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COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE INCIDENCE OF SCHOOL-RELATED VIOLENT  
CRIMES IN URBAN, SUBURBAN, AND RURAL LOCALES

by  
Trina C. Ragsdale

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 4, 1999

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved

5/3/99

## **ABSTRACT**

Trina C. Ragsdale

**A Comparative Study On the Incidence of School-Related Violent Crimes in Urban,**

**Suburban, and Rural School Locales**

1999

Dr. John Klanderman

School Psychology

Concern about school violence, crime and victimization has been a pressing issue since the 1950's. Only recently have the many facets of the complex social issue of school violence been thoroughly investigated, particularly, the high rates of violence among middle and elementary school students, and the upsurge of violence in suburban and rural school districts. Due to the increasing rate of school related violent crimes, Congress mandated districts to track the rate at which violent crimes occur in their school and develop intervention plans aimed at ameliorating the problem. Results of the study suggest, school violence is not constrained by geographic boundaries nor is it limited to adolescents, more and more studies are showing that violence has increased sharply over the past decade in suburban and rural communities and at the lower educational levels.

## **MINI ABSTRACT**

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School Psychology

As the problem of school violence persists, more and more research is being conducted to assess not only the aftereffect, but the causative factors that lead to school related violent crimes. This study provides evidence in support of existing research that suggests particular types of school-related violent crimes has become increasingly prevalent in suburban and rural public schools.

### **Acknowledgements**

Before all, I give thanks to God for giving me the strength to persevere through what seemed to be an insurmountable task. To my mother, I thank you for your belief in your little girl's abilities. To my father, I will be forever grateful for your unwavering support and for the use of your office space. To my baby brother, I thank you for the friendly competition and shining example of what dedication truly means. Lastly, I would like to express sincere gratitude for all the schools that participated in my study and most especially the principals, teachers, and school personnel committed to preserving the innocence of our children.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **SCHOOL VIOLENCE**

America is becoming a more violent nation every year. Of particular concern is the alarming increase in violence among children and youth, not only in our communities and in our homes, but in our schools. Forty years ago events that affected school staff and students were minor in comparison to those we read about in the newspapers and see on television today. Principals listened to complaints about things like chewing gum, running in the halls, and student non-compliance with other seemingly trivial school codes. Today, school personnel and students are exposed to an increasing number of violent events, including sexual abuse, physical assaults, homicides, suicides, and gang warfare. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1991) half of all crimes against teenagers occurred in school buildings, on school property, or on the street.

The problem of violence in schools, like the related problem of violence in society, has become one of the most pressing educational issues in the United States. There is a growing perception in our society that aggressive and antisocial behavior among children and youth has become more insolent, violent and commonplace. School violence is now more likely to involve weapons and gangs, to be more destructive, more virulent, and to involve more females and children of younger ages than ever before. In many school districts, concerns about violence have surpassed academic achievements as

the highest priority for reform and intervention. Forty-four percent of teachers in the United States reported that student misconduct interfered substantially with their teaching (Aleem & Moles, 1993). School principals considered student conflicts, vandalism of school property, and verbal abuse of teachers to be as serious a problem as student and staff absenteeism, tobacco-related offenses, and lateness (Mansfield & Farris, 1992). Moreover, it is estimated that 568,000 teens or about 5% of the student population of American schools are in possession of a firearm (Harrington-Lueker, 1992).

No longer are these problems restricted to inner city schools or to neighborhoods characterized by lower socioeconomic levels. Schools in rural and suburban areas are all becoming unsafe for students and teachers because of violence incidents such as physical conflicts among students, robbery, vandalism of school properties, alcoholism, drug addiction, student possession of weapons, and verbal abuse of teachers. For the most part, the severity of every type of problem decreases from urban to suburban and from suburban to rural schools. The exceptions are drug and alcohol abuse, two problems usually associated with urban schools. Studies have shown that students use of alcohol, in particular, actually increased from urban to suburban to rural schools. Furthermore, physical conflicts, weapons possession, and vandalism, also considered problems limited to urban schools, are becoming more prevalent in rural and suburban schools.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to corroborate existing research that suggests certain types of school-related violence has become commonplace in suburban and rural public schools. By the use of a self-report questionnaire given to a select sample of urban,

suburban, and rural school personnel, certain types of school-related violent crimes will show higher or comparable rates across these locales. Schools located in suburban and rural counties that had been unscathed by the violence that permeates urban communities, are now dealing with the same issues of school-related violence urban school districts have been combating for years.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

The basis of this study lies on the premise that schools located in suburban and rural communities are experiencing similar rates of violent crimes as compared to urban schools, and in some cases, exhibiting higher rates of particular types of school related violent crimes i.e. drug and alcohol abuse. While this study is not predictive in nature, reliability estimates show that comparable rates of school related violent crimes exist between urban, suburban, and rural schools at some level.

## **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

As school crime rates continue to rise, more and more interest is being placed on causative factors. Some researchers have found that the hostile behaviors of students involved in different incidents can be attributed to the deteriorating roles of churches and families in teaching and leading children. Others postulate that our nation's geographically mobile population, economic reversals, downsizing of companies and layoffs are resulting in an increasing number of students who are affected by the stresses of their parents; coupled with their own experiences, frustrated children become hostile students.

## *POVERTY*

Researchers have noted that although poverty is not necessarily a cause of violence, the high stress and lack of resources that result from poverty often precipitates violence. Recent data from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (1993) illustrate that the gap between the poor and the wealthy is at its widest point in 25 years. In 1993, 39.3 million people were considered poor; 39.7 million had no health insurance. A recent report by the Children's Defense Fund speculated that if present trends continue, 17 million American children will be living in poverty by the year 2001. Data also suggest that high-poverty areas frequently have unusually high levels of youth violence.

Analysis of 1994 KIDS COUNT in Missouri data indicates that Mississippi and Pemiscot counties and St. Louis City have some of the highest levels of both poverty and youth crime. Elijah Anderson, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, contends that poor youngsters turn to violence as a remedy for powerlessness. He adds that criminal activity often arises in environments that offer few resources or alternative activities for youth. When few job opportunities or role models exist, criminal activities can provide excitement, status, and financial gain.

## *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE*

There seems to be a consensus between researchers that domestic violence undoubtedly has a negative impact on children's behavior. The trauma of witnessing violence against a parent takes a physical, emotional and developmental toll on children. According to Hope Hill of the Violence Prevention Project at Howard University, the psychological effect on children witnessing violence is just as severe as if they had been

victims of themselves. Although treated by social service and law enforcement as two separate occurrences, domestic violence is often times a prelude to child abuse.

Children in homes in which domestic violence occurs are at risk for abuse from the batterer and could also be injured when attempting to protect their parent. An article in the Child Protection Leader quoted evidence that “punitive family of origin” is the parental characteristic most strongly correlated with current abusive behavior (American Humane Association, 1994). Boys who grow up in violent households are statistically more likely to become batterers than boys from nonviolent homes, and female incest victims are at increased risk for victimization by their partners as adults. Hence, children who witness violent acts are more likely to be involved in violence as either a perpetrator or as a victim.

### *TELEVISION VIOLENCE*

Evidence shows that mass media (i.e. television, radio, publications, and films), unlike some of the other contributing factors, glorifies violence and instigates aggressive behavior. Many researchers suspect that children’s exposure to television violence substantiates educator’s claim that there has been a marked increase in children’s aggression, both on the playground and in the classroom during the past decade.

According to research on television violence, five violent acts per hour are observable in prime-time programming, and twenty five violent acts per hour are observable in cartoons (Johnston, 1993). In a study completed by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), airtime for war cartoons increased from 1.5 hours per week in 1982 to 43 hours per week in 1986. In 1980,

children's programs featured 18.6 violent acts per hour and have increased to about 26.4 violent acts each hour. Moreover, the American Psychological Association Task Force Report on Television in Society (Huston, et al.1992), shows that by the time the average child (i.e. one who watches two or four hours of television daily) leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed at least 8,000 murders and more than 100,000 other assorted acts of violence on television.

Three major national studies, one by the Surgeon General's Commission Report (1972), another by the National Institute of Mental Health Ten-Year Follow-up (1982), and the third report being the APA's task force report on television and society concluded that heavy exposure to violence is one of the significant causes of violence in society. Although the exposure may be short-term, the effects are long lasting. For instance, viewing violence on the television screen has the following negative effects:

- \* It increases the viewer's fear of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviors and increased mistrust of others.
- \* It desensitizes the viewer to violence, resulting in a calloused attitude toward violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood of taking action to help a victim of violence.
- \* It increases the viewer's appetite for becoming involved with violence.
- \* It often demonstrates how desirable commodities can be obtained through the use of aggression and violence.
- \* Sexual violence in X- and R-rated videotapes has been shown to cause an increase male aggression against females.

