

**MIDDLE SCHOOL VIOLENCE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

by

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Middle School Violence:
A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of middle school violence was conducted within Mahoning County. Data was collected from 157 sixth grade students from one inner city middle school and one suburban middle school. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire that focused on eight major areas. The questionnaire asked students if they had knowledge of violent incidents at school, if they had witnessed these incidents, if they worry about these acts happening to themselves, if they had been victimized, if they had committed any of the listed acts, where these acts took place, how they got to school, and what the students did to protect themselves. The violent acts that were listed and defined on the questionnaire were robbery, rape, sexual assault, attacks without weapons, attacks with weapons, bullying, carrying a weapon other than a gun, and carrying a gun. Resulting data was analyzed then tested for statistical differences based on the type of school attended and gender.

An extensive literature review is also offered. It reviews youth violence causation, victims, violence within the schools, and hurdles to overcoming the problem. Current national research is cited.

Overall, it appears that Mahoning County middle schools do experience violence yet for the most part this violence comes in the somewhat traditional forms of bullying and fighting. While other incidents have occurred, the numbers are low. Results also show that violence is experienced differently between the two sets of students when compared by school type and gender. As a result of these findings, a recommendation was made for further research and prevention planning from within the schools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The United States ranks first in the world in rates of interpersonal violence, boasting also the highest homicide rate in the world (APA Commission on Violence and Youth, 1993). In the United States violence is a way of life. We see it on television, in homes, on the streets, and in schools daily. What is somewhat more disturbing however, is that violent crime rates have risen among our youth with every indication that these rates will continue to rise. From 1985 through 1994 there was a 40 percent increase in murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults. Juveniles represented 26 percent of this growth (American Psychological Association, 1997). Only 27 percent of this country's population is under the age of eighteen but they are accounting for a major increase in violent crimes (Crowe, 1991). Furthermore, in 1994, juveniles committed 14 percent of all violent crimes. This equates to 20 percent of all robberies, 14 percent of all rapes, 13 percent of all assaults, and 10 percent of all murders. If these trends continue, and with the projected growth in the juvenile population, this could mean a 142 percent increase in the number of murders, a 66 percent increase in rapes, a 58 percent increase in robberies, and a 129 percent increase in assaults by the year 2010 (American Psychological Association, 1997).

In 1991 the American Psychological Association empanelled a Commission on Violence and Youth to bring forth a body of knowledge generated over the last five decades to address the youth violence problem in this country. What resulted was an illustration of the quantitative and qualitative change violence has undergone. Basically, the intensity of youth violence has escalated. In the 1950s juveniles used switchblades,

chains, and their fists in violent encounters; today handguns are more prevalent and the lethality of the incidents has escalated. The APA Commission also noted that children are becoming involved in violence at younger ages. For instance, in a study of first and second graders in Washington, D.C., 45 percent had witnessed muggings, 31 percent witnessed shootings, and 39 percent had seen a dead body as a result of violence (American Psychological Association, 1997).

In short, the United States has a whole generation of Americans at risk. In response, youth violence is now considered a public health concern as well as a criminal justice priority. Old threats to the nation's longevity have been replaced by new concerns. Injuries, not illnesses, are the most significant threat to the lives of the young. Violence is considered an epidemic (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

In accordance with identifying an epidemic a host, agent, and environment can be identified for this surge of violence. The host is a person(s) whose behavior determines or contributes to a public health problem. The agent is the increased proliferation of guns in society. Finally, the broad social, cultural, institutional, and physical forces fulfill the environmental requirement that contributes to the problem (National Institute of Justice, 1994). These three components will be dissected throughout the remainder of this work. It is this epidemiological perspective that motivated the Surgeon General in 1979 to publish the first national agenda for health promotion and disease prevention which outlined fifteen priority areas. One of these areas called for the reduction of interpersonal violence. This publication set the agenda for future spending of funds towards prevention and further research (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

The Problem

As mentioned earlier, violence occurs everywhere. However, schools are supposed to be safe havens, free from such tragedy. Parents send their children to school everyday in hopes that they will receive an education. But what goes on in these environments is disturbing. In 1991 violent incidents with juvenile victims were nearly as likely to occur at home as they were in or around school (Allen-Hagan, 1994). In fact, while one million crimes occur in workplaces annually, three million violent incidents and thefts occur in the 85,000 public schools in the United States (Rossman, 1996). That equates to 16,000 incidents per school day, or one every six seconds (Fiester, 1996). According to the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, shootings or hostage situations have occurred in schools in thirty-five states as cited in Midwest Regional Center for Drug Free Schools (1993).

Specific examples are sometimes more illustrative. For instance, in February of 1992 two students were shot and killed in the Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, New York. In May of 1992 four people were killed and eleven injured when an ex-student entered Lindhurst High School in Olivehurst, California and opened fire. The siege went on for eight hours and kept fifty-nine students and teachers held hostage. In April of 1993 three teens armed with a baseball bat, billy club, and a knife entered Dartmouth, Massachusetts High School and stabbed a sixteen-year-old freshman (Pepperdine University, 1993). On December 1, 1997 a fourteen year old boy opened fire on a prayer group in the lobby of Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky. Three fellow students were killed and five wounded in the attack (CNN Interactive, 1997). On March 24, 1998, four students, one teacher and a fetus from Westside Middle School in

Jonesboro, Arkansas were shot to death by two fellow students. The gunmen, ages 13 and 11, opened fire on students as they evacuated the building during a false fire alarm said to have been triggered also by the gunmen (CNN Interactive, 1998). Ten others were wounded. The stories continue. Statistically, they can occur anywhere.

In response, Goal Seven of Goals 2000, the Educate America Act, adopted by Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton in March of 1994, calls for an end to such violence in schools. It states, "By year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning...No child or youth should be fearful on the way to school, be afraid while there, or have to cope with pressures to make unhealthy choices" (Futrell, 1996). For this reason research must continue in hopes to further understand youth violence causation, the scope of the problem, who the victims are, and what can be done to prevent such needless loss of young human lives.

Need for Local Study

While federal law does not require school systems to report incidents of delinquency or violence, several states have taken it upon themselves to require such reporting. California, Connecticut, Hawaii, and South Carolina require both elementary and secondary schools to report all incidents (Pepperdine University, 1993). In 1982, California set the precedent by approving an amendment to the state constitution called the Victim's Bill of Rights. California's Supreme Court has upheld this amendment.

California's Victim's Bill of Rights specifically guarantees the right to safe schools. While other states have not yet followed suit, courts nationwide are holding schools liable for injuries suffered by victims of delinquency and violence (Pepperdine

University, 1993). For this reason, schools should be examining the extent of the delinquency and violence in their schools.

Overview of the Thesis

As a method for identification of the problem of school violence and student victimization, this study will set out to determine the level of violence and victimization occurring in the schools within Mahoning County. Identifying the problem is necessary because it appears that violence has significant effects on the psychological and educational development of children. It is also necessary so that proper prevention can be implemented if needed. As discussed, violence breeds further violence. This is something this community cannot afford.

A literature review is presented in the next chapter. It reviews youth violence causation, victims, effects of victimization, and hurdles in acknowledging school violence as a problem. This chapter also reviews national research and the foundation for the present study.

Chapter Three discusses methodology and design. The data collection instrument, study sample, and data collection procedures are reviewed.

Chapter Four offers an analysis of the findings. First, a descriptive analysis of the sample is discussed. Second, findings for each major category of the questionnaire are presented. Finally, response comparisons based on school type and gender are summarized.

In conclusion, Chapter Five offers a discussion of study limitations and implications. Recommendations are made based on the present study's findings.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Causes and Correlates

Occasionally, when youth violence is explored it is forgotten that most adolescents are on a healthy path to productive adult lives. In fact, many young persons will get into trouble as a symptom of adolescent development and most will overcome delinquent tendencies with maturity (Crowe, 1991). With this in mind, it is very frustrating to try to determine why youth violence manifests.

Developmentally, adolescence brings a time for bodies to change and grow. Feelings change. Sexual choices present themselves. Relationships begin to change along with ideas about the world. A need to assert their independence develops. In fact, four developmental tasks are necessary during adolescence. They are: a separation from family, forging a healthy sexual identity, preparation for the future, and forging a moral value system. Risk taking and feelings of invincibility paired with a perceived exemption from consequences are necessary. Such characteristics serve a developmental function in that they give courage to the youth to break from the family. In addition, an attraction to violence is a normal adolescent trait as well. However, what presents the problem is that our dangerous world has created a justifiable fear for survival in our youth (Prothrow-Stith, 1991). Further, 25 percent of adolescents are at risk for veering off the healthy path because of involvement in drugs, sex, truancy, delinquency and violence (Chandler, 1996).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's "Study of Causes and Correlates" discusses the influence of peers and lack of supervision by parents as

being strong risk factors for exposure to youth violence as cited in Chandler, 1996. The causes that have been linked to larger, more insidious societal problems are also those that have been linked to violent behavior. They are: alcohol and/or drug use, being involved in drug sales and trafficking, exhibiting an antisocial personality, racism, the availability of firearms, impulsivity, child abuse, witnessing violence in the family, social alienation, experiencing poverty and hopelessness, media exposure to violence, gang membership, and cult membership (Linquanti, 1994). However, the strongest predictor of a child's involvement in violence is a history of previous violence (American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth, 1993).

