian & Taylor stated that students feared being the victim of an attack. . . Students would avoid places in their school for fear of being attacked and that they take a weapon to school to protect themselves (1991). Nolan, Davies, & Chandler say that the fear of victimization was significant (1996). Parents feel the effect whether it is their child or someone else's child. They may have an economic responsibility as a result of what the students do. It is also possible that there would be legal ramifications depending on the situation that has occurred. As a trickle-down effect, parents may also have some emotional scars to deal with. School employees are also affected in different ways. Effects can be felt in the classroom with increased discipline problems and overall fear, in the hallways and other parts of the facility with threats and fear of being attacked. The administration, of course, will feel the effects but probably in different ways; moral could be low and operational costs could increase. The psychological impact of violence is probably not the same everywhere.

Finally, comes the trade-off for these acts of violence. Obviously, there is an economic loss to the schools. The possibility of students avoiding certain schools would affect the revenue received from governments. The physical damage that results from some acts of violence also has a financial impact. There are tremendous costs associated with repairing and rebuilding after such vandalism. We certainly cannot lose sight of the fact that violence would certainly carry with it certain social consequences, which could include putting a large number of students together in close quarters, or it could have an impact on what the community attitude is toward the school. Are the economic losses the same in all situations?

The recent increase in extreme violence has certainly resulted in communities asking a number of questions and frantically searching for answers to those questions. Are the school and its environment to blame or is it the overall structure of the school that is at the root of the problems? Maybe, it is something entirely separate from the environment and the structure of the schools, such as the family or the media? Is changing the whole structure of the schools the answer to eliminating violent acts among students? Is changing the total environment going to provide the answer? Is society to blame? What do students think? What do parents think? What does the community think? Learning the answers to these questions could be the first important step to finding solutions to reduce school violence. There seems to be enough research that pinpoints what these causes are, and according to the literature,

the causes are many. The literature also places the causes of school violence in a rank order. Although the causes listed are rather broad, they include, first, parenting practices, peer pressure, drugs and alcohol, and, finally racial/religious bias (The American Teacher, 1993). Could we assume that these rankings are typical of rural and urban schools across America? The research points to the environment and the structure of the school. Pointing to a single cause of school violence is certainly an oversimplification. Similarly, attributing the same causes to every school in America is unrealistic.

Statement of the Problem

Every school is as individual as its students. Although, as the literature suggests, there may be common threads responsible for violence, it should be recognized that all schools are not alike. What is a major concern for one school (i.e. overcrowding) may not apply at all to another school. The solution, then, is to address the violence issue school-by-school. The problem becomes identification of the specific concerns on an individual school basis, as to the perceived causes of violence within the school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is twofold. First, to contrast and describe the differences of perception of the causes of school violence by students, parents, and the community through a comprehensive review of the literature. Second, to critique

the literature on the subject and draw implications and conclusions related to school programming in the Princeton School District.

Definition of Terms

Structure as used in this study refers to such things as physical confinement to hallways and rooms, rules and expectations, strict regimentation, the number of classes required each day, and the amount of time spent in each class.

Environment refers to such things as discipline policies, teaching methods, instructors, student interaction, and values associated with the climate and culture of a school.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

It has always been a top priority to maintain order, efficiency, and control in our schools. In fact, those items actually dominated the thinking in the early development of schools. By the 1960's, control of the students and their compliance with rules about behavior were increasingly difficult to obtain. Student's behavior was changing and schools were being forced to find alternative ways of dealing with violent behavior. This historical pre-occupation with control has limited the ability of schools to respond creatively to the crisis created by the increase of violence and disorder (Noguera, 1995). Schools are quickly becoming prison-like in their environment. Students that may be identified as having the potential for committing acts of violence are segregated from the general population. Noguera argues that schools must find ways to create more humane learning environments so that students, staff, and administrators feel less alienated, threatened, and repressed (1995).

Morrison, Furlong, and Morrison (1994) offer a framework for safe versus unsafe schools, arguing that safe schools are effective, while unsafe schools cannot and will not be effective. Unsafe schools are characterized by chaos, stress, and disorganization. They lack clear and consistent school disciplinary expectations and are poorly designed with respect to the use of physical space. Staff members are

unable to monitor and supervise student behavior effectively or efficiently. Safe schools, on the other hand, are characterized by a more positive school climate and atmosphere; have high levels of student, staff, and parent participation; have students who are attached to their school; and have clear and high expectations for student performance and behavior.