(APA Public Policy Office, 1998)

In addition, a longitudinal study found a significant correlation between boys exposure to

violence at age 8 and antisocial acts, including serious violent criminal offenses and spouse abuse 22 years later (APA Public Policy Office, 1998). Overall, the pattern of research findings indicates a positive association between television violence and aggressive behavior.

There is an emerging perception that violence has become more pervasive in society, including in our schools. School violence is reported to be on the rise and increasing in intensity, particularly in the form of verbal and physical assaults, as teachers see students become more insolent. Psychological research has demonstrated that violence is learned and that certain factors put children at the greatest risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. It has also shown that violence, specifically in the media, has had deleterious effects on children's behavior. Research has also concluded that the more violence a child views the higher the likelihood they will exhibit increased aggression both at home and in the classroom, be insensitivity to violence and the victimization of others, and have irrational fears about the world around them. Furthermore, Children who have witnessed domestic violence or themselves have been victims of violence i.e. incest are more likely to be victims or victimizers in their adulthood. Although poverty does not necessarily induce violence, the conditions of poverty are certainly a precipitant. Some studies suggest that youth from impoverished environments turn to violence as a remedy for powerlessness; when few alternatives or resources exist, violence serves as a means to financial gain and status.

## **DEFINITIONS**

To better identify the focus of my study and to give the reader a clearer understanding of the materials that will be discussed, it is important that I identify the

implied meaning for some of the terminology used in this study.

**Firearm** - any weapon that is designed to (or may be readily converted to) expel a projectile by the action of an explosive. This includes guns, bombs, grenades, mines, rockets, missiles, pipe bombs, or similar devices, designed to explode and capable of causing bodily harm or property damage.

**Incident** - a specific criminal act or offense involving one or more victims and one or more offenders

**Physical attacks or fight with a weapon** - an actual and intentional touching or striking of another person against his or her will, or the intentional causing of bodily harm to an individual with a weapon. This category should be used only when the attack is serious enough to warrant calling the police or other law enforcement representatives.

**Police or other law enforcement representatives** - any regular state or local law enforcement officers, school resource officer, campus police, security personnel employed by school district, or other security personnel with power to arrest or hold for arrest.

**Robbery** - the taking or attempting to take anything of value that is owned by another person or organization, under confrontational circumstances by force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear. A key difference between robbery and theft/larceny is that a threat or battery is involved in robbery.

**Rural** - a farming area or a small town with a population of less than 50,000,

**School-related violence** - any deliberate act that harms or threatens to harm a student, teacher, or other school official, and which interferes with the purpose of school.

**Sexual assault** - had (or tried to have sexual relations with someone against their will.



**Suburban** - a large town and on the fringe of a large or midsize city.

**Theft/Larceny** - the unlawful taking of another persons property without personal confrontation, threat, violence, or bodily harm. Included are pocket picking, stealing purse or backpack (if left unattended or no force was used to take it form owner), theft from a building, theft from a motor vehicle or motor vehicle accessories, theft of bicycles, theft from vending machines, and all other types of thefts.

**Typical week** - a typical full week of school. Avoid weeks with holidays, vacation periods, or weeks when unusual events took place at the school.

**Urban** - a large or midsize central city.

**Vandalism** - the damage or destruction of school property including bombing, arson, graffiti, and other acts that cause property damage.

**Weapon** - any instrument of object used with the intent to threaten, injure or kill.

Examples include guns, knives, razor blades or other sharp-edged objects, ice picks, other pointed objects (including pens, pencils), baseball bats, frying pans, sticks, rocks, and bottles.

**Zero Tolerance Policy** - a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences for specific offenses

## **LIMITATIONS**

Firstly, since the Incidence of Violent Acts Report (IVAR) relied solely on the recollection of estimated incidence of violence from school personnel i.e. guidance counselor, school psychologist, and school principals via self-report surveys, the validity of their responses may not be congruent with actual occurrences. However, by limiting my respondents to only those individuals who handle discipline problems within each

school, the higher the probability that the responses will be accurate.

Secondly, many schools were reluctant to respond to the IVAR due to its sensitive subject matter. Officials in both suburban and urban schools identified their districts as “numbers sensitive” and appeared reluctant to respond to the IVAR candidly possibly to avoid a hackneyed image in fear of backlash. Consequently, the researcher believes respondents may have contrived some of their responses.

Lastly, although the conciseness of the IVAR serves as an incentive for completion, its brevity limits the range of information that will be obtained. In Chapter two, it will be seen that most of the studies completed on school violence were more expansive, and relied on surveys that looked at a number of different variables to develop a much broader study and more comprehensive results.

## **ASSUMPTIONS**

It is important to note that survey estimates are subject to non-sampling errors that can arise because of non-observation (non-response or non-coverage) errors, errors of reporting and errors made in collection of data. These errors can sometimes bias data. Non-sampling errors may include such problems as the differences in the respondents’ interpretation of the meaning of the questions; memory effects; mis-recording of responses; incorrect editing; coding, and data entry; differences related to the particular time the survey was conducted; or errors in data preparation. During the design of the study, an effort was made to check for consistency of interpretation of questions and to eliminate ambiguous items. Although definitions of the terminology used in the IVAR were provided, accurate responses are dependent upon the respondents’

interpretation of the questions, therefore, meanings may be misinterpreted and responses skewed.

## **OVERVIEW**

In the upcoming chapters the materials discussed will help formulate the researchers presenting argument that postulates certain types of violent crimes are more or equally as prevalent in suburban and rural schools than in urban schools. In chapter two the researcher will identify various studies that are congruent with the Incidence of Violent Acts Report (IVAR) findings and provide additional qualitative research that will support her theory. In chapter three the design of the IVAR will be presented, including the random school sample, measure used to conduct the report, testable hypothesis, analysis of findings, and summary. To ensure that the IVA report findings were conclusive, chapter four will include a summation of the analyzed data. The concluding chapter, chapter five, will include a summary of the researchers findings, an integration of other researchers theories, and a discussion of the implications for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Statistics on the prevalence of school based violence are at an all time high. Violent assaults in schools are reported to have escalated 14% in the years between 1987 and 1990 (Landen, 1992). Approximately 28,200 students are physically attacked in schools each month (Hranitz & Eddowes, 1990). Approximately 21% of students, ranging from 12 to 19 years, fear attack at school (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1991). Assaults on teachers have increased at a steady rate from 41,000 to 110,000 between 1971 and 1979 (Goldstein, Apter, & Hartoonian, 1984). The National Association of School Security Directors estimates that each year there are 9,000 rapes, 12,000 armed robberies, 270,000 burglaries, and 204,000 aggravated assaults in schools. Moreover, an estimated 70,000 serious physical attacks each year are made on teachers (Rich, 1992). As a national goal, the United States is committed to the attainment of the sixth National Education Goal which states that “by the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs, violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning” (Aleem & Moles, 1993, p.1). Many districts have instituted intervention programs focused on abating the level of violence in their schools, and despite statistics, many are reporting lower levels of school related violent crimes.

### **SAFE SCHOOL STUDY**

The problem of school violence persisted and increased to the point that in 1974 Congress mandated a national survey of the prevalence of school crime, the factors

associated with its perpetration, and the effectiveness of existing measures to ameliorate student victimization. This mandate resulted in the Safe School Study (National Institute of Education [NIE], 1986), which revealed disturbing trends in the nation's schools. The NIE report revealed that while teenagers spend up to one-fourth of their waking hours at school, 40 percent of the robberies and 36 percent of personal attacks against them occurred at school. The survey also revealed that junior high students were victimized by other students at higher rates than high school students, and a third of junior high students in large cities said they avoided certain places at school like the rest room because they feared being victimized by a peer. In addition, more than 100,000 teachers said they were threatened with physical harm, and over 5,000 teachers reported being physically attacked each month, with these attacks much more likely to result in injury for teachers compared to assaults between students.

## **SCHOOL CRIME SUPPLEMENT**

The Safe School Study generated a series of school-related victimization surveys, particularly, the 1989 School Crime Supplement (SCS), an enhancement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS). This survey of over 10,000 youth age 12-19 who attended school the first six months of the 1988-89 school year showed that 9 percent of students had been victims of crime in or around school: 7 percent reported at least one property crime and 2 percent a violent crime (Bastian & Taylor, 1991). This study also showed that 16 percent of students reported that a teacher had been threatened or attacked at their school, 15 percent reported gangs in their school, 6 percent reported they avoided certain places at school because they feared attack, 2 percent said they had taken a

weapon to school to protect themselves (Bastian & Taylor, 1991). Rates of reported victimization by a property or violent crime were only slightly higher for students from urban schools than from rural schools.

### **NATIONAL ADOLESCENT HEALTH SURVEY**

Another survey that seemed to corroborate existing findings related to school violence was the National Adolescent Student Health Survey (American School Health Association [ASHA], 1989). A survey of over 11,000 eighth and tenth grade students showed that nearly 40 percent of students had been in a physical fight at school (or on the bus to or from school) in the past year, 34 percent reported that someone had threatened to hurt them at school, and 13 percent reported being attacked at school.