In 1996, a survey's findings were presented in *Preventing Violence in Schools* (Futrell, 1996). Here, perceptions or beliefs about factors contributing to youth violence were surveyed from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Overwhelmingly, 71 percent of teachers attributed a lack of parental supervision as a factor contributing to youth violence. Sixty-six percent of teachers also felt a lack of family involvement with school was a risk factor. Fifty-five percent thought or believed media exposure was linked. From the students' viewpoints mixed messages from parents as well as a lack of parental supervision was most often stated. Other factors included peer pressure, drugs and alcohol, racism, and discrimination.

Violent behavior has also been linked to the experience of violence at home, to victimization, and to witnessing violent acts first hand (Haynie, 1997). When a young person is involved in violence its impact is magnified. For instance, child abuse is a significant risk factor for future violent behavior (Allen-Hagan, 1994). The experience of being victimized as a child increases the likelihood that the person will not only

perpetrate violence but will also be involved in other juvenile and adult criminal activity (American Psychological Association, 1997). For young offenders in particular, violence and theft have survival value. Many young offenders have been victimized in the past and fear being victimized in the future. They may strike back emotionally in order to satisfy or regain lost possessions or self-respect (Siegal, 1997). Although the idea of victims becoming perpetrators is compelling, much more information is needed in this area. One fact supported by research is that it is harder for adolescents to change behavioral patterns once the pattern is set (Pepperdine University, 1995).

A discussion of youth violence in schools is not complete unless it includes the existence of gangs, the availability of firearms, physical fighting and bullying. While physical fighting and bullying are nothing new, new “wave” gangs and guns are new-fashioned modes of youth violence. Each has been dissected by numerous studies.

While only a small percentage of youth joins a gang, a still smaller percentage engage in violence. Nonetheless, three of four cases of murder and assault committed by youth are committed by juvenile gang members (American Psychological Association, 1997). The formation of gangs has been credited to the financial gain and status they give adolescents as well as the acceptance and self-esteem they provide. In poorer communities they are attributed to a breakdown of families and community structures. Nevertheless, they may also form in more affluent areas among children who feel alienated from friends and families (Gaustad, 1991). Until the 1970s gang members were 12-21 years old. Today members are as young as nine and as old as 30. This is largely due to the drug trade and the fact that legitimate jobs often pay less and are not as

desirable. While most members are still male (15:1) that gap is narrowing (American Psychological Association, 1997).

Schools are not safe from gang infiltration. In fact, schools may sometimes provide a mechanism for the spread of gangs. When transfer students from gang ridden cities are moved by their families in search of better opportunity they may be inclined to mark their new environment with gang practices. The insecurity that comes with their new environment allows the adolescent to fall back into gang trappings and bravado. Here they are able to build themselves up and gain popularity by impressing others (Gaustaud, 1991).

Students in school with gangs consistently report much higher victimization rates and higher levels of fear than schools without. Students in schools with gangs report they may avoid certain areas as a safety precaution. More students also report carrying weapons in these schools. In 1989, 15 percent of students surveyed by the National Center for Educational Statistics responded that there were gangs in their school. In 1993, 35 percent reported the existence of gangs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995).

While it is not uncommon for gang members to arm themselves with firearms, guns are a way of life in the United States in general. There are an estimated 120 million guns in the hands of private citizens alone (Pepperdine University, 1993). These firearms are being made more and more available to our youth. When a firearm falls into the possession of a juvenile it is likely that it will be used. That is because a juveniles use of a firearm is more random than an adults. Teenage behavior alone is marked by

recklessness and bravado. Adults show more restraint and an understanding for consequences (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

In 1984 a dramatic increase in juvenile gun homicide was reported. Some argue that this coincides with the introduction of crack in the drug market (Chandler, 1996). It is believed that as more juveniles were recruited to sell crack they needed to arm themselves. Guns provided an effective protection mechanism. As firearms became diffused throughout the community those not in the trade also needed protection (National Institute of Justice, 1995). Further, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that from 1985-1995 the number of gun-related murders by juveniles increased by 249 percent (American Psychological Association, 1997). In addition to, and including drug-related crime, everyday ten American teenagers are killed in gun accidents, suicides, or homicides (Fiester, 1996). In 1993, a Louis Harris Poll showed that 35 percent of children aged 6-12 years old feared their lives would be cut short by gun violence (Chandler, 1996).

Large urban areas have the most severe gun problems, but residential suburbs and rural communities are not exempt. This proliferation also reaches the school communities (Gaustad, 1991). The greatest threats to school safety today are firearms, knives, and explosives (Pepperdine University, 1995). This is because, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, 100,000 young people carry guns to school everyday (Futrell, 1996). The Center to Prevent Handgun Violence reported that from the beginning of the 1986 academic school year through the end of the 1990 academic year, 227 incidents involving shootings were reported in schools. This number was reached by a nationwide

newspaper search. These incidents resulted in 75 deaths, 201 severe injuries, and 242 people held hostage (Pepperdine University, 1993).

Why exactly guns are brought to school is not necessarily understood. It appears that violence is seen as an effective way to deal with problems, as evidenced by many television programs and movies viewed by children. According to a Texas A & M survey, many students have maladaptive coping responses to conflict. When surveyed, 25 percent felt it would be helpful to threaten weapon use in a conflict situation. Ten percent considered carrying a weapon useful (Pepperdine University, 1993). It appears that arguments and conflicts once settled by fists are now being settled by shootings. This sort of spread of the gun culture into the school community is associated with dangerous risks to the students mental health, social behavior, and educational success (Osofsky, 1997).

As previously stated, bullying and fighting are nothing new among adolescents, nor unique to the United States. To illustrate, Dr. Daniel Olweus, Professor of Psychology at Bergen University in Norway, surveyed over 150, 000 elementary and junior high students. He reports that 15 percent of school children are involved in bully-victim problems. One in ten students are regularly harassed or attacked by bullies. Dr. Olweus believes that these statistics are also representative of the United States' school children. Dr. David Perry, Professor of Psychology at Florida Atlantic University is hoping to replicate the study (Pepperdine University, 1995).

Active and assertive play is a normal part of childhood, however, bullies are unique in their quickness to start a fight. Bullies use belligerence, force, and intimidation to get their way. They tend to be overly aggressive, destructive, and enjoy dominating

others. Bullies select weaker students that they can easily overpower. Bullying affects its victims on a number of levels. For example, victims may avoid school out of fear. It can destroy a student's confidence and self-esteem. Bullying also effects the safety climate of the school community. In 1984 the National Association of Secondary School Principals conducted a survey which reflected that 25 percent of students were most concerned about bullying when discussing school safety (Pepperdine University, 1995).

The preyed upon children may be at risk emotionally as well. Those who are bullied may be stigmatized by others. This can further erode the confidence and self-esteem that is damaged through victimization. As a result the student may assume an attitude of self-reproach (Pepperdine University, 1995).

Finally, keeping in mind the previous discussion of the link between victims becoming perpetrators, there is a risk of perpetual and escalating violence in schools where bullying occurs. For example, Nathan Faris, a seventh grade student in Missouri entered DeKalb High School on March 2, 1987 to retaliate against bullying. He fatally shot another student as well as himself. A number of suicides and homicides have similar stories (Pepperdine University, 1995).

As bullying has led to other more lethal forms of violence, so has physical fighting among students. Fighting is not only a significant source of injury but also a risk factor for further deadly violence. A study published in the Journal of School Health in 1997 reported the findings of a study conducted in 1992. One thousand randomly selected middle school students were asked about their conflict resolution strategies. It attempted to assess healthy behaviors, perceived health risks, and health education needs. A stratified sample of black and white males and females responded to the questionnaire.

The results reflected that while most students perceive fighting to be a high-risk behavior one in five regularly engage in fighting (Haynie, 1997). The reasons behind fights are often trivial. They may result from stares, accidental bumps, gossip, courtship jealousy, extortion, being disrespected, as an attempt to impress others, general dislike for another, and/or the sole perception of someone being weak (Futrell, 1996).

As a final link in the discussion of youth violence causation, the school community itself can not be forgotten. There are particular features of the school that may actually help to create an aggressive, violence prone environment. Four factors have been specifically discussed as risk factors. They are: placing a relatively high number of students into a limited space, reducing the capacity to avoid confrontations, poor building design, and the imposition of behavioral routines and conformity which may contribute to feelings of anger, resentment, and rejection (American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth, 1993). Additionally, if a student perceives that the education they are being offered is inadequate or that expectations for them are somewhat less than for others, a sense of helplessness and frustration may develop. As a result, this may develop into anger and manifest in violence (Futrell, 1996).

Victims

Because crime statistics usually reflect reported crimes they do not accurately reflect how many crimes occur because not all crimes are reported. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Census Bureau conducts an annual household survey of victims. This helps to more accurately portray the number of crimes that occur. Fifty thousand households containing 100,000 individuals are selected. In 1993, 44 million

crimes took place in the United States. Six million were violent, 14 million were personal thefts, and 15.8 million were household/property crimes. The NCVS reported that young people are the most likely to be victimized (Siegal, 1997). In fact, while juveniles are the most victimized segment of the population, they are the least likely to report the offenses (Crowe, 1991). The NCVS determined that the likelihood of victimization actually decreases with age. It has also been shown that males run a higher risk for victimization for all crimes except those of the sexual nature (Siegal, 1997). Younger juveniles, those in grades 6-10, are also more likely to be victimized. Those who wear expensive or fashionable clothes and jewelry or bring expensive belongings to school are the most likely victims of property crimes (Futrell, 1996). Yet no matter who the victim or what the crime, all victims experience a level of pain, emotional distress, disability, and/or risk of death (Siegal, 1997).