Addressing the issue of violence in schools is extremely difficult because violence is perceived differently by students, parents, and the community. Because the perceptions of violence varies so much from one group to the other, blanket solutions to the violence issue are not the answer for each and every school. Therefore, this literature review will describe and contrast the perceptions of violence in schools by students, parent, and the community. First, student perceptions of violence will be reviewed. Second, parent perceptions of violence will be reviewed. Finally, community perceptions of violence will be reviewed. Before the perceptions of students, parents, and the community are reviewed, it is necessary to establish the nature and scope of violence in schools.

Nature and Scope of Violence in Schools

Violence in our schools causes a number of different problems that are felt by many and concern the nation as a whole. The violence that is associated with schools threatens the well being of students and staff, the integrity and values of parents, and the community. Student achievement and the entire learning process are at risk.

Recently, there have been a number of violent acts that have occurred nationwide, including shootings, that have placed school violence and safety of children at the top of school priority lists. The publicity that these events have received tends to sway perceptions of school safety negatively. Unfortunately, the media does not do a complete job in giving equal time to what schools accomplish in any given year. This heightened curiosity gives us the opportunity to examine, in detail, what is happening in schools no matter how large or small they might be. Assuring that our schools are safe is a very complex task.

One realizes that not all students are violent. The American Psychological Association (APA, 1993), concluded that the preponderance of evidence suggests that violence is learned behavior. This does not mean that physiological or temperamental factors are unrelated to the manifestations of aggressive or violent behavior, (Tolan and Guerra, 1994) but for most individuals, violence is learned behavior. This has tremendous implications for understanding risk factors and related attempts at prevention and intervention. Children at risk for aggression and violence are cognitively, imitatively, and socially different from their more socially competent peers (Embry, Flannery, Vazsonyi, Powel, & Atha, 1996).

The types of violence reported by schools are many in number. They cover a vast range of various degrees of severity. Also, the severity of the act committed tends to identify the size of the school in which various acts of violence occur. Larger

schools tend to have more severe acts of violence more frequently than smaller, rural schools. Results from a recent National School Board Association survey (NSBA, 1993) showed that more than eighty percent of school districts reported in 1993 that school violence had gotten worse compared to the previous five years. The most frequently reported form of school violence was assault. Problems were not limited to urban school districts, but occurred with increasing frequency over the past five years in suburban and rural schools as well (Rossman & Morley, 1966). Smaller regional studies of specific groups of students show high rates of violence perpetration and victimization at school. Cotton and colleagues found that thirty-seven percent of students had been in a physical fight, nineteen percent had reported carrying a weapon to school, and eighteen percent had been suspended for fighting (Cotton, Resnick, Browne, Martin, McCarraher, & Woods, 1994). In one of the largest studies of students exposure to violence and related psychological trauma, forty one percent of male high school students and twenty-seven percent of females had been hit, slapped, or punched in the last year. For some categories of victimization and exposure, rates were higher for adolescents in a small city than for adolescents in the central city (Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995).

Perhaps the most important element of school violence is the causes. As is the case with the types of violence mentioned above, the reasons for violence are many in number. Research shows that violence in high schools can be caused by the

structure, which includes class segregation, grading, scheduling, rules, and procedures. Teachers are often unprepared to deal with the challenges presented by their students and the system within which they must operate (Thayer, 1996). According to Walker and Gresham (1997), a major challenge consists of large schools and classrooms that make it difficult for teachers to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with students, especially at-risk students who have more intense needs for attention and involvement. In addition, overcrowded schools have more discipline and vandalism problems. A high child-to-teacher ratio makes it practically impossible for teachers to effectively monitor their students' behavior, so discipline problems and crime increase (Hellman & Beaton, 1986). Botstein suggests that shortening high school needn't mean dumbing down the population--or necessarily sending off the college track. He also argues that the high school overhaul should be accompanied by higher expectations, forcing grads to be adept in everything from civics to economics. Those students who are academically and physically mature should go to college. Teenagers who don't care for university life--or want to delay it--could take apprenticeships, engage in public service, or attend vocational schools (1997).

Grading can be a volatile source of frustration for students. High schools find it necessary to have a grading system in place, partly because colleges require students to have a certain grade point average just to be considered for entry. It

seems as though, for every teacher that teaches there is a corresponding grading system. Typically, the system has a point where the student fails. The student does not meet minimum requirements and is subsequently marked as a failure. Students who are putting forth their best effort may fall by the wayside because there is little, if any, recognition for their effort. Whether the student fails once or many times, this negativism weighs heavily on their minds. Being told time and time again of failure tends to build frustration and resentment. At some point, the student must release these frustrations. Perhaps the release will be violent behavior.