The fear of victimization was also significant: 22 percent of students reported carrying a knife or some other weapon such as a gun to school in the past year. Analyses of the 1993 National Household Education Survey are consistent with these trends, showing that half of the students in grades 6-12 personally witnessed some type of crime or victimization at school, and about 1 in 8 reported being directly victimized at school (Nolin, Davies, & Chandler, 1996). Other surveys consistently show that the number one reason students carry weapons to school is for protection rather than intent to perpetrate harm on someone else (Sheley & Wright, 1993).

### **YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY**

The more recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey by the Center for Disease Control Prevention in Atlanta (CDC, 1995) is also consistent with the ASHA survey. The CDC

found that nearly 1 of every 20 high school students (4.4 percent) said they missed at least one school day because they did not feel safe at or on the way to school. Younger, rather than older, students were more likely to miss a day because of fear for their safety. Nearly 12 percent (18 percent of boys and 5 percent of girls) reported carrying a weapon to school at least once during the 30 days preceding the survey, and 7 percent said they had been threatened or injured with a weapon at school in the past year. Sixteen percent said they had been in a physical fight in the past year, and nearly one-third reported having property (e.g. books, clothing, or a vehicle) deliberately damaged or stolen in the past year (CDC, 1995).

#### **NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**

As the NCVS survey results suggested, school violence is not uniquely an urban problem. A National League of Cities study (1994) found that 38 percent of 700 responding cities reported noticeable increases in violence in their schools over the previous five years, and only 11 percent reported that school violence was not a problem in their communities. Nearly two-thirds of the cities that responded had fewer than 50,000 residents and nearly half were suburbs. While the overall level of violence at school was highest for urban districts, nearly one-third of respondents in all types of jurisdictions (e.g. central city, small city, suburb, or rural) reported increases in school violence.

#### **NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION**

Results from a recent National School Board Association survey (NSBA, 1993)

showed that more than 80 percent of school districts reported in 1993 that school violence had gotten worse compared to the previous five years. The most frequent reported form of school violence was assault, occurring in 78 percent of the responding districts. Schools also reported an increase in the number of students bringing weapons to school (61 percent), incidents of student assault on teachers (28 percent), shootings or knifings (13 percent), drive-by shootings (9 percent), and on campus rapes (7 percent). Again, 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, 1996).

## **REGIONAL STUDIES**

Smaller regional studies of specific groups of students show similarly high rates of violence perpetration and victimization at school. Cotton and colleagues (Cotton, Resnick, Browne, Martin, McCarragher, & Woods, 1994), in a survey of two middle schools in predominantly African American neighborhood, found that 37 percent of student's had been involved in a physical fight at school, 19 percent reported carrying a weapon to school, and 18 percent had been suspended for fighting. Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer (1995), in one of the largest studies to date of context specific violence exposure and related psychological trauma (N=3,700), reported that 41 percent of male high school students and 27 percent of females had been hit, slapped, or punched at school in the past year, and over three-fourths of students had witnessed someone else being threatened, slapped, hit, or punched. For some categories of victimization and exposure, rates were higher for adolescents in a small city than for adolescents in the



central city.

In a subsequent survey of elementary school students, Singer, Miller, Slovak, and Frieson (1997) also found high rates of victimization by violence and exposure to violence. In the central city sample, 44 percent of males and 35 percent of females reported being threatened at school in the past year. As other studies have found, the rate for many types of victimization was higher in both the small city and rural samples than in the central city sample. While 41 percent of inner-city males reported being slapped, hit, or punched at school, approximately 50 percent of rural males reported having been hit at school. Rates of being beaten up at school were similar for males across central city, small city, and rural samples, but twice as many central city females in grades 3-8 reported being beaten up at school compared to females who lived in a small city or rural area (see **Table 2.1**).

Consistent with other national surveys, Singer et al. (1997) showed that younger students are victimized at school at higher rates than older students. The findings are not altogether consistent with what might be expected, however **Table 2.2** shows that elementary school students consistently reported being beaten up at school more often than middle school students. For boys, however, elementary student males in the rural sample reported the highest rates of being beaten up at school: 24 percent for rural males in elementary school compared to 18 percent of males in central city elementary schools and 20 percent for males in small city elementary schools. Conversely, females in urban elementary schools reported the highest rates of getting beaten at school (12 percent), compared to females in rural (9 percent), and small city (8 percent) elementary schools.

**Table 2.1**

**Percent of Students Reporting Exposure to  
Violence and Victimization at School**

Grades 3-8

**Incident Report**

	Males			Females		
	Small City	Rural	Urban	Small City	Rural	Urban
Yourself Beaten	13.8	14.1	14.7	5.5	4.7	10.3
Witness to beating of someone else	67.9	62.2	78	67.6	55.1	75.7
Yourself slapped	44.1	50.7	41.7	25.4	29	34.4
Witness to slapping of someone else	78.7	74.2	80.8	74	65.6	77.2
Yourself threatened	54.5	46	43.9	39.7	35.5	34.8
Witness to threatening Of someone else	81	68.3	72.9	80.3	64.8	68.7

Grades 9-12

**Incident Report**

	Males		Females	
	Small City	Urban	Small City	Urban
Yourself beaten	5.6	9.8	4	4.4
Witness to beating of someone else	81.7	75.8	82	73.9
Yourself slapped	38	36.8	17.8	24.9
Witness to slapping of someone else	93.2	89	93.3	87.3
Yourself threatened	48.4	38.7	38.9	34.6
Witness to threatening Of someone else	89.2	83.1	87.6	81

Note: Subjects reported the incidents above as occurring "sometimes".

Source: Singer, Anglin, Song & Lunghofer (1995)

**Table 2.2**  
**Percent of Students Who Report Being Beaten Up**  
**At Home, in School, and in the Neighborhood**

Location	Elementary School (grades 3-5)			Middle School (grades 6-8)			High School (grades 9-12)	
	Rural	Small City	Urban	Rural	Small City	Urban	Small City	Urban
<b>Males</b>								
School	23.9	19.7	17.6	8.3	9.6	11.3	5.4	9.8
Home	20.9	26.3	24.5	12.2	12.1	7.2	6.4	6.7
Neighborhood	18.2	27.8	20.9	7.2	8	13.4	11.5	16.4
<b>Females</b>								
School	8.9	7.6	12.4	1.4	4.3	8.9	4	4.4
Home	16.8	15.8	17.9	6.3	8.7	9.6	9.1	9.2
Neighborhood	4.4	17.2	12.7	1.4	2.2	10	3.8	7

**Note:** Percentage reflects students who reported being beaten up at least "sometime" in the past year.

**Sources:** Elementary school data: Singer, Miller, Slovak & Frierson (1997).

High school data: Singer, Anglin, Song & Lunghofer (1995).

## NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

In an expansive study conducted every three years by The National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education, a representative sample of some 50,000 public school teachers rated the following problems as serious, moderate, minor, or not at all, depending on the degree to which they occur at their schools:

- \* physical conflicts among students
- \* robbery or theft
- \* vandalism of school property
- \* student use alcohol
- \* student drug abuse
- \* student possession of weapons

\* verbal abuse of teachers

In the first study conducted in 1987-88, more than 25 percent of the teachers considered verbal abuse of teachers and student drug and alcohol abuse as serious or moderately serious. In the 1993-94 study, 34 percent of those surveyed considered both verbal abuse of teachers and physical conflict among students as serious or moderately serious problems; two problems that threaten teachers safety because teachers usually intervene to dissolve fights. Between the 1987-88 and 1993-94 school years the percentage of teachers who viewed student possession of weapons as serious or moderately serious problems in their schools nearly doubled, rising from 6.4 to as high as 11.5. Although that figure was relatively low in comparison to others, it clearly identified the serious nature of the problem.

In the same study, a comparison of school problems across elementary and secondary schools was conducted. Secondary school teachers rated all of these problems as being more severe in their schools than did their counterparts in elementary school. Moreover, elementary and secondary teachers identified different problems as being more serious among their students. In all three academic years, about half the secondary teachers saw drug and alcohol abuse as serious or moderately serious, whereas only 7 percent of elementary teachers felt drugs and alcohol were problems. Instead, elementary school teachers identified verbal abuse of teachers, vandalism, and physical conflicts as the most serious problems they face.

Another major difference was student possession of weapons. In 1993-94, 20.3 percent of secondary teachers saw this as a serious or moderately serious problem in their schools, while only 3.4 percent of elementary school teachers found weapons possessions

to be a problem. Although this study found a disparity in the identified problems between elementary and secondary schools, overall, it showed that both elementary and secondary school students have become increasingly violent.