Youths tend to be victimized by their peers as well as by acquaintances (Siegal, 1997). Perpetrators and victims tend to resemble each other in race, sex, age, background, psychological profile, alcohol and drug use, and reliance on weapons. They also tend to engage in a sequence of interacting and escalating events that will lead to violence (American Psychological Association, 1993). Victimization is more likely to happen during the day and in public places (Siegal, 1997). The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported after a 1987 nationwide survey the location of many victimizations. While the most common locations were the street, park, or playground (36%), school came in second (24%) (Crowe, 1991). While at school crimes tend to occur in hallways, under staircases, in lunchrooms/cafeterias, unattended classrooms, lockerrooms, and/or restrooms (Futrell, 1996).

Effects of Victimization

To understand the effects of violence on youth we must first examine several developmental issues. First, experience is the major modifier of all human behavior. Experience has an effect on all that we do as humans, even the development of our brains. Further, brain development is sequential and use dependent. Much of the critical structural organization our brains undergo takes place in early childhood. Any deprivation of developmental experiences can result in immature behavioral reactivity. Exposure to violence, either personally to the self or through witnessing a violent act inflicted upon another, can inhibit organizational processes. This may even predispose an individual to violence (Osofsky, 1997).

As children grow, children need to find reasons for events and tend to seek justice in the world. A part of this is the formation of social maps. Social maps are representations of the world that reflect simple cognitive processes, morality, justice, and reasonings. For instance, a social map may be that adults are to be trusted and/or that school is a safe place. When a child is then victimized by an adult or at school they may feel that they deserved the harm. This can cause a victim to withdraw just at the time they need to be encouraged to venture out and take risks. This can cause a child to be fearful and distrust. The world may then be viewed as hostile and unpredictable (Osofsky, 1997).

Children are stronger than we sometimes give them credit. However, children are very different from adults and their immaturity magnifies any risk factor that they are exposed to. Children can generally cope with one or two risk factors at a time, however, if you add more factors, damage can occur in the result of trauma. This may manifest as

poor concentration, distractibility, preoccupation with worries, anxiety, higher activity levels, inability to focus, passivity, difficulty in getting along with peers, and the tendency to misread social cues. Also, the effects of violence also often depend on the developmental stage of the child. For example, preschoolers tend to be more passive and may experience bedwetting, separation anxiety, exaggerated dependence, and decreased verbalizations. School-age children report more somatic problems such as headaches, stomachaches, and cognitive distortions. Finally, adolescents act out, abuse substances, are aggressive, and display delinquent behavior (Osofsky, 1997).

As already mentioned, when a child can not give meaning to a dangerous experience, trauma may result. The exact response to the exposure depends on a number of variables related both to the individual and the situation. However, several diagnosable disorders can be determined. The most common is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This disorder, along with other related trauma responses may occur immediately or be delayed. They may also be enduring. Symptoms manifest as increased arousal, trauma specific fears, anxiety, repeated memories, behavioral reenactments, pessimistic attitudes, hopelessness, anger, despair and/or dissociation. In addition, traumatized children are likely to be drawn into groups or towards ideologies that legitimize and reward their rage, fear, and hate (Osofsky, 1997).

PTSD may also cause significant problems that interfere with learning (Osofsky, 1997). In fact, victimization in general is a major problem because it distracts from the educational process (Pepperdine University, 1995). Again, this may be actual violence or the threat of violence that victimizes. Research on violence in school shows that exposure can harm cognitive abilities, physiological functioning, and abilities to bond

(Fiester, 1996). Such impaired cognitive abilities include memory lapses, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, and inability to problem solve (Osofsky, 1997). Intact cognitive abilities are actually needed for violence prevention in addition to educational success. Kids need to be able to reason their way out of dangerous situations. They need to think before they act. But when violence has robbed them of these abilities society should not be surprised when violence is also the outcome (Prothrow-Stith, 1991).

Hurdles in Acknowledging School Violence as a Problem

While it appears that youth violence within schools is an obvious problem, the scope of the problem is a source of considerable controversy. There are three main dilemmas in acknowledging the problem. They are ignorance, denial, and an incomplete definition of school violence (Gaustad, 1991).

Ignorance can be illustrated in a number of ways. First, only one-third of all violence committed against youths is reported to authorities (Gaustad, 1991). Underreporting usually occurs from fear of reprisal, shame, and sometimes, pride. School based incidents are also usually kept at school, meaning, they are dealt with only as disciplinary offenses. Therefore, the problem may well be greater than various reports reveal (Rossman, 1996).

Denial of school violence, as anything else, usually results out of fear. People naturally want to be safe. Anxiety, fear, and vulnerability are avoided as often as possible. Recognizing school violence as a problem challenges one's sense of security (Gaustad, 1991). Recognizing the problem may also cause people to boycott certain communities and/or falsely label schools as unsafe (Scwartz, 1997). However, a false sense of security and persistent denial can be just as dangerous (Gaustad, 1991).

The definition of school violence is also incomplete. Bullying, fighting, threats, intimidation, and weapon possession are all examples of violence. However, many of them are dealt with differently and not all are recognized as crimes. Most often, victims as well as perpetrators are penalized when such incidents occur. A more thorough understanding of these offenses and their dynamics would help identify the problems (Gaustad, 1991).

These hurdles exist mainly because schools are decentralized. Education is almost exclusively a matter of state and local law. Federal law is only involved when the courts are needed to interpret constitutional protections within the school community (Beyer, 1996). Federal law does not require school systems to report incidences of delinquency or violence (Pepperdine University, 1993).

Surveys of public school teachers forty years ago reflect the most pressing problems in schools as tardiness, talking, and gum chewing. Today, complaints are considerably different. Pressing issues concern drug abuse, gangs, bullying, weapons, sexual assaults, pregnancy, and verbal assaults (Gaustad, 1991). While recent surveys do note the escalating levels of violence and the increased lethality of youth violence, the most common violence is still bullying, fist fights, and shoving matches (Scwartz, 1997). In addition, it must be restated that all students are not violent. In fact, the vast majority are not. Teachers report there are three groups of students, or the 80-15-5 rule. Simply put, 80 percent of students are well behaved and rarely break the rules. Fifteen percent will break the rules regularly by refusing to accept restrictions. While this group is somewhat disruptive, it is the remaining 5 percent that are the chronic rule breakers who

are out of control much of the time. This is where violence is likely to occur (Futrell, 1996).

Related Research

In 1974 Congress mandated that the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare conduct a national study that would examine school violence. This study became known as the Violent Schools-Safe Schools Study of 1978 (Rossman, 1996). The findings are presented below in summary form.

Basically, teenagers were at a greater risk of victimization while at school than when they were not. In fact, 40 percent of all robberies (thefts committed by the use or threat of force or intimidation) and 36 percent of all assaults committed against youth occurred at school. Risks were even higher for those students 12-15 years of age (Crowe, 1991). Eighteen percent of those students who had been attacked reported being afraid while at school as compared to 2 percent of students who had not been victimized. Fifty-six percent of the victims were only afraid "sometimes". Fifteen percent of the victims actually stayed home from school out of fear. Twenty-nine percent of victims reported they had brought guns to school in the past (Pepperdine University, 1995).

The risk of burglary (the act of breaking into any building to commit theft) was higher at school than away from school. Burglaries were five times as likely to occur in schools than in businesses and they averaged \$150 in costs for each burglarization. Each month 25 percent of schools reported being vandalized with \$200 million in costs each year. One in 100 schools had a bomb threat within the last year (Rossman, 1996).

In 1986 the American School Health Association did a national study of 8th and 10th grade students in 20 states. Fifty percent of the boys surveyed reported physical

fighting during the past year at school while only 28 percent of the girls reported the same. Twenty-three percent of the boys reported carrying knives and 3 percent carried guns within the last year of school at least once. There were not any reports of females carrying weapons such as knives or guns. Seven percent of the boys reported carrying a knife everyday while 1 percent carried a gun as cited in Beyer, 1996.

In 1987 the National Adolescent Student Health Survey surveyed 11,000 8th and 10th grade students in public and private schools in 20 states. The overall findings were similar. Forty-nine percent of the boys and 28 percent of the girls reported fighting within the past school year. This study, however, probed a bit further. They were able to conclude that 34 percent of the students had been threatened, 13 percent had been attacked, and 14 percent had been robbed within the last year while at school. In addition, 18 percent of the females had someone try to force sexual activity on them as cited in Pepperdine University, 1995.

The National Crime Victimization Survey reported the occurrence of school violence in 28 cities from 1974-1981. This study indicated that the level of school violence and crime remained fairly the same throughout that period of time. A supplement to this study was added later that surveyed 10,000 youths who attended school during the first six months of the 1988-89 school year. This study indicated that those students younger than 17 years of age were more likely to be victims of school delinquency/violence. In fact, ninth graders were the most likely to be victimized (Rossman, 1996).