Another source of frustration for students stems from the scheduling process. Students are just those, students. They have a difficult time making regular day to day decisions. It is not always easy. Emphasis in schools currently seems to be placed on making career decisions. Elementary school students are being introduced to careers. The schools determine what classes students will take based on the course offerings. For some students, these course offerings are just what is necessary for them to be highly successful. Other students, however, are not as fortunate. They are not really sure what they would like to do for their career. Consequently, they make improper course choices. Botstein suggests that at age sixteen students would go to four-year colleges or community college. There are already at least a million students in this country who are starting college at age 16 (1997).

Equally frustrating for students of all ages are the many rules and procedures that will govern their behavior in a positive way. We are all subject to rules and procedures every day of our lives. As adults, we sometimes feel frustrations when we are told what to do and when to do it. Adults need to realize that students are governed by several sets of rules and procedures each day. This can lead to confusion. The school has its set of rules and procedures, each teacher has theirs. Coaches and advisors contribute to the mix as well. The intent of all of the rules and procedures is to keep students in line and create harmony that would allow everyone to get along with one another.

All of the discussion has been about environment and structure to this point. The fact remains that there would be other factors that would affect student behavior and violence in high schools.

The media plays a significant role in governing the beliefs and actions of students. Of course, they cover those stories that deal with violent acts. These acts may or may not involve students, however, the stories attract students and they still have an impact. It is difficult for these acts of violence to go unnoticed because they tend to dominate television, newspapers, radio, and magazines as they happen.

Peer pressure is a very dangerous factor in triggering acts of violence. There is that feeling of wanting to belong. Students are always looking to be accepted by

this group or that individual. Sometime in order to belong, the student is pressured into doing something that may be considered an act of violence.

As can be seen through the nature and scope of school violence, the issues are many in number and very complicated. Another factor presenting its share of problems associated with school violence would be how violence is actually perceived by students, parent, and the community. These valued perceptions should eventually lead us toward viable solutions to the violence issue.

Student Perceptions of Violence

Since the violence being discussed in this paper ultimately involves the students, it is fitting that we determine how they perceive it. After all, their perspective on violence should be valued because they are the perpetrators and they are the victims. Surprisingly, students feel that there is a need to be violent. Fagan & Wilkinson (1998) identified five functions of violence as perceived by the students. The five functions important to students that may result in violence include: (1) achieving and maintaining high status; (2) materialism and social identity; (3) power; (4) rough justice, social control, and self help; and (5) defiance of authority. Also worth noting here is that the functions of violence for girls appear to reflect a rejection of the violence of men toward women and the need for self-protection from men as well as other violent girls (1998). Personal disputes that will result in violence contain their own process that affects the outcome including violence as

scripted behavior, street codes, and the influence of popular culture. Referred to as mediators of violence, alcohol; guns; and bystanders can influence an individual's perception of the risks and rewards of violence as well as affect the motivation and thought processes.

When students report the different types of violence that occurs at their schools, they tend to be site specific. It is their personal exposure to acts of violence that determines what the students perceive. A report published information on student victimization from a national survey of students conducted in the spring of 1993. The data reported are from the *1993 National Household Education Survey (NHES:93)* conducted by Westat for the National Center for Education Statistics. A large majority of students in the sixth through twelfth grades reported having knowledge of bullying, physical attack, or robbery at their schools during the current school year. The greatest percentage of students reported that bullying had occurred in their schools, followed by physical attack, and robbery. At least one incident of bullying, physical attack, or robbery was witnessed by about half of all students. Given these reports, fear of threats or crime at school is rather low. One out of ten worried about being attacked at school (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). It should also be noted that there are some categories where some differences occurred. For example, school size. Larger schools are more likely to experience violence due to the fact that there are more students present. Violence in schools has no

boundaries. Males and females alike admit to being victims of violence. Generally, however, males are more likely to be victimized than are females. The age of students also showed a tendency for the more severe acts of violence to be present in the higher grades while less severe acts were typical in the middle to lower grades. One other difference emerged between public and private schools. The difference was in the likelihood of the occurrence of violence. Private schools are less likely to have violent acts than public schools (1993).