This study further demonstrates that problems once limited to urban schools are now becoming increasingly prevalent in schools located in suburban and rural areas. For instance, although teachers in all three communities rated drug and alcohol problems as equally serious, student alcohol use was found to actually increase across urban, suburban, and rural localities, with the latter showing the most prevalent rates. For all three academic years, rural teachers identified student use of alcohol as the most serious problem. By contrast, urban teachers consistently stated that physical conflicts among students were the most serious. For suburban schools, the relative severity of problems changed from 1987-88 to 1990-91. In the 1987-88 study, teachers identified student's use of alcohol as the most serious problem they confronted, but by 1990-91, verbal abuse of teacher became the most serious concern. Conclusively, this study has shown that problems once associated with schools located in urban communities have become commonplace in suburban and rural schools.

## **CANADA**

Surveys of teachers in British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia indicate that violence is of increasing concern in Canadian schools. An Environics poll conducted in April 1993 revealed that violence is the top educational concern, surpassing even academic standards (Macdougall, 1993). Another survey of 2,286 teachers in Manitoba reported that 47% had been subjected to abuse (Manitoba Teachers

Society [MTS], 1993). This represents a 37% increase from a previous survey conducted in 1990. Also, 45% of the teachers reported being verbally abused in 1990. Moreover, 72% of the teachers and 42% of the administrators agreed with the statement, “Abuse is on the increase”.

According to Roher (1993), the results of a survey of 881 responding schools conducted by the Ontario Teachers Federation [OTF] (1991), revealed a 150% increase in major incidents such as biting, kicking, punching, and the use of weapons, and a 50% increase in minor incidents such as verbal abuse over a three-year period, between 1987 and 1990. Much of this aggression was reported to have been perpetrated against another student, although teachers and other school personnel were also victims. The study also found that an increasing number of teachers were assaulted while breaking up fights; the incidence of trespassers had increased, as did the reported consumption of alcohol on field trips and athletic activities held outside the school; and the possession of weapons had become a serious problem.

In a separate survey conducted by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association [OECTA], (1992), between 1990-91 and 1991-92 the reported number of verbal assaults increased 6.1 % and 20.5% in elementary and secondary schools, respectively. A similar study of 850 Ontario elementary students, found that 45% believed that there was “some” to “a lot” of violence in their schools and 29% said that they felt safe “sometimes” or “not at all” while at school (Ryan, Matthews, & Banner, 1993). Overall, Canadian students, teachers, and administrators report having some fears regarding their safety while at school, as violence becomes an increasingly pressing issue in their school system.

## **FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA**

On a much smaller scale, law enforcement in Fairfax County Virginia, a suburb of Washington, D.C., joined the efforts of it's local public high school to quell the incidence of school-related violence that had risen sharply in recent years. According to Fairfax Police records, 14 juveniles and eight adults were arrested on charges that included assault by mob, attempted malicious wounding, destruction of property and disorderly conduct. Most of those arrested were students at the school. Moreover, the school requested police service 72 times during the 1988-89 school year, 90 times during the 1991-92 school year, and 112 times during the 1992-93 year. As the 1992-93 school year progressed, low-level, largely verbal disputes between students grew increasingly violent. Then, in January 1993, a student was shot in the knee with a 9-mm handgun by another student. Yet another indicator that violence, in all it's many forms, has trickled into the most urbane school environments.

## **SUMMARY**

In sum, data from regional and national representative samples of students and school staff indicate that violence perpetration and victimization rates at school are high, with younger students more likely to be victimized than older students. However, younger children are committing violent crimes in schools at much higher levels than in the past. Much of the research done on school-related violence indicates that regardless of a schools location or its relative wealth, there is no immunity from violence. High levels of violence perpetration and victimization are not confined to urban schools.

Increasingly, schools located in suburban and rural districts are dealing with the same complex issue of school violence and have even begun to show higher rates of particular types of school crime such as drug and alcohol abuse and school property vandalism.



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Incidence of Violent Acts Report (IVAR) was adapted in part from the National Center for Education Statistics Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97 report. This report was conducted to determine the frequency, seriousness, and incidence of violence at each educational level, using a representative sample of 1,234 regular public elementary, middle, and secondary schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the spring and summer of 1997. The survey requested information on four main topics:

- The incidence of crime and violence that occurred in public schools during the 1996-97 academic year;
- Principals' (or school disciplinarians') perception about the seriousness of a variety of discipline issues in their schools;
- The types of disciplinary actions school took against students for serious offenses; and
- The kinds of security measures and violence prevention programs that were in place in public schools.

The types of criminal incidents that schools were asked to report included murder, suicide, rape, or other sexual battery, assault, or fight with a weapon, robbery, assault, or fight without a weapon, theft/larceny, and vandalism.

The overall findings suggested that one in 10 public schools experienced at least one of these crimes, which occurred at a rate of 53 incidents per 100,000 students, during

1996-97. While schools in urban areas were more likely to experience serious violent crime, schools in suburban and rural locales did not differ significantly when comparing particular incidents. Thirty-eight percent of public schools reported vandalism, 31 percent reported theft, and 28 percent had at least one physical attack or fight in which no weapon was used during 1996-97. In addition, the study found that efforts to prevent or reduce school violence were being implemented in 78 percent of public schools. Those in which serious crime was reported were more likely to have these programs than those with or only less serious crimes (93 percent compared with 74 percent and 79 percent, respectively).

## **SURVEY METHOD**

In order to achieve the Incidence of Violent Acts Report's (IVAR) objective, a ten-item questionnaire was either mailed or personally delivered in December 1998, along with a letter describing its objectives, to randomly selected schools in urban, suburban, and rural locales at the elementary, middle, and high school level. To ensure accurate results it was suggested that an individual responsible for student discipline in each school i.e. principal, guidance counselor, social worker, or school psychologist, complete the survey to the best of their ability and to refer to school records if they were available. Since a survey of every school in the New Jersey region was seen as impractical, the researcher limited the study to seven townships located in southern New Jersey: Burlington, Camden, Cherry Hill, Evesham, Gloucester, Pennsauken, and Voorhees. Excluded from the sampling were special education, vocational, and alternative/other schools. Taking into consideration the limitation of such a small

sample, the researcher found it important to I investigate more than one variables to allow for more comprehensive findings. The two variables being investigated in this study are the instructional level at which school-related violent crime occurs and the incidence of violent acts as it relates to a schools physical location. Each provided the required data used to formulate my result.

The IVAR requested that schools report on the following types of school related violent incidents: weapon possession, theft, alcohol and drugs use, homicide, suicide, physical attacks, sexual assault, and vandalism of school property. The first nine questions asked that the respondent circle a number from one to four (one (1) serious, two (2) moderate, three (3) minor, and four (4) not a problem) indicating to what extent, if any, each of the identified violent crimes has been a problem in their school during the 1997-98 school year. Based on their responses the tenth question asked, "Of these incidents how many required police or other law enforcement involvement? Respondents were asked to choose: a. 1-5 b. 5-10 c. 10 or more. The questionnaire took approximately five minutes to complete and was returned by mail, fax, or completed and returned directly to the researcher.

## **TESTABLE HYPOTHESIS**

In this descriptive study the level of particular violent crimes i.e. weapon possession, theft, alcohol and drug use, homicide, suicide, physical attacks, sexual assaults, and vandalism of school property, in urban, suburban, and rural schools across elementary, middle, and high school levels was compared. Any effort to quantify the frequency and seriousness of these crimes and violent incidents occurring in public

schools will be affected by the way the information is gathered collected and reported.

Three important aspects of the process were used to gather the data reported in this study:

- The survey was personally delivered to identified school personnel responsible for student discipline.
- The survey questions were clear and concise, including definitions applied, time span covered, and the context in which they were written.
- The choice of survey respondent; and
- The survey sample size

The reader should keep these aspects of the survey in mind when comparing results of this particular sample survey with other studies on crime and violence. The data reported in this survey may vary from data reported elsewhere because of differences in definitions, coverage, respondents, and sample. For example, the data reported in this survey describe the number of violent incidents, not the number of individuals involved in such incidents.

## **SUMMARY**

The Incidence of Violent Acts Report serves as a self-report measure to determine the incidence of violent crimes that occurred in the identified southern New Jersey public schools during the 1997-1998 school year. The purpose of this report is to provide a comparative analysis of the rate of particular violent crimes as they occur in various school locales. In the findings the researchers will identify which school-related violent crimes occur more frequently in which school locale and the level at which it is a problem.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

As previously stated in this report, schools located in suburban and rural communities are experiencing similar rates of violent crimes as compared to urban schools, and in some cases, exhibiting higher rates of particular types of school related violent crimes. In concordance with previously conducted research on this topic, the intent of this study was to lend additional support to the theory that schools located in urban, suburban, and rural communities experience higher incidence of violent crimes in distinct areas. For this purpose, a self-report measure (IVAR) was used to conduct a comparative analysis on the incidence of violent acts in urban, suburban, and rural public schools at the elementary, middle, and high school grade levels.