The Schools and Staffing Survey conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics collected information for three academic years: 1987-88, 1990-91,

and 1993-94. The study presented teachers in public schools with a list of school related problems and asked for ratings of their severity. From the 1987-88 to the 1990-91 school year the percentage of public school teachers that reported physical fighting increased from 26 percent to 30 percent. This rate then rose again from 30 percent to 40 percent when surveys were calculated in 1993-94. Weapon possession reports from teachers about the students nearly doubled from 1990-91 to 1993-94. This study was also able to report that teachers that came from larger schools (750 students or more) reported more of these problems than those schools with 150 students or less as cited in Chandler, 1996.

The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System was a school-based study that surveyed 9-12th graders nationwide in 1993. This system was developed and administered by the Centers for Disease Control. They concluded that 4.4 percent of students missed at least one day of school because they felt unsafe. Approximately 12 percent carried a weapon to school and 16 percent had been involved in a fight. Seven percent had been injured or threatened directly by another student as cited in Rossman, 1996.

James Feldman reported conclusions to a Kidspace project in the Spring of 1996. Kidspace is an 114-year-old organization that helps children and families in crisis. They conducted a study in 1995 of 10 to 13 years olds randomly chosen nationwide to see what kids are concerned about. It was asserted that feeling safe, protected and nurtured is of critical importance to development. Worry and anxiety can interfere with learning and relationship development with peers, parents, and teachers. In addition, alcohol and drug use by children are associated with stress from worries (Feldman, 1996)

Sixty-five percent of respondents reflected that the most common concern of 10-13 year olds is that their parents might die. Fifty-seven percent report that the second most common concern is doing well in school (Feldman, 1996).

It is also clear that peer pressure is a primary concern. Such pressure is of primary concern because of what it leads to. For instance, two-thirds report that they would likely do something they would not normally do if pressured by friends (Feldman, 1996).

Such pressured involvement can lead to jeopardizing physical safety which, in turn, influences fear of harm. Forty-three percent of respondents fear being harmed by bullies. Twenty-two percent report changing their routines to avoid threat of harm and/or victimization at school (Feldman, 1996).

The National Institute of Justice reported in January of 1995 a study of weapon related victimizations in inner city high schools. They found that one in five inner city students surveyed had been shot at, stabbed, or otherwise injured with a weapon while at school or traveling to or from in the past few years. This study further identified who is victimized and why (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

Surveys were completed by 1591 students (758 males and 833 females) from ten inner city public high schools. These high schools were located in California, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Illinois. The schools were selected once identified as having a firearm incident in the recent past and whose students likely encountered gun-related violence. This study was not based upon probability samples. Also, participation was voluntary. The average respondent was sixteen years old and a sophomore in high school. Seventy-

five percent of respondents were African American, 16 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were white, and 7 percent described as other (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

It was determined that four in ten respondents had relatives who carried guns outside the home. One in three had friends that did the same. One in four considered guns easily available in their neighborhoods (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

While at school, two-thirds of the respondents knew someone who carried a weapon to school. One in four reported they carried weapons in school. While only one-third considered there to be a lot of violence at school, two-thirds reported personally knowing a victim of a school shooting, stabbing, or assault (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

Thirty percent of males and 16 percent of females offered self-reports of victimizations. More than one-half of these students experienced multi-victimizations. It was found that high-risk activities increased the likelihood for victimization. These activities included theft, weapon use and/or possession, and gang membership. Surprisingly drug-related activity was not connected. Also, neither knowing someone who carried a weapon nor perceiving school as violent were linked to victimization (National Institute of Justice, 1995).

The Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services published the results of a homicide study in May of 1997. The report was an attempt to provide information about juvenile homicide so that relevant violence prevention programming could be developed for Ohio. The data used came from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting system (UCR). The UCR tracks criminal offenses in the United States through the information submitted voluntarily by nationwide law enforcement agencies. Yet, all agencies do not necessarily

participate. Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR) are used when homicides are reported to the FBI. Here, detailed info is reported for each victim and offender, their relationship, if any, the circumstances of the incident, and weapon used. SHR data is filed monthly. The data collected over fifteen years in Ohio (1980-1994) illustrates how many homicides were reported, ages of victims and offenders, time of year, the weapon used, and under what circumstances children are most vulnerable to victimization and/or becoming an offender.

It was estimated that children under the age of four shared the same vulnerability as those children 13-17 years of age. However, most of these younger children were killed by caregivers while teens were killed by peers (Reichard, 1997).

When examining information on offenders it was established that the number of known offenders increased by 70 percent during the study's timetable. Males had a 600 percent greater risk for committing murder than did female counterparts. Blacks age 16-17 years old were the majority of offenders. Most offenders knew their victims. Sixty-six percent of offenders used guns. Arguments most frequently preceded the crime (Reichard, 1997).

Overall, the percentage of violent crime committed by juveniles is disproportionately high compared with their share of the population. In addition, victimization trends reflect that the older the juvenile the greater risk of being a victim of a homicide by a peer. Regardless of these facts, a reason as to why can not be offered (Reichard, 1997).

The facts have startling consequences. In both cities and suburbs kids are carrying weapons to feel safe, even to school. Many inner city children do not expect to

live past their teen years. Violence develops terminal thinking. There is a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that results (Reichard, 1997).

The Journal of School Health published results to a study about gun carrying in schools in January of 1996. Here, Martin stated that studies have found that 20-50 percent of students fear being hurt by other students at school. While both age and race have been linked to this fear, African Americans are more fearful than others are. Also, junior high students are more fearful than senior high students are. Furthermore, studies have also shown positive associations between fear of victimization and school avoidance (Martin, 1996).

Martin's study examined perceptions by students concerning gun possession in school and their emotional and behavioral responses. During 1991, two middle schools were surveyed. These schools were located in lower income, African American neighborhoods in North Carolina. Three hundred seventy-six students participated after parental consent was obtained. A questionnaire was used that included information from the Safe Schools Study Questionnaire and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Specific topic areas included questions about weapon possession at school, level/frequency of fear experienced, and if school avoidance strategies were used.

As a result, 28 percent of students believed other students had guns at school. While in reality, only 20 percent carried weapons. Two percent reported carrying guns. Weapon possession was explained as a means of protection. Thirty-six percent feared an attack by another student. Fifteen percent used school avoidance behavior. More boys than girls reported this behavior as well as weapon carrying. Younger students reported more fear-related behaviors than older students did (Martin, 1996).

In closing, the report states it is unclear whether these responses are problematic or normal responses to abnormal situations. It is also unclear whether the long-term consequences of such responses may be disrupting normal development (Martin, 1996).

Another study was published in 1996 by the Journal of School Health concerning handgun possessions at school. This particular study looked at rural Texas adolescents. The report stated that according to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 1990, 31.5 percent of male students and 8.1 percent of female students in United States' schools, grades 9-12, carried a weapon at least once during the last thirty days. According to the U.S. Justice Department, 100,000 students carry guns to school everyday. Between 1986-1990 an average of 51 incidents per year involving murder or severe injury at school involved handguns (Kingery, 1996).

While the number of these school incidents is small as compared to other community incidents, there is a concern about their effects. The emotional consequences of school violence are wide-reaching and long-lasting. They can include disruptions in learning as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Kingery, 1996).

In the Texas study, 1072 students participated in answering a questionnaire in their English classes. The respondents were from a Texas school system and consisted of 249 eighth grade females, 215 eighth grade males, 295 tenth grade females and 313 tenth grade males. Seventy percent were white, 17 percent African American, and 13 percent were described as other.

One hundred eleven respondents were eliminated from the study due to inconsistent answers. However, 85 students reported carrying handguns to school. They were compared to the 794 students who did not (Kingery, 1996).

As can be seen, students who carry weapons at school are different from those who do not. Those who find themselves in dangerous situations more often, who are more often victimized, and lack knowledge of effective strategies to avoid fighting defend themselves by carrying handguns. These students feel vulnerable and are trying to meet their personal safety needs (Kingery, 1996).

National Household Education Survey

The Journal of School Health published Nolin's school violence study in August of 1996. This study, based on research done in 1993, can also be found in the Creating Safe and Drug Free Schools Action Guide published in 1996. This study is the closest in relation to the present study that was done in Mahoning County.

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey an estimated 2.7 million violent crimes occur annually at or near schools. In 1993, Nolin used the National Household Education Survey (NHES:1993) and reported information on personal student victimization for students grades 6-12. A total of 6504 students were surveyed along with 126,870 parents. Weights were applied to make the survey estimates applicable to the national population of children grades 6-12.

Nolin's study expanded the definition of victimization used by the National Crime Victimization Survey from direct personal experience of threats or harm to include knowledge or witness of crime or incidents of bullying at school. This is based on the

premise asserted by the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth that youth may be victimized by the chronic presence of violence in their communities. This is applicable to the school community which, if plagued by violence, can disrupt the learning environment (Nolin, 1996).

Data was collected from January through April of 1993. Three types of incidents were examined: bullying, physical attacks, and robbery. First, students were asked if they had knowledge of these incidents occurring in their schools. Then they were asked if they ever witnessed such incidents at school or were ever victims of such an incident. Finally, students responded as to the worry and/or fear caused by such incidents and what strategies, if any, the students employ to combat threats and/or fear.