Student perceptions of the causes of violence are quite uniform from one study to the next. Other than in semantics, the causes seem to fit into four categories. The categories include parenting practices, peer pressure, drugs and alcohol, and bias. Children often receive mixed messages from parents and other adults about what is right and wrong. Today's youth seem surprised when asked if they are required to perform chores in and around their home (Franks, 1993). Many indicate that they do not do chores unless they are paid to. These attitudes and actions convey strong lessons about roles, responsibilities, and the rights that must be learned in order to assume positions as citizens. In addition, with more and more parents working outside the home, students are very aware that it is difficult for school officials to contact their parents, and that even if they do, their parents often refuse to respond. They do not respond because they are tired of dealing with their child's problems, they believe the school is at fault, they believe there is nothing they can do to control

their children, or they believe the school is a hostile environment. Students concur that lack of parental supervision at home is the major factor contributing to violence in schools. However, thirty-four percent of them cite as a second major factor the presence of gang or group membership or peer group pressure (The American Teacher, 1993). Several recent studies concluded that peer group pressure is perhaps the fastest growing and most disturbing cause of acts of violence among youth, whether in school or out (Toby, 1994). Students cited involvement with drugs and alcohol as the third major factor contributing to school violence. Those who reported the availability of drugs in school did not vary significantly by ethnicity, level of family income, or geographic location (U.S. Department of Justice, 1991). Although reports indicate that the use of drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, and crack is down among students, the use of alcohol is not. Alcohol is the number one drug used by teenagers and young adults. Another emerging trend is the number of acts of violence related to race or religion. *The 1993 Lou Harris Study on Racism and Violence in American High School: Project Teamwork* reported that racism and violence are rising significantly in America's high schools. Seventy-five percent of all students surveyed reported seeing or hearing about racially or religiously motivated confrontations on a regular basis, up from fifty-seven percent in an earlier survey (National Consortium for Academics and Sports, 1993).

Parent Perceptions of Violence

The adults in communities all across America, with children in public and private schools, have their own ideas about the escalating violence in schools. These people have vested interest in and are extremely concerned about what happens to their children and also what their children are doing while they are in attendance at school. These adults are the parents.

One problem that seems to be common with all parents is the minimal amount of communication, or the lack of it, between parent and child concerning school issues. This lack of communication can create some voids in the parents' understanding of violence and thus create misconceptions about violence in schools. Of course, the media has an influence on what parents see and hear, but does that reflect what is actually happening at the hometown school? No one will argue that parental involvement in the educational process benefits the school and the children. When parents are present, the whole atmosphere in the educational process improves. Children tend to behave differently when there is adult influence, whether it is an on-site presence or just knowing that the parent figure is involved and concerned about the whole educational process. Parental engagement views parents as citizens in the fullest sense-change agents who can transform inner city schools and neighborhoods (Alliance Schools Concept Paper, 1998). Parental participation in education is not that simple, however. Parents have identified several obstacles that hinder their involvement with the school. Barriers to involvement reported by parents include

differing ideas on what constitutes involvement, a less than welcoming atmosphere, communication, lack of parental education, time, and job pressures (Collins, Cooper, and Whitmore, 1995)

In an article written for *USA Today*, Vallalva states that the threat of violence affecting their children is a top concern for one out of three parents in the United States. Parents want to spend as much time with their children as they possibly can. Parents are concerned about their children becoming victims of violence or actually becoming violent themselves. Three in ten parents worry that their own children are capable of violence (Vallalva, 2000).

Violence does not always just happen. Parents and others feel strongly that the history of incidences of being attacked, availability of substances of abuse (drugs, alcohol), and the actual use of these substances while in school leads to violent behavior. Results indicate that while there is variation in perceptions of variables not under the parents' or schools' control (such as assignment of schools, student friends' aspirations) as good predictors of school violence, both parents and students see some practices and policies as also significantly associated with school violence. Specifically, adverse school climates, ineffective proactive school safety actions in response to school violence, poor enriching environments and less parental involvement are perceived by parents as accounting for most of the variance in school violence. Incidentally, enriching environments such as positive school experience

and parental involvement in a child's friends' high aspirations are deterrents of school violence (Kimweli, 1997).

