

CTL Project- School Violence
Group 2:
Lindsay Fox, Laura Daugherty, Kentrell Curry, and Matthew Flanders

The Encyclopedia of Social Issues defines school violence as including “any intentional actions taken while on school property to physically harm or threaten people” (School Violence 1999). A major problem facing society today is the overwhelming increase in school violence that has taken place over the last several years. Violent acts such as school shootings have emerged all over the United States, from cities like West Paducah, Kentucky, Littleton, Colorado, and Jonesboro, Arkansas. These shootings are not the stereotypical stories of inner city gang related violence of one student against another, but were more of planned massacres against the whole school population. Although these cases received national attention, acts of violence such as vandalism and theft occur everyday at schools across the nation.

People look at these travesties and wonder how they could have been prevented, what caused these students to do this, and who should be blamed. There are no clear answers to any of these questions, only conflicting opinions. Everyday 100,000 students bring weapons to school, and every year 40 people are killed with them (Walker & Gresham 1997). Yet, others report the number of violent deaths in schools have decreased 70 percent, from 55 to 16 per year (Soskis 2001). The problem that plagues the schools, the faculty, the students, the parents, and the whole community is how to prevent such catastrophes.

When solving a problem, the cause must be identified. The motive behind the action is constantly being questioned. What actually set the students off? Was it bullies, lack of values, lack of counseling, or popular culture? No one really knows. Some argue

that delinquent juveniles do not just spontaneously wander the streets and become criminals, they argue that individuals like this have grown slowly from a broken family or unsupervised peer group and have learned to behave in such a delinquent manner.

Along with the cause comes the blame. Among those some people believe responsible are the gun manufacturers, the National Rifle Association (NRA), the media, television programs, the parents, a lack of morals, a lack of security at the school, the other students who bullies or teased the assailants, and the students themselves. The answer to this is always hard to determine. It may never be known. The real cause maybe a combination of many factors. Until that is determined, society is forced to change in its ways that may seem beneficial, but in reality it may not.

The schools are at the forefront of this problem. The teachers and students who should be worried about teaching and learning are now worried about potential violent situations. Several programs and efforts have been presented to prevent and reduce the severity of these acts. Peer mediation and counseling have proven to be helpful when dealing with bullies and other situations following certain guidelines (Soskis 2001). Creating a safer school environment is also emphasized, following guidelines such as visitor's passes and emergency exit plans (Walker & Gresham 1997). Character education is another topic that could be taught. Also, encouraging parent involvement in the school has been shown as beneficial (Peterson & Skiba 2001). These programs may help but do they belong in the schools? If so, where do they fit? Any attempt to combat violence is worth trying. These programs need to be examined carefully by the school community for possible determination. The challenges come when you start crossing lines of religion and morals. Each family has their own code of conduct they live by, and

they don't want anyone else to tell their kids how to live. But by doing it as a community activity, such as part of the Parent Teacher Association, everyone has a say in the decision. These programs may help in solving current problems in schools.

From school shootings and physical attacks to incidents of theft and vandalism, school violence can take on many forms and can have a major impact on the lives of those involved. With so many questions being raised about what causes school violence, and what can be done to prevent these incidents, it is imperative that we delve into the information that has been previously gathered surrounding this issue so that we may gain a better understanding of the concept at hand.

In determining what the effects and possible solutions are for school violence, it is necessary to understand the concepts being put forth in the literature on this topic. When talking about school violence, it is first necessary to gain insight into the background of this subject. In Gordon Crews and Reid Countes' article entitled "The evolution of school disturbance in America: colonial times to modern times," we are given information tracing the history of school violence in the United States since colonial times. This article tracks the different types of violence throughout history, stemming from inflicted abusive treatment in the 19th century due to public flogging and whipping to school shootings in the 1990s. We learn that "not until the 1950s did schools begin to experience children as the agents of violence and widespread disturbances." The authors of this article also point out that "many Americans believe schools today to be on the verge of destruction" and that many have "lost their faith in the U.S. educational system altogether."

After learning about the differing types of school violence throughout history, it is necessary to determine the causes of school violence within our current society, and what can be done to deter this type of violence. In Allan Hoffman's article entitled "Schools, violence, and society," a collection of twenty previously unpublished papers on school violence, the issues of prevalence, types, root causes, effects, and countermeasures are explored. The four main papers inquire into violence from a teacher's perspective, weapon carrying, and school safety. Furthermore, the issues of media and television influence, and methods of prevention such as resolving conflicts correctly are discussed.

Hoffman's article coincides with the National School Boards Association and the article written by Kim Howard, June Flora, and Marie Griffin. These articles focus in on methods of preventing school violence. In the article published by the National School Boards Association, school board policy to combat school violence is addressed. The suggestions are organized into thirty categories, ranging from "closed-circuit television and metal detectors to mentoring programs and multicultural sensitivity training." The article entitled "Violence prevention programs in schools: state of the science and implications for future research" by Howard, Flora, and Griffin, also combats the notion of prevention of school violence. This article is essentially a review of the types of school-based violence prevention programs used in the years of 1993 to 1997. These interventions include "classroom-based curricula, efforts to change the broader school environment or other settings where youth spend their time, and intervention effects on knowledge, attitudes, and aggressive or violent behavior."