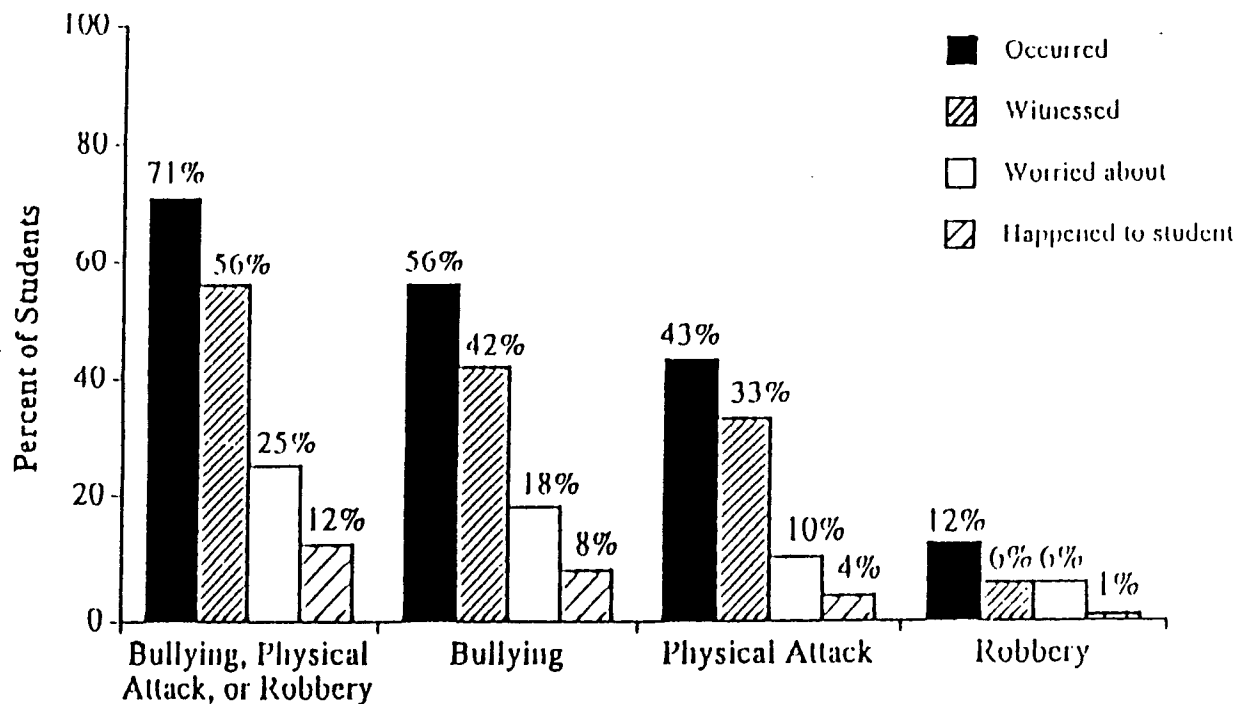
The sample was nationally representative of all civilian, noninstitutionalized persons in the United States. The sample was obtained by using random digit dialing. Interviews were conducted with age appropriate students once a screener gained information about the household from the parent(s)/guardian(s). Because nonsampling errors occur with telephone surveys (some people do not have telephones) it is important to note that 92 percent of students live in homes with phones (Nolin, 1996).

Table 1 illustrates the findings discussed below. Seventy-one percent of students reported having knowledge of bullying, physical attacks, and/or robbery at their schools. Fifty-six percent reported bullying had occurred, 43 percent knew of physical attacks, and 12 percent identified with robbery. Fifty-six percent also reported witnessing one of the three incident types. However, fear of threats or harm was only asserted by 25 percent of students. Worry was higher for middle school students than high school students (Nolin, 1996).

Twelve percent of students reported being victimized. Bullying was the most common and was reported by 8 percent of respondents. Robbery was less common, only being reported by 1 percent of students. Victimization was more common for younger students. Seventeen percent of middle school students as compared to 8 percent of high school students were personally victimized (Nolin, 1996).

Table 1

Sixth Through 12th Grade Students Reports of the Occurrence of, Witnessing of, Worrying about, or Victimization of, by Selected Incidents: 1993



*Students who reported more than one type of incident are included in the overall victimization percentages only one time.
Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Survey, 1993*

As cited in Nolin, 1996

Differences were also analyzed between public and private schools, schools of different sizes, and by racial and gender composition. In general, students in public schools had more experience with crime and threats than private school students. Students in larger schools had more experience with crime and threats than in smaller schools, yet there was no difference in worry. While this study asserts no difference between races for victimization and worry, a difference is noted for gender. While boys were more likely to be victimized than girls were, both boys and girls generally had similar levels of exposure and worry (Nolin, 1996).

Based on threats and/or actual acts students may be motivated to develop strategies to avoid harm. Students reported whether they took a special route to get to school, if they avoided certain places in the school building, if they avoided places on school grounds, if they stayed away from school-related events, stayed in a group while at school, or skipped school due to worry/fear. Half of the respondents indicated no strategy was used. The other half indicated that one or a combination of strategies were used. The most common strategies used were staying in groups and avoiding certain places. In accordance with the results on who is victimized, more younger students, more public school students, and more minority students report using strategies for protection (Nolin, 1996).

While statistics alone can not capture the devastating effects of violence on local communities, economies, neighborhoods, and quality of life, the present study will help to describe what is occurring in Mahoning County and relate it to national studies. The next chapter will summarize the method and design of the study conducted in Mahoning County.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND DESIGN

The possibility that students may experience violence while at school has sparked national concern. As discussed earlier, this concern is addressed in the National Education Goals for the year 2000. Identifying the incidence of violence at school among students and the extent of fear of violence among students is necessary in order to measure progress towards accomplishing that goal.

The methodology for this research involved identifying and describing those violent acts that have occurred in, have been witnessed, and/or cause worry for Mahoning County students. It also examined victimization as a result of these acts.

Instrumentation

The National Household Education Survey (NHES:1993) examined three types of incidents by telephone survey. These incidents were bullying, any kind of physical attack, and robbery. Participants were asked if they knew of each type of incident occurring in their school, if they had personally witnessed the incident, if they worried they would ever be a victim of such an incident, and if they had already been a victim of such an incident. These incidents may have occurred at school, at school-related events, or on the way to or from school.

The NHES:1993 provided a foundation for this local study. Adjustments were made in order for the research instrument to address the needs of Mahoning County. The questionnaire examined eight types of incidents: robbery, rape, sexual assault, attacks with weapons, attacks without weapons, bullying, carrying weapons to school, and carrying guns to school as experienced by students during the 1997-98 school year.

Race, gender, age, mode of transportation to school, locations of incidents, and protective measures were also examined. The complete questionnaire is located in Appendix A.

The philosophy for collecting data on each of the above incidents is similar between the NHES:1993 and this local study. Robbery and physical attacks were measured because they are occurrences commonly depicted by the media. However, the category of physical attack was further broken down into categories of rape, sexual assault, attack with a weapon, and an attack without a weapon due to the fact that students would be answering a questionnaire and not describing events in response to telephone dialogue with a researcher. Bullying was included in both because it contributes to an adverse school environment and can escalate into more overt incidents of violence (Nolin, 1996). Weapon and gun possession was examined to assess the potential lethality of violence occurring at the local level.

Descriptive information was collected such as age, race, and gender so that possible comparisons could be secured. Chi square tests were performed based on statistical differences at a .05 level for gender and school demographics (inner city versus suburban) for all incident categories.

Participants were further asked to describe where these violent acts occur. Here they were able to write in other locations in addition to those provided by the questionnaire. Students also provided information on any acts they may have committed, how they got to school each day, and how they deal with possible threats of violence. The locations and coping mechanisms were collected for purposes of identifying potential problem areas within each individual school. This information could be helpful in addressing violence prevention needs in the individual responding schools.

All data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The initial intent of this research was to collect data from both suburban and inner city students in the sixth and tenth grades. One inner city school system and two suburban school systems were selected and contacted. Meetings were held with each systems superintendent in order to gain permission to conduct the study. The inner city superintendent then identified two high schools and two middle schools that could participate. Three hundred ninety-three (393) students from the inner city tenth grade and 180 students from the inner city sixth grade were to participate.

Upon meeting with the first suburban school system, system A, it was determined that the superintendent would need to gain permission for the study from the school board. There was a potential of having approximately 200 sixth graders and 400 tenth graders participate. However, system A's school board denied permission for participation in the study. It was felt that this study had the potential to alarm parents.

The superintendent from the second suburban school system, system B, was more open to participation. However, while the superintendent granted permission, the actual decision to participate was passed on to the individual school principals. The potential for approximately 450 tenth graders and 200 sixth graders to participate existed. The high school principal denied participation asserting that time taken from academics was not possible for the sake of this study. However, one middle school principal committed to participation.

The questionnaire (see Appendix A), was distributed to each participating school in a packet. Copies of the instrument, instructions for the principals, instructions for the teachers and students, and self-addressed postage paid envelopes made up this packet. Short of the return envelopes, copies of these items can be found in Appendices A, B, and C. A total of 773 questionnaires were distributed. One hundred fifty-seven instruments (157) were returned from one inner city middle school and the suburban middle school, a response rate of 20.3 percent. None of the returned questionnaires had to be discarded for any reason. As a result, the sample size was 157.