Circuitously, the research identifies other causes of violence in our schools as perceived by parents. For example, some parents believe that it is the environment of the schools that causes violence. Botstein says, "The American high school is a very destructive environment." (Botstein, 1977). Still others say that it is the structure of the schools that causes the violence. The media, music, video games, and gun control are also included. Parents seem to "believe" that these are causes but yet, they never really identify them as such. The causes of violence in our schools vary quite a bit from one source to another. Consistently, however, three phenomena are linked to violence in schools. These are gang presence and activity, hate-motivated behavior, and drugs. Gangs are organized groups whose distinctive languages and dress identify their members. Even though only a small percentage of students belong to gangs, they impact schools because of their involvement in drugs and with weapons. Indeed, their mere presence on school grounds creates tension (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Hate is also a cause of violence in our schools. When hate groups target particular people in society at large, they target those same people in schools. And, in schools, those who suffer this hate-violence are members of ethnic, racial, and religious groups; gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and females. In at least three ways, drugs can lead to violent behavior. The first involves drug sales. A bad

sale or failure to pay for drugs can produce a violent reaction. The second involves the issue of turf. Schools where drugs are sold may be the turf of one gang or provider of drugs. Should another seller attempt to move in, violence may erupt. The third involves student behavior, which, when students are on drugs, may be violent or erratic.

Community Perceptions of Violence

The school, especially in smaller, more rural towns, is the center of the community. The school provides communities with many activities during any given year. The school seems to provide something for everyone. For example, the sports enthusiast has more than enough athletic events to choose from, there are school plays, the band and choir concerts, spaghetti dinners, and the list goes on. Through these events, the community is able to perceive the school as a catalyst for good sportsmanship, teamwork, camaraderie, and good will. The community hears stories about what happened, or they see police cars in the parking lot, or see the drug dogs being led into the building. What does the community really think?

First, some information on how the community feels about violence. Communities believe that there is more crime now than before (homicide, robbery, and assault are up from 1988) and that it is juveniles that are causing most of the crime. To help contain the violence, the community believes that there should be stiffer gun laws, more police on the streets (they are willing to pay higher taxes to do

it), and tougher sentences for those that are caught (Burbach, 1993). The community is of the opinion that criminals are not dealt with harshly enough (1993). Finally, the community sees the influence of drugs as the leading cause of violence followed by lack of moral training and availability of guns as additional causes in that order (1993).

On the other hand, the judicial element in the community sees family breakdown as the leading cause followed by drugs, lack of employment, poor housing, and poor education (1993). There also seems to be a connection with violence and the background or biology of the child. Childhood-onset and adolescent-onset can distinguish conduct disorder. The childhood-onset group commits over fifty percent of the crimes and they tend to be the more violent crimes (1993).

The community also identifies some seeds of violence factors that can lead to violent behavior. Some factors identified as seeds of violence are prenatal substance abuse, injury and disease, bonding deficits, media, violent role models, lack of alternative activities, poor job prospects, income, discrimination, lack of social skills, and gangs (1993). We are, after all, a violent nation.

The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence provides a number of facts that would certainly be critical in helping us to understand and control violence. Lorian writes that exposure to violence generates a sense of fear and leads to acts

intended to reduce or control fear (Lorion, 1998). Exposure to violence is psychologically toxic. This exposure may produce generalized emotional distress; disruptions in interpersonal relationships; problems with aggression, conduct disorder, and truancy; cognitive, psychological, and physical issues related to learning and teaching; and physical symptoms (1998). The effects of exposure to violence in schools may spread to others within the school setting. This spread, or "contagion," change the school setting in ways that negatively alter school interactions and interfere with the schools' capacity to achieve its educational and social goals (1998). Widespread concern about violence within a school may reduce the quality of teaching, disrupt classroom discipline, limit teachers' availability to students before or after the school day, and reduce students' motivation to attend school and their willingness to participate in extracurricular activities (1998).

Laub and Lauritsen add various social conditions that may lead to violence. Low socioeconomic conditions do not have a simple, direct effect on neighborhood violence. However, residents living in low-income neighborhoods tend to experience more difficulty establishing the formal and informal social ties within the community necessary to control crime and violence (Laub & Lauritsen, 1998). Neighborhoods characterized predominately by single-parent households tend to have fewer social resources and networks necessary for developing and maintaining local institutions, and for helping parents acquire the social capital necessary in deterring children from

violence and delinquency (1998). A community's ability to use informal social controls appears to be the key to understanding local levels of violence and disorder (1998). Participation in formal networks such as neighborhood associations, schools, and churches tends to be lower in disorganized communities (1998). A community is powerless to influence policy decisions that affect neighborhood conditions and thus further weaken the community when there is a lack of external ties. Without strong formal and informal social ties and networks within a neighborhood, it is unlikely that strong ties to organizations and resources outside the neighborhood will develop (1998). Research demonstrates how social disorganization affects neighborhood crime, however, the dynamic can also operate in the opposite direction. Violence in a community can change the population composition of a neighborhood, increasing social disorganization (1998). Finally, the most effective responses to violence are those that develop the social resources of their students (1998).