After learning about possible causes and prevention for deterring school violence, it is necessary to look at the effects that these types of incidents may have on those

involved. In a study entitled “Teachers’ perceptions of violence in the public schools: The MetLife Survey” by James Price and Sherry Everett, the results of a secondary analysis of data from a 1993 survey conducted for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company are reviewed. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers’ perceptions and experiences with violence in U.S. public schools. Issues looked at involved “overall effects of violence in school behaviors weapon carrying in schools, and the adequacy of violence prevention programs.”

After gathering information surrounding the issues of prevention, cause, and effects of school violence, it is necessary to evaluate what the research has shown in order to gain a better understanding of the issue being described. After reviewing and comparing these works, we are able to get a better understanding of the authors’ points of view. It is apparent that each of these authors chose to focus on different areas of the spectrum in relation to the topic of school violence. While some choose to include input into the areas of prevention and causes of actions such as these, others chose to focus on what can be done after they occur. Although different in opinions about what areas should be discussed, all of the authors are concerned with the topic of school violence as a whole.

Violence can include many different levels of intensity at all levels of education. From elementary schools through high schools, physical cruelty ranges from pushing or punching to the use of weapons such as knives, guns, or other objects that can severely injure a student or teacher. In order to prevent school violence, we must all work together with educational policy makers, the schools, teachers, administrators, and communities to improve this terrible dilemma.

Educational policy makers can help reduce school violence by enforcing new policies in schools. The district, the school, and the classroom are three different levels at which policies can be created. At times, policies are created reflecting the views of the students, their parents, the teachers, and the administrators. This alliance of views ensures that the policy will be valued and imposed. As policies are created, they are often explained to students so that the point is made clear and there are no misunderstandings. Also copies of the policies are given to the students and their parents, as well as teachers and administrators.

With the preponderance of evidence suggesting that there is a major problem with school violence in the United States today, it is imperative that we find solutions and methods of deterrence to reduce these acts. The best method for creating a safe school environment is to prevent these crimes before they happen. Some claim that the security policies of schools aren't up to par. Some want metal detectors, video cameras, locker searches, and on-duty police officers as part of a "no tolerance" policy in every school. Under this policy any students showing any sign of an act of violence are punished, or suspended. Many people in favor of this rule believe it allows the school to remove any threat immediately to prevent harm to others. This sentiment echoed through school districts in the late 1990's, when it became popular (Derbyshire 2001). Now the "no tolerance" policy is beginning to be abandoned for several reasons. The prevention measures are a high economic cost for the schools and unrealistic for those schools that are already under-funded and can be seen as intimidating by students and teachers, creating an uncomfortable environment. If someone really wants to cause harm, barriers can deter them, not stop them. Also, the students are often times suspended for what can

be considered petty violations, such as drawing a gun or dressing up as a fireman with a plastic toy axe as happened in Pittsburgh in 1998. The guidelines under this system are also seen as coping for the loss of values. “Zero tolerance is one more response to the moral crisis of our time: to the collapse of authority, to the turning away from customary and traditional practices and beliefs” (Derbyshire 2001). These flaws have the schools rethinking their policy and situation.

Other concepts of prevention involve programs in schools or throughout communities that would explain the risks involved in committing school violence. Scientists have often studied the effects of deterrence on juveniles, and these methods prove to be a positive reinforcement on juveniles and their further actions. By educating children about the risks of violence, and by getting them involved in community affairs, society will be taking the first step in helping to prevent these children from becoming prone to acts of violence. A recent study found that early intervention programs were cost effective solutions for reducing the juvenile crime rate and that “children with Big Brothers and Big Sisters were less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, or to have trouble in school” (National School Boards Association 1993).

To improve situations at school, teachers and administrators are using metal detectors, random locker checks, and police patrol or campus security guards on school grounds on a regular basis. By monitoring the halls, bathrooms, and cafeteria, school officials are better able to enforce school safety. Teacher team meetings can also be arranged so that the faculty can form an alliance against school violence. These meetings allow the teachers to talk about their concerns and suggestions freely with other teachers

and administrators that share many of the same views. Solutions to many of the violence issues in schools can be found after discussing different options to prevent the problem.

With so much evidence to support the issue of school violence, there is no question that something needs to be done to stop the problem from escalating further. When we hear the horrific statistics surrounding this topic, we as a society need to find effective methods for reducing school violence. Although it is uncertain as to how many and which of these programs are the most effective, the positive concepts brought forth within these programs will certainly be beneficial. By teaching children about school violence, and by further educating school officials, we as a society will succeed in helping to create a safer school environment for our children.

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