Table 4.1 shows that urban schools reported a slightly higher rate of drug use at 3.43, than suburban schools at 3.55 and rural schools at 3.46, while alcohol use in rural schools showed a slightly higher rate at 3.42 than suburban schools at 3.58 and urban schools at 3.57. Surprisingly, physical conflicts appear to be more of a problem in suburban schools at 2.97 than in rural schools at 3.04 and urban schools at 3.14. However, student possession of weapons was higher in urban schools at 3.71 as compared to suburban schools at 3.79 and rural schools at 3.83. Another interesting result was the reported incidence of vandalism in rural schools as compared to their counterparts. Rural schools showed a rate of 2.92, while suburban and urban schools were 3.12 and 3.29, respectively. The problem of robbery/theft seemed to be more of an issue for rural schools at 3.38, than for suburban schools at 3.55 and urban schools at

3.43. All schools appeared to require police involvement at about the same rate with rural schools showing a slightly higher rate at 1.13 as compared to suburban schools at 1.10 and urban schools at 1.00. Sexual assault, homicide, and suicide did not appear to be a significantly relevant issue for any school.

**Table 4.1**

**Incidence of School Violence by Crime  
in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Locales**

	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
<i>Drug Use</i>	3.43	3.55	3.56
<i>Alcohol Use</i>	3.57	3.58	3.42
<i>Physical Conflicts</i>	3.14	2.97	3.04
<i>Weapons Possession</i>	3.71	3.79	3.83
<i>Vandalism</i>	3.23	3.12	2.92
<i>Robbery/Theft</i>	3.43	3.35	3.38

The rate of particular incidence of violent crimes appeared to be consistent across educational levels. The higher the grade the higher the rate of school-related violent crimes across the board. However, the purpose of this report was to show that particular types of violent crimes were occurring at significant rates at lower educational levels. As seen in Table 4.2 high schools typically experience more types and higher rates of violent crimes, however, middle schools in this study showed comparable rates in a number of areas. For instance, physical conflicts appeared to be an issue for all educational levels, however, middle schools showed the highest frequency of occurrence at 2.56 while high schools showed a rate of only 2.62. Though not significantly high, but worthy of mentioning, the frequency of physical conflicts for elementary schools was 3.24. While vandalism seemed to be more of a concern for high schools and middle schools, surprisingly, elementary schools were not far behind in the frequency of incidents. High

schools showed the highest rate at 2.85, middle schools showed a rate of 2.89 and elementary schools showed a rate of 3.17. The frequency of robbery/theft appeared to be more of an issue at the elementary level at 3.60 than in middle school at 3.67, while high schools experienced the highest rate at 2.92. Weapons possession seemed to be a problem predominantly in the high schools at 3.50, while middle schools stood at 3.78, and the least concerned were elementary schools at 3.90. As expected, the problems of alcohol and drug use were substantially higher in high schools than in elementary and middle schools. Alcohol use was higher at the high school level at 2.46, while middle and elementary schools were relatively low at 3.22, and 3.90, respectively. Drug use was also more prevalent in high school at 2.54 than in middle schools at 3.00 and elementary schools at 3.90. Homicide, suicide, and sexual assault did not appear to be a significant problem at any educational level nor was there frequent police involvement

**Table 4.2**

**Incidence of School Violence by Crime  
in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools**

	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Drug Use</i>	3.90	3.00	2.54
<i>Alcohol Use</i>	3.90	3.22	2.46
<i>Physical Conflicts</i>	3.24	2.56	2.61
<i>Weapons Possession</i>	3.90	3.78	3.50
<i>Vandalism</i>	3.17	2.89	2.85
<i>Robbery/Theft</i>	3.60	3.67	2.92

Overall, the IVAR showed relevant findings in a number of different areas. First, drug and alcohol use appears to be distinct problems for each locale. While drugs appeared to be more of concern for urban schools, alcohol was more of an issue in rural

school; suburban schools showed comparable rates in both areas. Robbery/theft was a problem for rural schools while weapons possession was of greater concern for urban schools. Physical conflicts showed a slightly higher rate in suburban schools than in rural and urban schools while rural schools experienced more frequent incidents of vandalism.

Across educational levels, high schools experienced more types of violent crimes at greater frequency. However, middle schools showed a higher rate of physical conflicts than high school and elementary schools showed a higher rate of robbery/theft than middle schools. Weapons possession, vandalism, and alcohol and drug use, were all rated to be more relevant issue at the high school level.



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The issue of school violence is not a new phenomenon. Since the 1950's schools have been combating the problem of school violence by developing and implementing intervention programs designed to ward off potential violence, however, times have changed. The possibility that a disagreement among students will be settled by the use of some of weapon rather than an old-fashioned fist fight has increased considerably. School violence has grown increasingly malicious, particularly in the form of verbal and physical assaults, as teachers see students become more insolent. For many schools today, ensuring quality education for all students also means protecting their lives.

Psychological research has demonstrated that violence is learned and that certain factors such as media violence, domestic violence, and poverty put children at the greatest risk of perpetrating or being victimized by violence. Research has concluded that the more violence a child views the higher the likelihood they will exhibit increased aggression both at home and in the classroom, be insensitivity to violence and the victimization of others, and have irrational fears about the world around them. Moreover, research shows that although more serious types of violent crimes occur at the high school level, children at the middle and elementary school level are committing violent crimes in schools at much higher levels than in the past.

Despite relentless attention from the media on the mounting problem of school violent crimes in suburban and rural schools, the misconception that school-related violent crimes are confined to predominantly urban school districts still exists. Research

compiled on school-related violent crimes indicates that regardless of a schools location or its relative wealth, there is no insusceptibility to violence. High levels of violence perpetration and victimization are not confined to urban schools. The purpose of the Incidence of Violent Acts Report was to support existing research that suggests certain types of school-related violent crimes has become more prevalent in suburban and rural public schools. The IVAR served as a self-report measure to determine the incidence of violent crimes that occurred in the identified southern New Jersey public schools during the 1997-1998 school year. The questionnaire was given to a select sample of urban, suburban, and rural school personnel and it was found that particular types of school-related violent crimes showed higher or comparable rates across locales.

Although it was assumed by this researcher that suburban schools would show higher rates of drug use, the Incidence of Violent Acts Report (IVAR) showed that urban schools experienced higher rates of drug use while alcohol was more of a problem for suburban and rural schools in the sample. The researcher also assumed that urban schools would show higher rates of physical conflicts, however, the IVAR showed that higher rates of physical conflict existed in those schools located in rural and suburban locales. Another important observation was that schools located in suburban and rural locales showed substantially higher rates of vandalism and rural schools, in particular, showed the highest rates for robbery and theft. There were no substantial differences in the other identified categories of study.

In sum, the IVAR provided evidence to the claim that school related violent crimes are no longer confined to urban schools. The IVAR determined that schools located in suburban and rural communities are experiencing problems with alcohol use by

students, higher levels of physical conflicts, and more incidence of vandalism.

Increasingly, schools located in suburban and rural communities are dealing with the same issue of school related violent crime and are showing higher rates of particular types of violent crimes.

## **DISCUSSION**

The disruption caused by violence in America's public schools is a national concern. Crime in and around schools threatens the well being of students, school staff, and communities. It also impedes learning and student achievement. The intent of this study was to not only bring awareness to the problem of school violence in urban, suburban, and rural areas alike, but also to encourage education providers to continue to implement intervention programs aimed at ameliorating the problem.

The IVAR provided a comparative analysis of the rate of violent acts that occurred in a select sample of urban, suburban, and rural schools located in Southern New Jersey. However, to gain a better understanding of how insidious school violence has become, a much more comprehensive study would need to be conducted. Moreover, it may be helpful to investigate the existing intervention plans schools have implemented and whether or not they find these interventions to be effective or practical. Finally, school violence information is generally based on self-report data or data collected from school incident reports and student/teacher surveys. In order to obtain more accurate accounts of the types of incidents that occur in schools, without discrepancies caused by faulty interpretation, the collection of data via self-report must be substituted.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Recent media accounts of violence in urban, suburban, and rural schools have called serious attention to this problem. The existence of violence in schools is a reflection of violence that occurs within the larger community and society in general. As violence continues to permeate our communities, our schools will remain susceptible to this insidious problem. Many schools are implementing prevention programs aimed at addressing this issue and educating students about alternatives to violence. Peer mediation and/or conflict resolution programs, constructive anger management curricula, mentoring services, and parent skill training, are just a few examples of the types of programs offered in schools across the country to combat the school related violent crimes.

The seventh goal of the National Education goal states that by the year 2000, “all schools in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning.” If we are to achieve this goal researchers must focus their attention not only on the deleterious effects of school violence, but on the precipitants that lead to violence in schools. A proactive stance must be taken by parents, teachers, administrators and all others concerned about the safety of our children to ensure that intervention plans are implemented and enforced in every school.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Survey Letter and Questionnaire**

# ROWAN UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAM

Trina C. Ragsdale 48 Peregrine Drive Voorhees NJ 08043  
(609) 424-7599 (Residence) (609) 489-1948 (Facsimile) [traggs@mailexcite.com](mailto:traggs@mailexcite.com) (E-mail)

November 30, 1998

Dear School Official,

The problem of violence in schools, like the related problem of violence in society, has become one of the most pressing educational issues in the United States. In many school districts, concerns about violence have surpassed academic achievement as the highest priority for reform and education. Schools in rural, suburban, and urban areas are all becoming unsafe for students and teachers because of the incidence of violence that occur each day. It is our job as administrators, teachers, parents, and all others who care about the lives of children to take a proactive stance against this insidious problem.