Questionnaires were coded so that school systems could later be identified and compared, however, individual student anonymity was secured. Also, as a guarantee of confidentiality to the participating school systems, school identities are not being released and all data has been destroyed.

Parental consent forms were offered to each individual school system. All school systems waived the need for this consent (see Appendix D).

The next chapter will offer an analysis of the data collection results. First, a descriptive analysis of the sample is discussed. Second, findings for each major category of the questionnaire are presented. Finally, response comparisons based on school type and gender are summarized.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive Analysis of the Sample

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the data collected. There were 157 questionnaires returned from the schools. One school was an inner city middle school and the other was a suburban middle school. The children from the suburban middle school (58.6%) were slightly more represented than the children from the inner city middle school (41.4%). All of the participants were in the sixth grade (again it should be noted that high school data was requested, but access to the students was denied). Most of the students were 12 years old (76.4%). The other children were 11 years old (14.6%) and 13 years old (8.9%). The majority of the children were caucasian (89.9%). There were slightly more male (55.4%) than female (44.6%) students who participated in the study (see Table 2).

The questionnaire completed by the students had eight major questions. Each question will be discussed separately.

Knowledge that Described Acts Occurred

Figure 1 shows what acts the students reported that they had knowledge of occurring. Bullying was the violent act that a majority of the students knew occurred (78.9%, n=124). Many of the students also reported that they had knowledge about attacks without the use of weapons (76.4%, n=120). Thirty-five percent of the students reported that they had knowledge about robberies occurring (n=55).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on Current Data Set

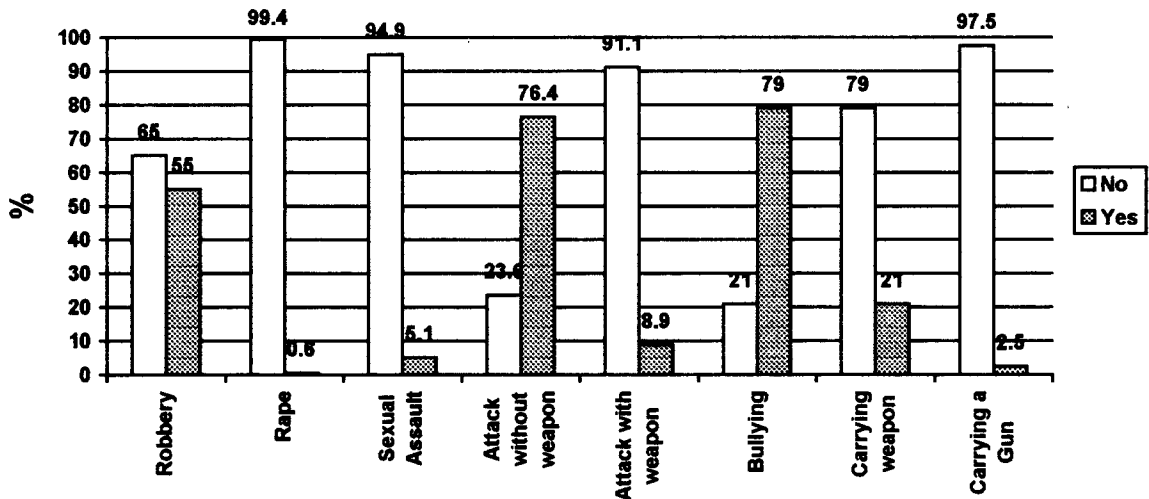
<i>VARIABLE</i>	<i>VALUE</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Grade	6 th	157	100%
Age	11	23	14.6%
	12	120	76.4%
	13	14	8.9%
Gender	Male	87	55.4%
	Female	70	44.6%
Race	White	141	89.8%
	Non-White	16	10.2%
School	Inner City	65	41.4%
	Suburban	92	58.6%

There were other violent acts that were less reported. One student reported that (s)he was aware of a rape that had occurred. Eight students (5%) reported that they had knowledge concerning sexual assaults occurring. Knowledge about students carrying weapons to school was also reported by participants. Thirty-three students (21%) reported that students carried weapons, not guns, while four students (2.5%) reported that they knew of students carrying guns to school.

These findings were somewhat higher than Nolin's findings published in 1996. Nolin reported that nationally 71 percent of students had knowledge of bullying, attacks, and robberies. Specifically, 56 percent had knowledge of bullying, 43 percent knew of attacks (weapon use was not specified), and 12 percent knew of robberies.

Figure 1

Knowledge that Described Acts Occurred (n=157)



Acts Students Witnessed

Students were then asked to describe those acts that they personally witnessed.

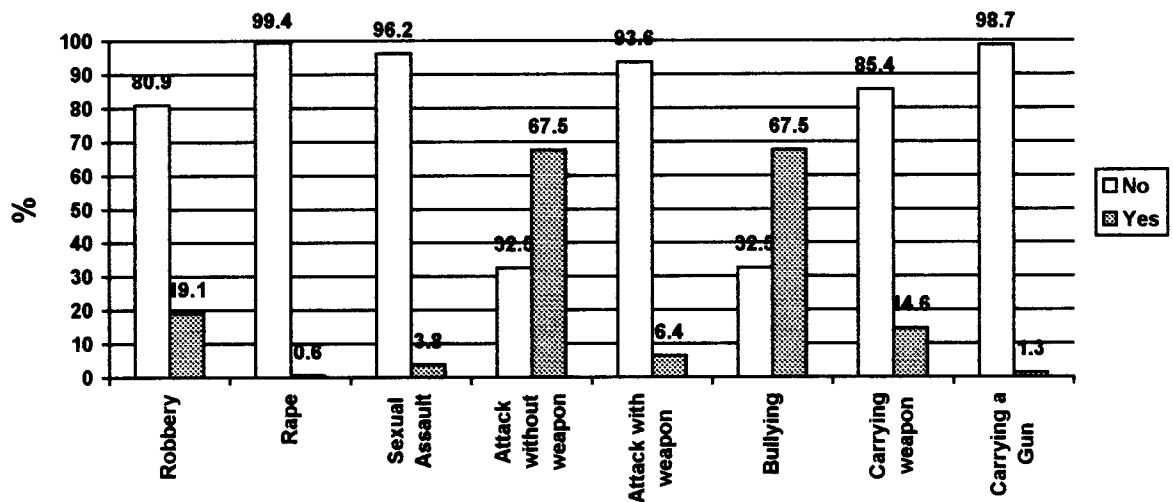
Figure 2 represents these findings. Again, bullying was the violent act most commonly

reported (67.5%, n=106). Attacks without weapons were also reported by 67.5 percent of the students (n=106). A number of students also reported witnessing robberies (19.1%, n=30). Twenty-three students reported witnessing a student with a weapon (14.6%).

Less witnessed acts included rape (.6%, n=1), sexual assaults (3.8%, n=6), and attacks with weapons (6.4%, n=10). Two students reported witnessing a student with a gun at school (1.3%).

Figure 2

Acts Students Witnessed (n=157)



These results agree with findings cited in Schwartz, 1997 that the most common forms of violence in schools is still bullying, fist fights, and shoving matches.

Worry That Described Acts Will Happen to Self

Figure 3 reflects the reported worry that students have that these sort of violent acts may happen to them. Over half of students were worried about being victims of bullying (54.1%, n=85). A similar number also reported concerns about attacks without

weapons (53.5%, n=84). Many students were also worried about robbery (41.4%, n=65) and attacks with weapons (35.7%, n=56).

Despite the low numbers of acts known and witnessed, a number of students were worried about rape (12.7%, n=20) and sexual assault (14%, n=22). As cited in Martin, 1996, a number of studies reflect that 20-50 percent of students fear being harmed at the hands of other students. This study's findings tend to agree.

The responses to the weapon and gun component to this part of the questionnaire raise some questions. Twenty students (12.7%) report that they are worried that they will carry a weapon to school. Twenty students (12.7%) are also worried that they may bring a gun to school. However, an examination of this area on the questionnaire reveals that this question may be unclear. It is unknown whether the students answered this about concerns about their own weapon or gun carrying potential or about fears of another student bringing a weapon or gun to school.

Described Acts Have Happened to Self

Figure 4 illustrates those students that have been victimized by the described violent acts. About one-half of the students reported that they had been bullied (48.4%, n=75). Fourteen percent reported being victims of robbery (n=22) while 24 students reported being victims of an attack without a weapon (15.3%). Two students reported being raped (1.3%). Sexual assaults were slightly higher (3.2%, n=5). One student reported being a victim of an attack with a weapon (0.6%).

