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School Crime: K-12

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- In 1999, 1,492 school-age children were killed by firearms (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000).
 - In 1998, students ages 12 through 18 were victims of more than 2.7 million total crimes at school. In that same year, these students were victims of about 253,000 serious violent crimes at school (that is rape, sexual assault, robbery and aggravated assault). There were also 60 school-associated violent deaths in the United States between July 1, 1997 and June 30, 1998-including homicides (Kaufman et al., 2000).
 - Fifteen percent of violent crimes and almost nineteen percent of simple assaults occurred inside school buildings or on school property in 1999 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).
 - Twenty-five percent of inner-city school students report carrying a weapon in school, and 44 percent report carrying weapons out of school (Sheley, McGee, & Wright, 1995).
 - Seventeen percent of all persons arrested in 1999 were under the age of 18 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000).
 - While only four percent of inner-city school students report use of hard drugs, 13 percent report either dealing drugs or working for a drug dealer (Sheley, McGee, & Wright, 1995).
 - Fifty-seven percent of violent crimes committed by juveniles occur on school days, even though only about half of the days in a year are school days. In fact, 1 in 5 violent crimes committed by juveniles occur in the four hours after school (Sickmund, Snyder, & Poe-Yamagata, 1997).

Overview

Our nation's schools, once a protected haven for learning and growth, are no longer safe for teachers or students in many of our nation's communities. From overt violent acts, such as homicide and assaults, to concealed crimes, such as child sexual abuse, violence in schools affects everyone-teachers, parents, children, and the whole community. Victims of violent crime in the school, like victims elsewhere, may suffer physical ailments, withdrawal from peer relations, and display indifference to learning. They also may be more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, which contributes to lack of learning, growth, and development, and hinders the effective education of children. Today, the problems in our schools are firearms, weapons, substance abuse and gangs. Many people equate school violence with large urban areas: however, violence has invaded

suburban and rural schools as well. Not only public schools, but private schools are involved.

Firearms:

Guns in schools have increased to the point that approximately one in four major school districts now use metal detectors to reduce the number of weapons brought into schools by students (Wheeler & Baron, 1993). The juvenile offenders who are arrested for weapons violations are sometimes fellow students, and other times non-student peers, who threaten and attack students, administrators, and teachers. According to a 1995 survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly one-fourth of students nationwide had carried a gun to school (Hamburg, 1998).

In 1997, 4,205 children and teens died as a result of gunfire - one every two hours, nearly 12 every day; of these, 2,562 children and teens were murdered by gunfire (Ward, 1999). Gun violence among juveniles also causes countless injuries and disabilities. Research by the National Association of Children's Hospitals and Related Institutions shows that the average cost of treating a child wounded by gunfire is more than \$14,000- enough to pay for a year of college (National Crime Prevention Council, 1995).

The Crime Control Act of 1990 was passed by Congress in an effort to regain control of schools in the United States. The Act prohibits the possession or discharge of a firearm on or within 1,000 feet of private, parochial, or public school grounds. Violators can receive up to five years imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$250,000, or both.

As of 1996, fifteen states-California, Florida, Connecticut, Iowa, Nevada, New Jersey, Virginia, Wisconsin, Hawaii, Minnesota, Maryland, North Carolina, Delaware, Rhode Island, and Texas-have passed laws making adults criminally liable for shootings committed by children who have access to the weapons. A maximum of three years in prison can result for a fatal shooting that occurs in this type of situation. The law in Florida was passed after a 1998 survey-conducted by the Florida School Boards Association and the Association of School Administrators-on the use of guns in schools found that nearly 93 percent of the weapons brought to school came from the homes of students or from homes of friends or relatives (Wheeler & Baron, 1994).

Drug and Alcohol Abuse:

In 1995 and 1997, almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 (32 percent) reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property (Kaufman et al., 2000). While illegal consumption or sale of drugs and alcohol among school children may not, in itself, be violent, such behavior often leads to violent acts.