As a graduate student at Rowan University, part of my studies include a thesis project. I have chosen to study the incidence of violence in school districts located in the seven southern New Jersey counties: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem. My goal is to encourage respective districts to look at the problem of school violence in their county, and together begin to develop comprehensive intervention programs aimed at addressing this issue. Please help me in my efforts to not only fulfill graduate school requirements but to generate information that will serve as a precursor to school violence prevention in your district.

Enclosed you will find the brief ten item questionnaire and a self-addressed return envelope for your convenience. I ask that a representative from your school responsible for student discipline complete the attached questionnaire to ensure accuracy. To expedite the process, you may also fax your responses to the above number. It would be very helpful to have your completed questionnaire returned by **January 14, 1999**. The information will be compiled according to school district and educational level.

**Your responses will be confidential.** **No names or individual school information will be distributed.** If you would like to know the results of this study please check the appropriate box on the questionnaire. For more information, feel free to contact me at (609) 424-7599. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Trina C. Ragsdale  
Rowan University  
School Psychology Graduate Student

## **INCIDENCE OF VIOLENT ACTS REPORT (IVAR)**

**(in urban, suburban, and rural school districts located in southern New Jersey)**

**Please answer the following items to the best of your knowledge. If you have records available to you, I ask that you refer to them for accuracy.**

Circle the number indicating to what extent, if any, the following has been a problem in your school during the 1997-98 school year.

	<b>Serious</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Not a problem</b>
1. Physical conflicts	1	2	3	4
2. Robbery of theft	1	2	3	4
3. Vandalism of school property	1	2	3	4
4. Student use of alcohol	1	2	3	4
5. Student drug use	1	2	3	4
6. Student possession of weapon	1	2	3	4
7. Homicide	1	2	3	4
8. Suicide	1	2	3	4
9. Sexual assault	1	2	3	4
10. Of these incidents how many required police or other law enforcement involvement? a) 1-5      b) 5-10      c) 10 or more				

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please check the appropriate box if you would like to know the results of this study.

☐ **Yes, I would like to know the results of this study**

☐ **No, I do not need to know the results**

Please return the questionnaire by fax to (609) 489-1948 or by mail using the enclosed self-addressed envelope by **January 14, 1999**. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have questions pertaining to this study, please contact Trina Ragsdale at (609) 424-7599.

**\* This survey has been authorized by Rowan University's Graduate School Psychology Program under the supervision of Dr. Roberta Dihoff. While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely.**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Violence Prevention Resources**

## **Violence Prevention Resources**

### **National School Safety Center**

4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290

Westlake Village, CA 91362

(805) 373-9977

### **National School Boards Association Publications**

Alexandria, VA

(800) 706-6722

### **National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR)/**

### **National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME)**

1726 M Street NW, Suite 500

Washington, D.C. 20036-4502

(202) 466-4764

### **National Crime Prevention Council**

1700 K Street NW, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Washington, D.C. 20006-3817

(202) 466-6272

### **Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)**

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse

(800) 638-8736

### **National Criminal Justice Reference Service**

Box 6000

Rockville, MD 20850

(800) 851-3420

### **Council of Great City Schools**

1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 702

Washington, D.C. 20004

(202) 393-3427

### **National Education Association**

1201 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 833-4000

### **School Violence Alert/ LRP Publications**

747 Dresher Road, P.O. Box 9800

Horsham, PA 19044-09800

(215) 784-0860

**Center for Violence and Injury Prevention**  
Education Development Center, Inc.  
55 Chapel Street  
Newton, MA 02158  
(617) 969-7100

## **APPENDIX C**

### **News Reports on School Violence**

# School shootings trend toward rural, suburban schools

**April 22, 1999**

*Web posted at: 11:17 p.m. EDT (0317 GMT)*

\_\_\_\_\_(CNN) -- While Justice Department figures show that teachers are more likely to be accosted in urban schools, the recent string of random, mass shootings have been in rural or suburban schools.

Medical Correspondent Eileen O'Connor takes a look at some of the possible reasons for this disparity.



Statistics show teachers may be at risk in all types of areas



# Fatalities at Columbine High

**April 23, 1999**

Web posted at: 2:13 p.m. EDT (1813 GMT)



LITTLETON, Colorado (CNN) -- Fifteen people -- 14 students and a teacher -- died in Tuesday's gun and bomb assault at Columbine High School in suburban Denver.

The two seniors who were the gunmen, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, began their attack in the parking lot and proceeded to a ground floor cafeteria, school hallways and a second floor library; they later killed themselves, police said.

Here is a list of those killed, including information provided by family and friends:

## Students



**Cassie Bernall**, junior. Two years ago, after becoming a born-again Christian, she became active in church youth programs and Bible study groups. "She was amazing," said classmate Mickie Cain. "I was so happy to be able to reach out to her and be a friend." She recently had visited Britain, and her favorite movie was Mel Gibson's "Braveheart."

---

**Steven Curnow**, 14, dreamed of being a Navy top gun, piloting an F-16. He watched the "Star Wars" movies so many times he would recite the dialogue along with the



dialogue along with the actors.

---



**Corey DePooter**, 17. Loved to golf, hunt and fish and was a former wrestler. He recently got a maintenance job at a golf club to save up for a fishing boat with a friend. Good student. Had wisdom teeth removed this year and was frustrated that it forced him to miss school. Hid under library table with friends as gunmen sprayed bullets at floor level.

---

**Kelly Fleming**, 16. Aspiring songwriter and author. Wrote scores of poems and short stories based on her life experiences. Was learning to play the guitar. Moved from Phoenix 18 months ago, and was eager to get her driver's license and a part-time job.



"It was hard to uproot," said her mother, Diedra. "But Kelly had made several good friends. She was your basic, normal, beautiful teen-age girl." She was shot in the library.



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**Matthew Kechter**, 16, junior. Had hoped to start for the varsity football team in the fall. Lifted weights. Maintained an "A" grade-point average. Was shot in the library after he tried to reach friends hiding in adjacent video room.

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**Daniel Mauser**, 15, sophomore. Excelled in math and science, and earned straight A's on his last report card. Ran cross-country and joined the debate team. Recently returned from a two-week trip to Paris with his French club.



**Daniel Rohrbough**, 15, was shot as he held an exit door open for other students. He died on the sidewalk, a few steps from safety. His body lay outside for 24 hours. "It would have been hard to live with it if I found out that he could've been helped," said his grandmother, Maxine Rohrbough.

Rohrbough helped his father in his electronics business. He was interested by computer games, stereos and home theater systems.

**Rachel Scott**, 17. Played lead in a student-written school play, "Smoke in the Room." Active in Celebration Christian Fellowship church. Liked photography.

After the violence, her red Acura, parked where she left it in a lot between a park and the school, became a flower- and card-covered shrine, often surrounded by weeping and praying classmates.

During the rampage, her younger brother Craig, 16, pretended to be dead in the library and helped lead others to safety.





**Isaiah Shoels**, 18, senior. Only black youth shot. Suffered health problems as a child and had heart surgery twice. Wanted to attend an arts college and become a music executive. Small in stature, but lifted weights and played football and wrestled. Bench-pressed twice his weight.

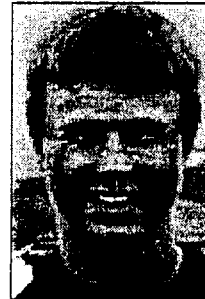
"He was the nicest person I knew," remembers classmate Justin Norman. "He would always go up to you and say, 'What's up?' even if you didn't know him."

A transfer student from Lakewood High School, he was shot in the head execution-style in the school library, specifically because of his race and athletic interests, witnesses said. His father says he believes that account.

"He was black and he was an athlete," Michael Shoels said. "That's why my son died. Because of the color of his skin and the achievements that he wanted to do for himself. ... That's not a reason to die."

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**John Tomlin**, 16, sophomore. Enjoyed driving off-road in the nearby Rocky Mountains in his beat-up Chevy pickup. Worked after-school in gardening store and belonged to a church youth group. Last year, went on missionary trip to Mexico with family and built a house for poor people.



After graduation in two years, Tomlin planned to enlist in the Army. "He was a great kid, really happy, going to school, getting good grades," said his father, John Tomlin. "He knew what he wanted to do. He had everything planned."

---



**Lauren Townsend**, 18, senior. Was captain of girls' varsity volleyball team, coached by her mother. Other players said she was "consumed" by the sport. Member of the National Honor Society. She planned to attend Colorado State University on an academic scholarship and become a wildlife biologist, like her oldest brother.