From the community policing and mental health angle, Marans & Schaefer add some interesting facts. The three key youth serving community institutions that need to collaborate to help children experiencing or committing violence include public schools, mental health services, and police departments (Marans & Schaefer, 1998). When children witness or experience violence, the basic sense of safety is jeopardized. They often experience a disruption in the normal capacity to anticipate, adjust to, and assimilate events and emotions (1988). Whether as victims, witnesses,

or perpetrators of violence, children's psychological reactions are all too often ignored or misunderstood (1998). The juvenile justice system also needs to collaborate because it is often the first and most significant point of intervention in lives that have already deviated from optimal developmental pathways (1998).

It is important for communities to urge all local groups and individuals to work with schools to ensure implementation of comprehensive and long-term strategies to support successful youth development (Futrell, 1994). Communities, for example, spend thousands of dollars on metal detectors and security guards each year. Other than make schools appear more prison-like, these strategies have not eliminated violence from schools nor have they made students feel safer. What would happen if some of the money spent was used to create jobs for the students, or build facilities that would eliminate overcrowding, or even establish counseling and intervention programs that would extend through the summer months? The communities believe that these types of investments would probably have a greater, more positive impact on the school and the community. We cannot ignore the complexity of violence in the schools. The future of this country, the kind of society we want, and the degree of safety in schools that is in jeopardy.

The literature shows that violence in schools can be caused by a number of different elements. It seems that the blame for who or what causes the violence is the responsibility of all those who have a connection with education. The problem of

school violence cannot be solved overnight, but we can begin to address the problem when we know where to begin. We can begin at home, with our own school.

To summarize, the literature shows that there are a number of similarities in the perceptions of violence by students, parents, and the community. The similarities include:

- 1) The students, parents, and the community recognize that controlling violence in schools is a difficult task.
- 2) The students, parents, and the community want to have safe learning environments for children.
- 3) The students, parents, and the community agree that violence has no boundaries.
- 4) The students, parents, and the community agree that a good home life, which would include good parenting, morals, and a strong sense of values, is critical to controlling violence.
- 5) The students, parents, and the community agree on some of the causes of violence in the schools such as substance abuse and gangs.

The literature also shows that there are a number of differences in the perceptions of violence by students, parents, and the community. The differences include:

- 1) The students, parents, and the community are at odds about whom is to blame for the violence. They tend to blame each other.
- 2) The students, parents, and the community disagree on the leading cause of violence. Students say it is poor parenting, the parent's say it is the school, and the community says it is drugs.
- 3) The students, parents, and the community see different motivations for committing acts of violence such as frustration, status, and defiance of authority.
- 4) The students, parent, and the community disagree on what viable solutions to the problems of violence should be initiated.

In order to successfully control the violence in schools, steps should be taken by each individual school to outline and implement a program that will work for the improvement of their own students, their own school, and their own community.

Chapter III

Critique, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Critique

Ensuring that our students have a safe environment, conducive to learning, is a priority for schools all across the nation. This environment should be well disciplined but yet it should allow students to actively engage in the learning process.

Schools experience crimes that range in severity from minor incidents to very serious criminal acts. When violence becomes serious, the safety and security of our children are at stake. Granted, more serious crimes occur in larger schools, and usually in the upper grades. Less serious crimes usually occur in smaller, more rural schools, but usually at a much higher rate.

A large number of schools in America do not have violence prevention programs. In addition, a large number of the schools do not adequately train their staff in violence prevention and control techniques. Schools that do not experience the more serious crimes tend to "write off" the need to have a violence prevention plan.

From the literature, it can be drawn that the perceptions of violence as expressed by the students, the parents, and the community is similar in many ways. The review of literature also shows that the perceptions of violence as expressed by the students, the parents, and the community is different in many ways. It will not be

until the differences are brought into focus and the school adopts a unified plan to control violence, that the students and all those associated with education, will have a safe, comfortable environment where active learning takes place. There are a number of issues that need to be resolved before violence is under control and the education of all of our children is successful.