Figure 3

Worry That the Described Acts Will Happen to Self (n=157)

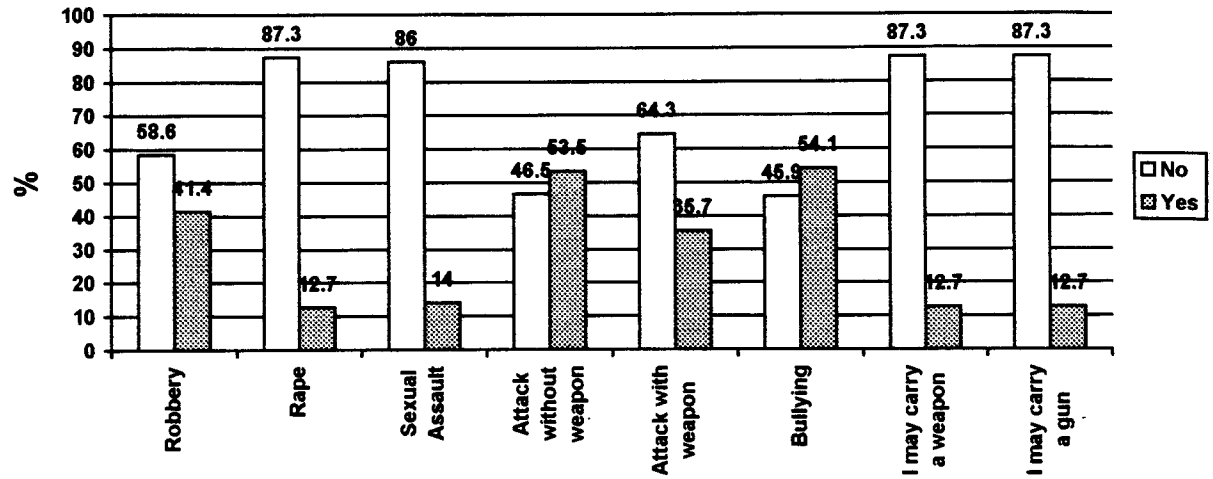
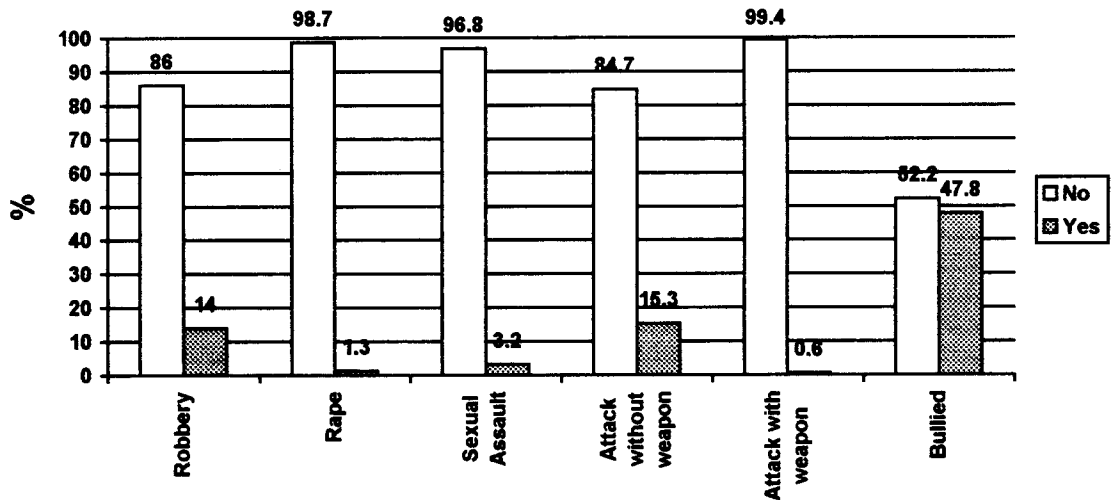


Figure 4

Described Acts Have Happened to Self (n=157)



These findings reflect similarities reported by Pepperdine University in 1995.

Their study reported that 13 percent of students had been attacked, 14 percent had been

robbed, and 18 percent had been sexually assaulted. This report was based on a study conducted in 1987.

Nolin, however, reported in 1996 that the most common form of victimization at school was being bullied (8% of respondents from national sample). Only one percent were reported victims of robberies.

Have Committed Described Acts

Despite the number of violent acts reported to occur, a relatively low number of students reported committing these acts. This could indicate that students in other grades are committing these acts, a small percentage of the students commit these acts, the perpetrators may be skipping school, skipping class, be on suspension, or may have been expelled, or that the respondents were resistant to report their guilt. Figure 5 illustrates these findings.

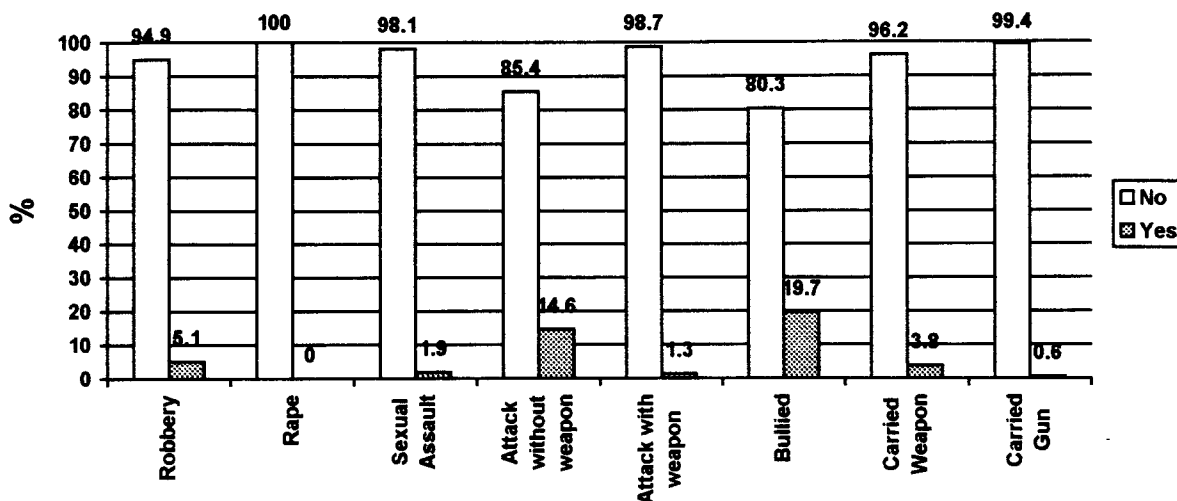
Thirty-one students reported that they had bullied another student (19.7%). Twenty-three students reported attacking another student (14.6%) while two students reported attacking with a weapon (1.3%). Robbery was admitted by eight respondents (5.1%). No one reported committing a rape but three students (1.9%) reported committing sexual assault.

Six students reported carrying a weapon other than a gun (3.8%) and one student reported carrying a gun (0.6%). This is a lower number than Martin (1996) reported. As cited in Martin's 1991 study, 20 percent of students carried weapons and two percent carried guns.

Again, a review of Figure 6 reflects a comparison of findings from Figures 1-5.

Figure 5

Have Committed Described Acts (Self) (n=157)



Location of Violent Acts

Students were also asked about the locations of the described violent acts. Figure 7 illustrates these findings. The most popular location listed was the bathroom (65.6%, n=103). Hallways (59.9%, n=94) and buses (52.2%, n=82) were also highly reported. The playground (37.6%, n=59) was reported to also be a host environment for violent acts. Similar ratings were reported for the cafeteria (29.3%, n=46) and the parking lot (29.9%, n=47). Locker rooms were reported by 23 students (14.6%). Only five (3.2%) students reported problems in the school gym, while twenty-one students reported acts to occur at the school stadium (13.4%).

A number of students responded that these acts occur in other locations (21.7%, n=34) and 33 students described these locations in a fill-in area on the questionnaire. The

most popular write-in description was the classroom (69.7%, n=33). Other locations included the auditorium, on field trips, at the bus stop, and outside of school.