"She was to be a senior class valedictorian at her graduation next month," her uncle, David Beck, told CNN. "Lauren, unfortunately, won't have the opportunity to make the impact on the world that I'm sure she would have."

When shooting began in the library, "we understand that Lauren was hit nearly immediately," he said. Her family "takes some comfort in the hope that there was no suffering."

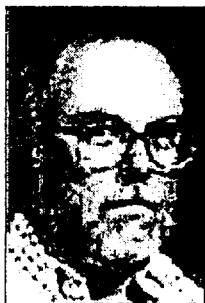
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**Kyle Velasquez**, no information is available at this time.



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## Teacher



**William "Dave" Sanders**, 47, a computer and business teacher for 24 years. Coached girls' basketball and softball; basketball team posted winning record in his first year, 1997-98 after finishing next-to-last the year before.

Married with at least two daughters and five grandchildren. Shot twice in chest while directing students down hallway to safety. Survived at least three hours until students were rescued.

# Violent crime rising at U.S. schools

April 12, 1998

Web posted at: 9:42 p.m. EDT (01:42 GMT)

From White House  
Correspondent John King

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- A government survey of 10,000 students ages 12 to 19 shows that while the overall crime rate at U.S. schools is relatively stable, violent crime is on the rise.

The study by the Education and Justice departments compared data from 1989 and 1995. Among the new findings:

- 15 percent of students say they are crime victims and 4 percent say the offenses involved violence.
- The percentage of students reporting gangs at school nearly doubled to 28 percent.
- 13 percent say they know students who bring guns to school along with their books.
- 65 percent say they can buy drugs at school.

"They're dealing with the pressure every day in making decisions about drugs," said Steve Dnistrian of the Partnership For A Drug-Free America. "They're seeing drugs in their schools and in their neighborhoods."

The report immediately became ammunition for White House efforts to get Congress to spend billions more on juvenile crime and other programs.

"Let's stop arguing about it, let's pass the president's plan ... more



Some schools use metal detectors to check for weapons

# Start of school year brings painful memories of killings

August 10, 1998

Web posted at: 9:38 a.m. EDT (1338 GMT)

ATLANTA (CNN) -- School starts this week for many students around the country. For at least three schools, this back-to-school season will bring back horrifying memories of death on their school grounds.

In Springfield, Oregon, the return to school will bring a bittersweet reminder of the deadly May 21 Thurston High School shooting. On that nightmarish morning, police say 15-year-old Kip Kinkel walked into the packed cafeteria and opened fire on his classmates. Two students were killed, 22 hurt.

When Kinkel's rifle jammed, Jake Ryker, his brother Josh and three friends tackled Kinkel.

"We just did what we were taught," said Josh Ryker. "What came natural to us, sort of like instinct."

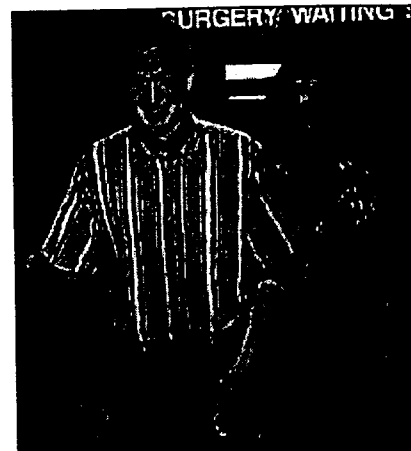
Now the boys, along with three others, are being honored by the Boy Scouts for their heroic acts.

On Monday, Jake Ryker, who was shot in the chest and hand as he attempted to subdue Kinkel, will receive the Boy Scout's highest award for heroism. Josh Ryker and three other students who also helped subdue the gunman will receive medals as well.

But medals and awards may not be enough to stop the pain in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

According to Larry Salinger, a criminologist and sociologist at Jonesboro's Arkansas State University, anger still fills the city of about 50,000.

"The victims want to be heard. The families want to be heard. They want to be able to say what has happened to them as a result of the



Jake, left, and Josh Ryker leaving the hospital in late May

**RELATED VIDEO**  
CNN's Denise Dillon looks back at the school shootings



Windows Media    [28K](#)    [56K](#)

want to be able to say what has happened to them as a result of the shooting. They want to draw it out," Salinger said.



Andrew Golden, left, and Mitchell Johnson face a hearing Tuesday

On Tuesday, memories of the shooting at Jonesboro's Westside Middle School will return as 12-year-old Andrew Golden and 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson face a juvenile hearing to determine whether they can be found either innocent or guilty of being delinquent.

Authorities say the boys -- armed with two semiautomatic rifles and several handguns -- pulled a fire alarm to force classmates out of the school, then opened fire from a wooded area, killing four students and a teacher.

Soon after the March 24 shooting, Craighead County prosecutor Brent Davis expressed concern that the punishment would not fit the crime.

If found guilty, the boys can only be held until they're 21 under Arkansas law. The problem is, Arkansas doesn't have a facility for prisoners between the ages of 18 to 21.

Gov. Mike Huckabee says he's willing to build a new jail to hold them as long as legally possible, if that's what it takes.

But building a new prison for the boys may not be seen as sufficient punishment for many in Jonesboro.

"If an adult would have done this, then an adult would have been looking at life, probably the death penalty," said Wright, holding the couple's 3-year-old son in his arms at a ceremony honoring his wife.

"That means in our state your life's important. But if a person of a certain age does this, then the state says, 'Hey, we're sorry but your life's not important,'" he said. "And it's a shame that my wife and four little girls lost their lives for that kind of reasoning."

At Pearl High School in Mississippi, the first day of classes is likely to stir up memories of last October's horrors. That's when student Luke Woodham opened fire, killing two classmates and injuring seven.



Woodham

This year, the beginning of school will be different. For two weeks, teachers will spend 10 minutes a day on conflict resolution and sensitivity training. There will also be drills teaching students and administrators how to respond to a crisis.



# Teen guilty in Mississippi school-shooting rampage

June 12, 1998

Web posted at: 11:33 p.m. EDT (0333 GMT)

HATTIESBURG, Mississippi (CNN) -- Rejecting an insanity defense, a Mississippi jury found 17-year-old Luke Woodham guilty Friday night of two counts of murder and seven counts of aggravated assault for a shooting spree last October at Pearl High School.



Police escort Woodham to the Hattiesburg courthouse Thursday

Woodham was accused of killing two classmates -- ex-girlfriend Christina Menefee, 16, and her friend Lydia Dew, 17 -- and wounding seven others during the attack, the first of a series of deadly mass shootings at U.S. schools. Jurors deliberated about five hours before returning their verdict.

Judge Samac Richardson immediately sentenced Woodham to two consecutive life sentences for the murder convictions and seven 20-year sentences for the aggravated assault convictions.

After being sentenced, Woodham spoke briefly to the court.

"I am sorry for the people I killed and hurt. The reason you see no tears anymore is because I've been forgiven by God," Woodham said.

"If they could have given the death penalty in this case, I deserve it."

The mother of one of the girls stood up in court and said, "You have stolen from me. ... You have stolen any chance I will ever (have) to hold grandchildren."

Last week, a separate jury in Philadelphia, Mississippi, convicted Woodham of murdering his mother, 50-year-old Mary Woodham, who was beaten and stabbed. He was sentenced to life in prison for that killing, which prosecutors say happened several hours before the attack at Pearl High.

Woodham confessed to shooting his classmates, but said he did not remember killing his mother. Defense attorneys argued in both trials that Woodham was legally insane at the time of the slayings. The school-shootings trial began Tuesday.

### **Tearful Woodham: 'I'm so sorry'**

On Friday, the defense rested its case after Woodham completed his testimony. He began in a calm, restrained mood, but, by the final minutes, he had broken down into sobs. He apologized for his actions and acknowledged they were unjustified.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry," he sobbed. "It wasn't me. I didn't want to do it."

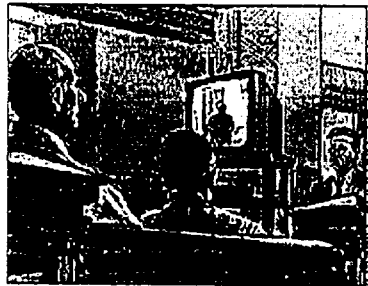
Woodham said revenge against Menefee was the primary motivating factor behind the school shootings. He said he was devastated when Menefee broke up with him a year earlier.

"I didn't eat. I didn't sleep. I didn't want to live," he sobbed. "It destroyed me."

### **Egged on by alleged cult member**

Woodham also insisted that his friend, Grant Boyette, encouraged him to murder his mother and Menefee during more than five hours of telephone conversations on the day before the murders.

Boyette, 19, and several other alleged members of a cult-like group known as "the Kroth" have been charged with conspiracy in the school shootings.



**Jurors watch Woodham's taped confession**

Woodham testified that Boyette pushed him on with insults, calling him "gutless ... [and saying that] he had never done nothing."