Conclusion

The review of literature identifies a number of similarities in the perceptions of violence by students, parents, and the community. These similarities include: an agreement that controlling violence is a difficult task; that there is a desire for a safe learning environment; and both males and females are involved as victims and perpetrators. In addition, they agree that controlling violence begins at home with the teaching of strong morals and values, and there is an agreement on a number of the causes of violence in schools. This means two things for the schools. First, the mere fact that there is some agreement provides the school with something positive to start with. This positive element should provide an incentive for continuing the process of the development of a violence prevention program. It should create a "feel good" attitude and a sense of pride. Second, the agreement between the parties provides a starting point for initiating the effort to create a better learning environment. The areas of agreement can be used as a foundation for building and maintaining a strong violence prevention program.

The review of literature identifies a number of differences in the perceptions of violence by students, parent, and the community. These differences include: a disagreement as to who is to blame for the violence; a disagreement as to what the leading cause of the violence is; a disagreement as to what the motivation to commit violent acts is; and, a disagreement as to what the best solution would be.

The students, parents, and the community need to stop blaming each other for the problem of violence. They should develop a clear understanding that they share the blame. If each would recognize this shared blame, they could assess the degree to which each is responsible and then begin to take corrective measures. The causes of violence, regardless of whether or not it is the leading cause or any other cause, need to be identified and discussed. The discussion on the causes would eliminate any "gray areas" that may exist between the groups. The lines of communication between the groups would be opened, and the quest for the common goal could begin.

Students experience frustrations on a regular basis. Some students are able to deal with those frustrations and some students are not. These frustrations provide the motivation for acts of violence. Each school needs to reduce or eliminate the sources of frustration in order to begin searching for a viable solution. Symptoms must be identified. The best solution to the schools' violence problems must be modeled so that the exact symptoms are addressed. The solution is a violence prevention program that is unique to the individual school district. If the differences that are

present in each community could be reconciled, then the issue of violence in schools could be controlled.

Recommendations

In order to implement and maintain a program to control the violence in the Princeton School District, several recommendations are necessary. Currently, there are a number of elements of a successful violence prevention program that are in effect in the Princeton School District. These include such things as controlling access to the school building, requiring visitors to sign in, and regulating students' freedom during lunch times. In addition, dogs are used to conduct drug searches, a police liaison office is present on campus, hall passes are required, and a code of behavior is in place and enforced. While these elements do exist, they need to be placed strategically within a district-wide plan to ensure their effectiveness. These elements should also be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect the current environment, structure, and needs of the Princeton School District.

At present, Princeton does not have a comprehensive violence prevention program. Such a plan should include the following components:

- 1) Identify that there is, in fact, a violence problem in the district. Present the problem to the students, staff, parents, community, administration, and the school board. Work to gain their support.

- 2) Revisit the schools' mission statement. School safety and violence prevention should be a part of the educational goals of the district.
- 3) Establish a violence prevention team. The team should consist of students, staff, board members, parents, community members, law enforcement, administrators, and counselors.
- 4) Conduct a site assessment. The school needs to determine the specific needs of the district. A survey should be designed to determine the relevant facts about violence in the Princeton School District.
- 5) Set goals for the district. These goals must be realistic and meaningful. This would provide direction for the violence prevention team. The results of the survey would aid in setting the specific goals for the violence prevention program.
- 6) Develop a violence prevention plan. The plan should include guidelines for the curriculum, the physical plant, social issues, cultural concerns, economics of the district, the code of conduct, student and staff concerns, and the community.
- 7) Implement the plan. Actually put the plan into effect. It would not solve any problems if the district would just discuss the problem of violence. The district must take action.

- 8) Review and update the plan. Each year, at a designated time, re-evaluate the plan. Keep statistics that would provide a basis for the evaluation and the subsequent revisions. Make any necessary changes. This would provide longevity for the program.

It is felt that if the Princeton School District would carefully implement, revise, and continue to monitor these recommendations, that we would have a model violence prevention program that would provide our students with a safe school environment conducive to active learning.

Bibliography

- Alliance Schools Concept Paper. Interfaith Education Fund. (Fall 1998).
- American Psychological Association. (1993). *Summary Report of the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth* (Vol. 1). Washington, DC: Author.
- Asmussen, K.J. (1992, Fall). Weapon possession in public high schools. *School Safety*, 28-30.
- Botstein, Leon. (1997). *Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture*. Doubleday.
- Bastian, L.D., & Taylor, B.M. (1991). *School crime: A national crime victimization survey report*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Burbach, Hal. *Violence and the Public Schools*, 1992.
<http://www.people.Virginia.EDU/~rkb3b/Hal/SchoolViolence.html>
- Collins, A., Cooper, J. L., and Whitmore, E. (1995, August 31). *Enhancing local involvement in education through quality leadership*. Total Quality Leadership for Learning Project. (Cross Case Analysis, p. 3).
- Cotton, N., Resnick, J., Browne, D., Martin, S., McCarraher, D., & Woods, J. (1994). *Aggression and fighting behavior among African-American adolescents: Individual and family factors*. *American Journal of Public Health*, 84, 618-622.