A survey conducted by the National Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education found that high school students who carried guns to school in 1993-1994 were 14.5 times more likely to use cocaine, nearly twice as likely to drink alcohol, and three times as likely to smoke marijuana as other students. This survey also found that students involved in school and community activities and those whose parents talked to them about drugs' dangers were half as likely to use drugs (Manning, 1994).

Gangs:

A study shows that 37 percent of students surveyed identified gang presence in their schools. The same study found a strong link between any type of student victimization and gang presence.

(Howell, 2000). Organized youth gangs are not limited to large, inner-city areas as is commonly believed, and membership crosses all racial and ethnic boundaries. According to a survey conducted by the National Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education, 13.8 percent of American high school students joined a gang during the 1993-1994 school year (Manning, 1994). With these younger gang members attending school, schools themselves have become prime recruiting grounds. Gang members stake out their turfs in their territory, including the neighborhood school grounds (Wheeler & Baron, 1993).

Sexual Crimes:

Sexual crimes against children cause extreme victimization-both immediately and often well into adulthood. The principle reason reported for revocation of teacher certificates is sexual misconduct (Whiteby, 1992). Such crimes are commonly called "concealed crimes" since they often go unreported because child victims are frequently silenced by their perpetrators with either threats or intimidation.

Child sexual assault victims lose trust in adults and authority figures, suffer physical effects, and often experience extreme emotional trauma. The possible resulting anti-social behavior can lead to greater social problems, such as alienation and estrangement. Because child sexual exploitation is so easily concealed, there is no absolute mechanism to gauge the extent of this problem. However, 12 states reported that in 1992, about 51 percent of all female rape victims were juveniles and based on these and other relevant data, the Bureau of Justice Statistics conservatively estimates that nationwide about 17,000 girls under age 12 were raped in 1992 (Langan & Harlow, 1994).

Acquaintance or date rape is another sexual crime perpetrated against school children-both females and males, but more often females. Acquaintance rape is committed by someone the child knows well or with whom she or he is acquainted. The perpetrators at times resort to violence and usually claim that their victims are consenting partners to their sexual advances. More often, the perpetrators are aware of their victims' objections, yet continue their attack. At that point, what may have been an aggressive sexual advance becomes a violent act of rape. Victims often blame themselves or are blamed by others for the rape. Sexual assault victims may suffer from rape-related Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, as well as withdrawal from social activities, distrust of peers, and physical injuries.

Hate Crimes:

Crimes committed against persons because of their ethnic, cultural, religious, or socio-economic background, or sexual orientation are on the rise in American society. In schools, this can mean discriminatory practices by educators and fellow students, malicious graffiti on walls or lockers, and interpersonal confrontations. Each of these can lead to violence, and all are detrimental to a supportive educational environment.

Domestic Violence:

For some intimate relationships between young persons, violence plays a personal and painful role. In studies of adolescent violence, researchers are finding that physical abuse among dating teens seems to be a rising trend. A Study over 1,000 high school students found that 45 percent of females, and 43 percent of males, reported being the victim of violence from dating partners at least once (O'Keefe, 1998).

In one ten-month period, courts in Massachusetts issued 757 restraining orders against teens engaged in threatening, stalking, abuse, or outright assault of their young partners (Locy, 1994). The trend in dating violence was so notable in Washington, D.C., that it impelled the Superior Court to implement a separate domestic violence treatment program for teenagers, as they were seeing more and more batterers between the ages of 13 and 18. Some states have recognized the problem enough to make the topic of dating violence prevention a mandatory part of the public school curriculum (Shen, 1993).

The victims of teenage dating violence-usually female, but not exclusively-may suffer from what has been identified in domestic violence research as "Battered Women's Syndrome", causing them to return to or stay in harmful relationships as a result of learned helplessness. They may also suffer from other effects associated with violent victimizations.

