


School Safety and Understanding Violent Children


Prevalence of School Violence


Research shows that the number of crimes committed on school campuses has remained about the same for the last few years at 3 million thefts and violent crimes every year. Unfortunately, recent trends also indicate that these crimes are becoming more serious in nature, the age at which children are committing these crimes is becoming younger, and the frequency of assaults is increasing. Fist-fights and fire drills in schools have been replaced by gun fights and crisis drills. These crimes are occurring regardless of economic class or cultural/ethnic group.


Consider the following statistics:

 Every day, 10 Americans aged 19 and under are killed in gun accidents, suicides and homicides

 One in seven students is affected by bullying

 One in 12 students has stayed home from school because of fear of being hurt at school


 15% of students reported gangs present at their schools. Of these, 35% feared attack at school


 In a 30-day period, one in five high school students carried a weapon, although not necessarily to school


Data on Youth Violence

Understanding youth violence is a complex issue that is affected by a wide variety of social, economic, political and economic factors. In a cooperative study involving the National School Safety Center and the Centers for Disease Control, an analysis was made of "School-Associated Violent Deaths." Specific common factors that were identified among perpetrators include:

 40% had a past background of criminal misbehavior

 24% had been previously involved with substance abuse

 35% were involved in gangs

 70% had previously brought a weapon to school

This data reveals that even with all we know, what we don't know is greater than what we do know. This suggests that there are many other factors that influence the development of youth violence

What Other Factors Contribute to Youth Violence?






Researchers and youth-serving professionals have identified many individual, family, school and community risk factors which contribute to youth violence. The two risk factors that ranked the highest are: past victimization and perceptions of isolation.

Past Victimization

Research involving schoolyard bullies reflects that 80% of bullies were first victims of bullies in the form of parents, peers, siblings or others. Many victims become perpetrators of crime in response to their own experience with ridicule, physical punishment, torment and abuse. The combination of both being a victim and a perpetrator makes it more difficult to understand and sort through the causes of violent behavior. The way youngsters are treated by parents is perhaps the most influential predictor of child behavior.

Youngsters Who Feel Isolated, Neglected, Ignored and Ridiculed

This factor itself is complicated. Some suggested causes of perceptions of isolation and neglect include:

-  Economic deprivation that distances children and youth from peers who have advantages and comforts they lack
-  Lack of growth and enrichment activities (e.g. childhood reading, social activities, pre-school classes)
-  Lack of nurturing role models and persons who can serve as caring mentors, supervisors or advocates
-  Youngsters' perceptions that they are not understood and not appreciated
-  Conflicts and isolation perceived due to differences among the culture of the family and varieties of cultures in the school

A few examples of other factors are:

- ▶ A background of misconduct at home
- ▶ Social skills deficit
- ▶ School failure
- ▶ Prejudice and discrimination
- ▶ Easy availability of guns
- ▶ Absence of responsible adult supervision




What is Louisiana Doing About School Violence?

On January 14, 2004 two teenagers were arrested for plotting a shooting at Dutchtown High School to take place in April to commemorate the five-year anniversary of the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colorado. Ascension Parish Sheriff Jeff Wiley reported that, "This is not just a case of kids just talking to be cool; these students had plans all worked out."

In response to school shootings across the country, Attorney General Richard Ieyoub, with the assistance of the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana (Caring Program for Children) and Cingular Wireless, created "Operation Safe Haven," a comprehensive safe school plan developed to ensure that Louisiana's schools are educated on crisis prevention and are prepared and trained to handle crisis situations. The program addresses identification of potential problems, preparation of crisis and disaster plans, and implementation of these plans for all schools and school employees.



The Attorney General's Drug Policy Section has a full time Safe School Coordinator that trains school personnel and law enforcement on crisis prevention and response. The coordinator can assist communities in many ways including:

-  District and school based training on how to prepare a comprehensive crisis plan
-  Technical assistance in developing and previewing a crisis plan
-  Organizing critical incident training for all responding agencies at school sites

For more information on Louisiana's Safe School Program, resources, current events, trainings, or materials feel free to contact the Drug Policy Section at 225-339-5171.

Material for this newsletter was derived from the following sources:

National Criminal Justice Reference Service. (2002). In the Spotlight School Safety. Retrieved 1/15/04 from www.ncjrs.org
National School Safety Center. (1993). School Safety Update. NSSC School Safety News Service, 1-8.
Stephens, R.D., (1998) Youth Violence: Coming Soon to a School Near You. Presentation at the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families Committee on Education and the Workforce, United States House of Representatives Hearing on Understanding Violent Children, Washington, DC.

160-05-0210

Louisiana State University
 School of Social Work
 Office of Social Service Research and Development
 311 Huey P. Long Field House
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803