- Embry, D.D., & Flannery, D.J., Vazsonyi, A.T., Powell, K.E., & Atha, H. (1996).
PeaceBuilders: A theoretically driven, school-based model for early violence
prevention. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 12, 91-100.
- Fagan, J., & Wilkinson, D.L. (1998). Social Contexts and Functions of Adolescent
Violence. In D.S. Elliot, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in
American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp. 55-93). New York, NY:
Cambridge University Press.
- Franks, L. (1993, October 10). Little BIG people. *The New York Times Magazine*,
pp. 28-32, 34.
- Futrell, M.H. (1994). *Safe schools, safe students*. Paper presented at a joint U.S.
Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice conference, Safe
Schools, Safe Students: A Collaborative Approach to Achieving Safe,
Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools Conducive to Learning, Washington, DC,
October 28.
- Hellman, D.A., & Beaton, S. (1986). The pattern of violence in urban public schools:
The influence of school and community. *Journal of Research in Crime and
Delinquency*, 23, 102-107.
- Kimweli, D. (1997). Parents' versus Students' Perception of Predictors of Violence
and Substance Abuse in Schools: Psychological and Contextual Factors.

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (105th, Chicago, IL, August 15-19, 1997).

Laub, J.H., & Lauritsen, J.L. (1998). The Interdependence of School Violence with Neighborhood and Family Conditions. In D.S. Elliot, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp. 127-155). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lorian, R.P. (1998). Exposure to Urban Violence: Contamination of the School Environment. In D.S. Elliot, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp. 293-311). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Marans, S., & Schaefer, M. (1998). Community Policing, Schools, and Mental Health: The Challenge of Collaboration. In D.S. Elliot, B. Hamburg, & K.R. Williams (Editors), *Violence in American Schools: A New Perspective*, (pp. 312-347). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Morrison, G.M., Furlong, M.J., & Morrison, R.L. (1994). School violence and school safety: Reframing the issue for school psychologists. *School Psychology Review*, 23(2), 236-256.

National Consortium for Academics and Sports. (1993, November 10). *The 1993 Lou Harris study on racism and violence in American high schools: Project*

teamwork responds. Boston, MA: Northeastern University, Center for the Study of Sports in Society.

National Education Association. (1995). "Understanding Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students Through Diversity." Action Sheet. Washington, DC: NEA Human and Civil Rights.

National Institute of Education. (1986). *Violent schools-safe schools: The Safe School Study Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

National School Board Association. (1993). *Violence in our schools: How America's school boards are safeguarding our children*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Noguera, P.A. (1995, Summer). Preventing and producing violence: A critical analysis of responses to school violence. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(2), 189-212.

Nolin, M.J., Davies, E., & Chandler, K. (1996, August). Student victimization at school. *Journal of School Health*, 66(6), 216-221.

Rossmann, S.B., & Morley, E. (1996, August). Introduction. *Education and Urban Society*, 28(4), 395-411.

Singer, M., Anglin, T., Song, L., & Lunghofer, L. (1995). Adolescents' exposure to violence and associated symptoms of psychological trauma. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 273, 447-482.

- Thayer, Y. (1996). The Virginia model: School to community intervention techniques to prevent violence (pp.275-295). In A. Hoffman (Ed.), *Schools, violence and society*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- The American Teacher, 1993: *Violence in America's public schools. The Metropolitan Life Survey*. (1993). New York: Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.
- Toby, J. (1994). Violence in schools. In E.J. Hollingsworth, H.S. Lufner, Jr., & W.H. Clune, III(Eds.), *School Discipline: Order and autonomy*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Toby, J., Smith, W.R., & Smith, D.R. (1985). *Comparative trends in crime victimization in school and in the community: 1974-1981*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Tolan, P., & Guerra, N. (1994). *What works in reducing adolescent violence: An empiracle review of the field*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.
- U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey, 1993.
- U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (1991, September). *School crime: A national crime victimization survey report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Villalva, Maribel. Parental survey reveals fear: Violence. *USA Today*. 2000,
February;8.

Walker, H.M., & Gresham, F.M. (1997). Making schools safer and violence free.
Intervention in School and Clinic, 32, 199-204.