"The reason all this happened is that I was heartbroken," Woodham said. "I could have gotten over it, but Grant wouldn't let me ... he told me I had to kill my mama ... I had to get my revenge on Christina."

"I shot Christina," Woodham said. "I never really knew why the others got shot. It just happened."

But under cross-examination, Woodham admitted that his desire for revenge against his ex-girlfriend outweighed Boyette's influence. When asked to explain why he did Boyette's bidding, he replied:

"acceptance."

Prosecutor John Kitchens suggested that most of Woodham's problems -- the breakup with his girlfriend, his lack of friends and his problems with his parents -- were common to most teen-age boys.

The prosecution rested its case against Woodham on Thursday morning, closing with a videotaped confession the teen gave less than an hour after the shootings.

# Survey: Serious violence at 10 percent of schools

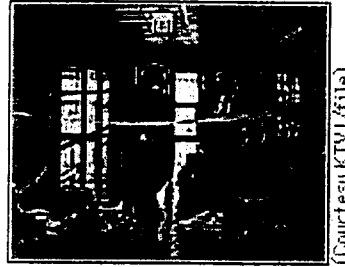
**But most had little or no crime in 1996-97**

March 19, 1998

Web posted at: 2:22 p.m. EDT (1422 GMT)

**In this story:**

- [Hundreds of schools surveyed](#)
- [Related stories and sites](#)



The scene of the shooting at Heath High School

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- One in 10 American public schools experienced serious violence last year that included rape and robbery, said a first-of-its-kind survey released Thursday by the White House.

The incidence of crime was higher at large schools and at those in urban areas, said the survey, which noted that most public schools reported five or fewer crimes by students during the 1996-1997 school year.

President Clinton announced the findings at a White House event to tout his proposals for more closely tracking disciplinary problems in schools and reducing school violence.

He requested the survey after a December 1 shooting spree at Heath High School in West Paducah, Kentucky, left three students dead. Classmate Michael Carneal, 14, is charged with the crime and faces trial in October.

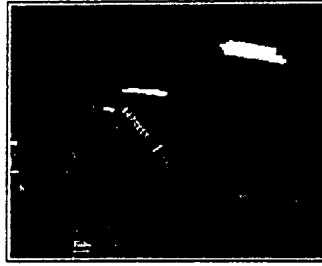
In remarks to education leaders, law enforcement officials and members of Congress, Clinton also announced \$17.5 million in new financing for school safety projects.

The money, from the Justice Department's community policing and school safety program, will pay for anti-crime partnerships among law enforcement agencies, schools and community groups.

School safety is a central feature of Clinton's broader push for education improvements, including national achievement standards, additional federal spending to modernize school buildings and extra money to hire 100,000 more teachers to reduce classroom size.

reduce classroom size.

## Hundreds of schools surveyed



Metal detectors being used  
in a high school

(CNN/file)

The survey on school crime was produced by the National Center for Education and Statistics.

It was based on contact with principals from more than 1,200 public schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The survey found 80 percent of schools reporting five or fewer crimes in the 1996-97 school year. In addition:

- 10 percent reported serious violence crimes. These include an estimated 11,000 physical attacks or fights in which a weapon was used; 7,000 robberies, and 4,000 rapes or other kinds of sexual assault.
- 47 percent reported crimes that were less serious, such as vandalism and fights.
- 43 percent reported no incidents of crime.

Principals rate absenteeism, tardiness and fights as the three most common discipline problems among students.

# 2 Arkansas boys on trial in school shootings

One to plead guilty, other may claim incompetence

August 11, 1998  
Web posted at: 10:53 a.m. EDT (1453 GMT)

In this story:

- [Incompetency defense for Golden?](#)
- [Juvenile hearing similar to adult trial](#)
- [Related stories and sites](#)



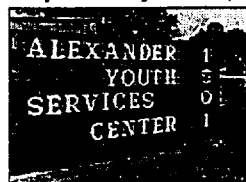
Johnson (left) and Golden

JONESBORO, Arkansas (CNN) -- Two Arkansas boys -- Mitchell Johnson, 14, and 12-year-old Andrew Golden -- are in juvenile court Tuesday to face trial on charges they shot four classmates and a teacher to death.

Another teacher and nine other students were wounded March 24 when they were drawn from the building by a false fire alarm and ambushed outside Westside Middle School.

## RELATED VIDEO

CNN's Charles Zewe reports on Arkansas' juvenile justice problems



Windows Media

[28K](#)

[56K](#)

## Incompetency defense for Golden?

Johnson is expected to avoid trial by pleading guilty. But CNN has learned that Golden's attorney plans to offer an incompetency defense, meaning Golden didn't know what he was doing when the shootings occurred and is incapable of assisting in his own defense at trial.

It's a tactic that Craighead County Judge Ralph Wilson Jr. has rejected in the past. In an earlier ruling, now under appeal, Wilson said Arkansas law prohibited an incompetence defense.

Should the judge turn aside such a defense for Golden, the boy's attorney and parents would have to decide whether to proceed with a trial or, like Johnson, enter a guilty plea.

Wilson has twice delayed trial while public defenders explored whether they could use some form of mental incompetency plea for Golden.

## **Juvenile hearing similar to adult trial**

More than 100 of the victims' relatives and school staff have reserved spots to watch the boys' hearing, which is the equivalent of an adult trial.

If the two are found guilty of being juvenile delinquents, the maximum sentence would keep them in a juvenile facility until age 21, but they could be released when they are 18.

They are too young to be charged as adults.

Johnson turned 14 on Tuesday.

The judge also could place them on probation, order community service and make their parents pay fines and court costs.

Juvenile hearings typically are closed to the public in Arkansas, but Wilson opened the trial because of intense public interest.

Because of a pretrial gag order, it was not clear whether the lawyers would seek to have Golden declared incompetent to stand trial or whether the boy wished to claim he was not competent at the time of the shootings.

Gretchen Woodard, Johnson's mother, said she had not seen her son since Saturday.

"We can't give him any kind of presents, all we can give him is love," she said. "I am sorry it's on his birthday of all days. But we'll hug him, tell him we love him and wish him happy birthday."

Woodard was among those named in a lawsuit Monday by families of two victims seeking damages from the shootings.

Arkansas has no facility to hold the boys after age 18 if they are convicted. Gov. Mike Huckabee said he would build a new facility or modify an existing one to hold them as long as the state can.

pass the president's plan ... more prosecutors, more after-school programs," said Bruce Reed, White House domestic policy adviser. "We can't sit by and watch these trends continue."

But critics of the Clinton administration say it is already a federal offense for a juvenile to carry a gun to school, and that the balanced budget agreement increased spending on the Safe and Drug-Free School Act.

"To think that if the federal government will just pass three more laws and somehow that's going to give us more peace and more hope for our young people is such an unrealistic view," said Rep. John Kasich, R-Ohio. "It's not the answer."

White House aides acknowledge that parents are far more important than politicians when it comes to fighting crime. But the White House says more prosecutors and recreation programs would help.



# Student in custody after teacher, school aide shot

**Richmond, Virginia,  
police cite teen feud**

June 15, 1998

Web posted at: 4:03 p.m. EDT (2003 GMT)

RICHMOND, Virginia (CNN) -- A male teacher was shot and a female school volunteer was grazed by a bullet in a hallway outbreak of gunfire that resulted from a "feud between juveniles," police said Monday.



Armstrong High School

No students were injured in the shootings at Armstrong High School, said Deputy Police Chief Teresa Gooch.

Police arrested a 14-year-old boy, a ninth-grader at the school, as the suspected shooter and recovered the weapon that was used, a .32 caliber semi-automatic pistol, Gooch said

Police questioned a second student but later said they believed only one student was involved.

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## ALSO:

**In-Depth: Are our schools safe?**  
**State-by-State look at gun control**

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The wounded man was identified by Gooch as Gregory Carter, 45, a history teacher and basketball coach. Doctors who operated on him to remove the bullet said he is expected to make a full recovery.

Eloise Wilson, 75, a volunteer for the school's Head Start program, was grazed on the right arm by a bullet, police said.

Neither was believed to be a target of the gunman, police said. "We believe that this shooting resulted from a feud between juveniles," that began earlier in the day, Gooch told reporters.



Carter and Wilson were shot in a hallway about 10 a.m. as students were taking final exams in the city public school on Richmond's east



Police outside the site of the shootings

public school on Richmond's east end.

"We heard about 10 rounds of gunshots," one student said. "Right after that, we heard people panicking." (AUDIO) 215K/20 sec. AIFF or WAV sound)

A policeman on duty inside the school, Ron Brown, caught the suspected gunman after chasing him to a wooded area outside the school, Gooch said.

Classes were dismissed after the shootings.

It was the latest in a spate of school shootings since October, including fatal shootings in West Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Jonesboro, Arkansas; and Springfield, Oregon.

Tuesday is the last day of school in Richmond before the summer break.