Domestic violence occurs in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships, and victimizes both females and males. School officials should be aware of the potential for violent relationships between students that may result from learned behavior from the students' home environments.

Homicide:

The number of juveniles murdered peaked in 1993 at 2,900, about 4 murders for every 100,000 person under age 18 living in the U.S. By 1997, this figure had dropped to 2,100, or about 3 murders per 100,000 juveniles (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Arrests of juveniles for murder increased by 85 percent between 1987 and 1991 (National Crime Prevention Council, 1995), and multiple-offender homicides involving juvenile offenders have more than doubled since the mid-1980's. When juveniles commit homicide, 64 percent of their victims are friends, family, or acquaintances (Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata, 1997).

Assistance for Juvenile Victims:

Juveniles who are victimized, or who repeatedly witness violence, and do not receive immediate support in understanding it are more at risk of using violence as a means of dealing with their own conflicts. They also show traumatic stress symptoms that impair their capacity to succeed in school, to develop healthy relationships, and to become productive adults. Psychological health services and victim assistance programs can help young crime victims and witnesses of violence deal with the trauma, thus stopping the cycle of violence and preventing academic and emotional problems that victims and witnesses sometimes experience while trying to cope with trauma.

A group of psychologists, social workers, community recreation workers, and specially-trained police officers in Washington, D.C., formed the Youth Trauma Team, which patrols the city at all hours. The team appears at the scene of a violent incident as quickly as possible to help children cope with what they have experienced and witnessed. The work of the team is helped by the Howard University Violence Prevention Project, which offers an after-school middle school program, a preschool program, and a summer camp that provide social support, tutoring, esteem-building, and cultural enrichment for children who have been exposed to serious violence (National Crime Prevention Council, 1995).

School Safety as a Policy

What can be done to provide a safer school environment? In the National School Safety Center (NCSSC) resource paper, *School Crisis Prevention and Response*, it is noted that courts have held

that schools are expected to provide a physical environment conducive to the purposes of an educational institution, although a school may not be expected to ensure nor guarantee the safety of its students (Wheeler & Baron, 1993). The paper goes on to state that the right to safe schools includes the right of students and staff to:

Protection against foreseeable criminal activities;

- Protection against violence or student crime which adequate supervision can prevent;
- Protection against potentially dangerous students who are identifiable;
- Protection against dangerous persons admitted to school in a negligent manner; and
- Protection from negligently selected, retained, or trained school administrators, teachers, or staff.

The National School Safety Center recommends that a security plan be prepared and that the following general security measures be taken to lessen the chances of school violence:

- A local school security committee or task force comprised of school officials should be established by school districts. Planning for needed safety measures and their implementation should be performed by this task force, including regular review of safety and security measures.
- Crime prevention and expertise should be developed and greater responsibility taken by school administrators in working with the school board and districts.
- A comprehensive crisis management plan should be developed by schools which incorporates resources available through other community agencies.
- Regular updates on safety plans and in-service training should be conducted to keep school staff informed. The training should include certified staff, classified staff, part-time employees, and substitute teachers.
- Volunteers from the community, as well as parents, should be used to help patrol surrounding neighborhoods and supervise the campus before, during, and after school.
- Access points to school campuses should be monitored during the school day. Access should be limited where possible. A single visitor entrance should be monitored by a receptionist or security officer and visitors should be required to sign in and wear an identification pass. Delivery entrances should also be monitored closely.
- Students should be taught to report suspicious individuals or unusual activity. They should also be taught to take responsibility for their own safety by learning personal safety and conflict resolution techniques.
- A curriculum committee focusing on teaching students non-violence, pro-social skills, conflict resolution, law-related education, and good decision making should be established.
- Plans should be made to establish alternative schools to handle problem students. When these offenders are expelled from school, there must be other programs in place to keep them off the streets where other violent incidents may be perpetrated.

Efforts such as these require the support of parents, teachers, administrators, social workers, criminal justice professionals, and community leaders working together.

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