Figure 6

Comparison of Figures 1-5

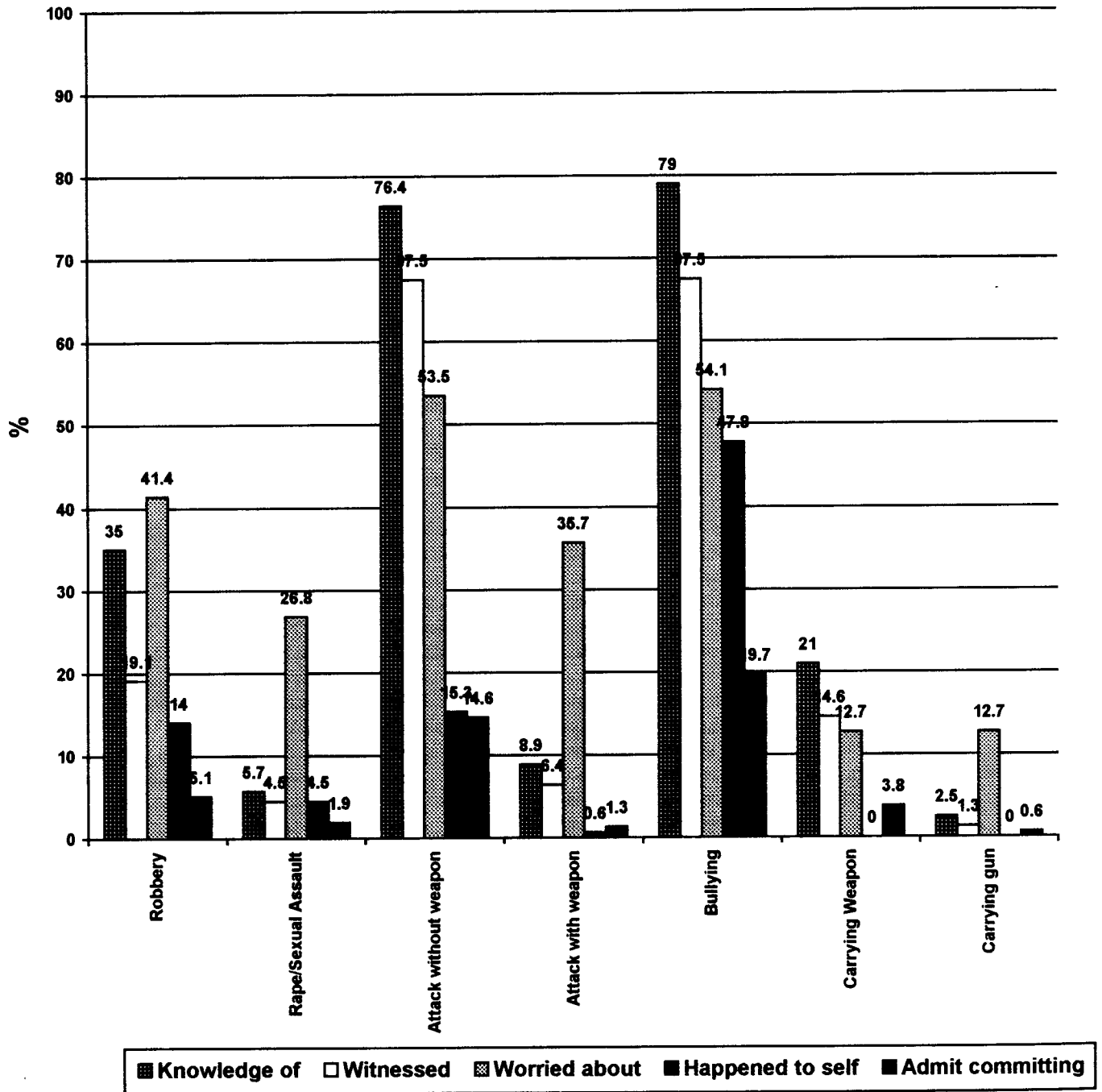
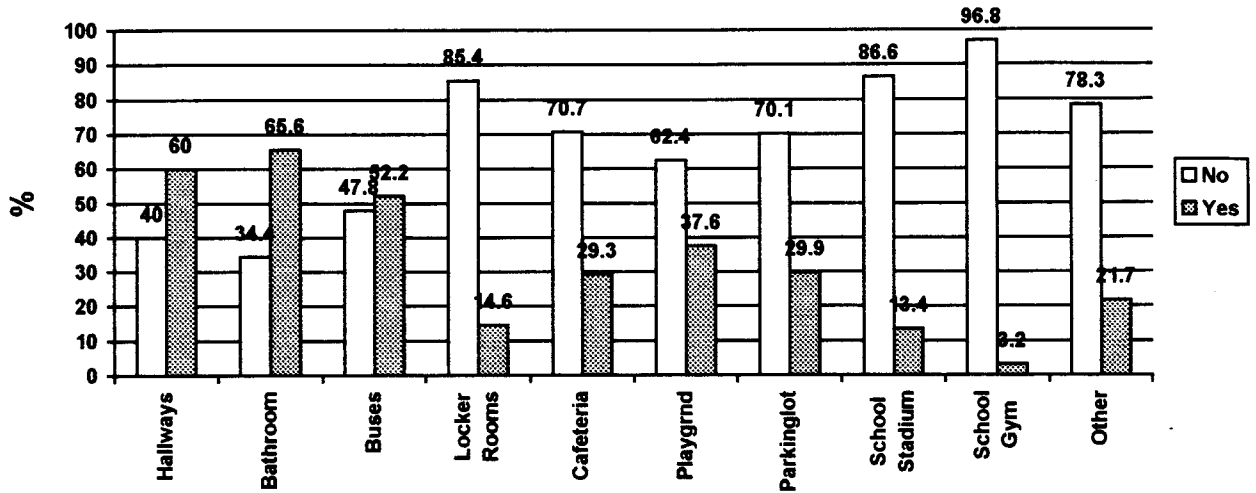


Figure 7

Location of Acts (n=157)



As cited in Futrell, 1996 the most common locations for violent acts to occur within the school are halls, under staircases, cafeteria, unattended classrooms, locker rooms, and restrooms. It does appear that these locations are highly represented in the current data. However, it is not known whether the classrooms that the students mentioned in this study were supervised or unsupervised by school staff.

Method of Getting to School

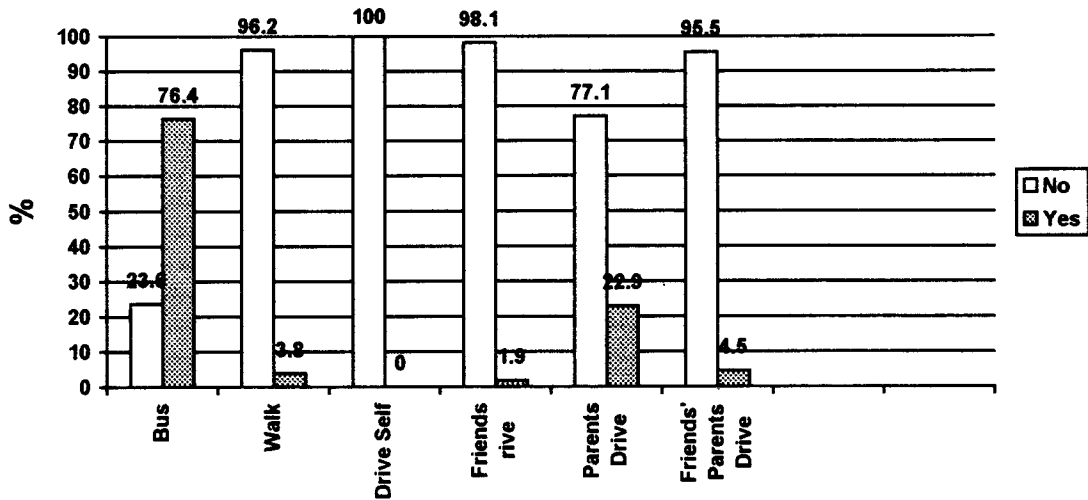
Students were also asked to describe how they got to school each day. A majority reported the use of a bus to get to and from school (76.4%, n=120). The second largest response describing transportation was being driven by parents (22.9%, n=36). None of the students reported driving themselves, which was expected due to the age of participants. However, three (1.9%) students reported that their friends drove them to school. It is possible that these students have older friends providing transportation.

Seven (4.5%) students reported friends' parents driving and six (3.8%) students walked.

Figure 8 illustrates this data.

Figure 8

Method of Getting to School



Self-Protection

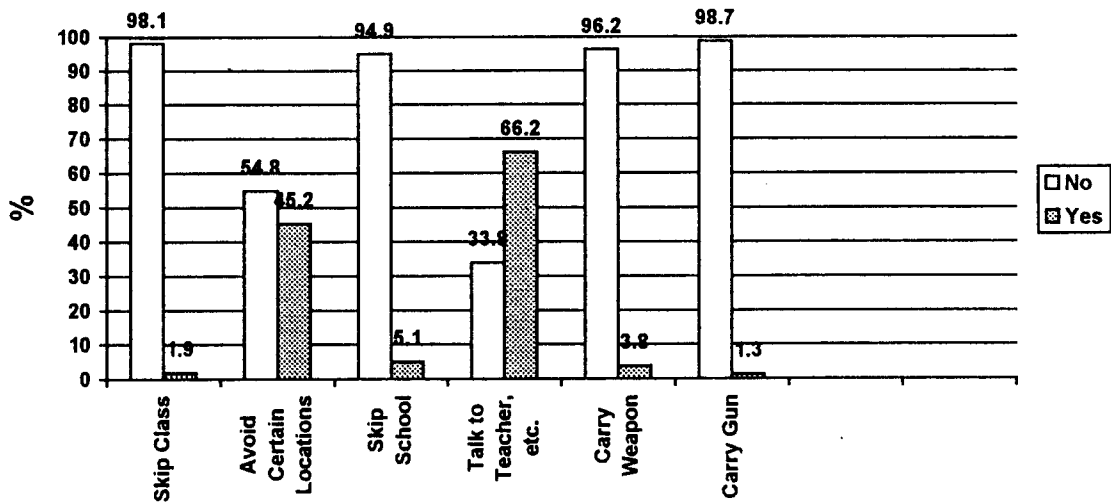
The final area addressed by the questionnaire was the methods students use to protect themselves if they fear being harmed by the described violent acts. These methods are presented in Figure 9.

The most frequently mentioned method of protecting oneself was talking to a teacher, principal, guidance counselor, or other adult (66.2%, n=104). While the questionnaire did not supply the category of another adult, several children checked this item and wrote it in. Several students indicated parents here as well. Another popular method of protection was avoiding certain locations (45.2%, n=71). This category also requested that students fill-in which areas are to be avoided. Thirty-six students filled in

such locations. The most popular answers here were the bathroom (19.4%, n=36), where questionable people are located (19.4%, n=36), hangouts of the troublemakers (13.8%, n=36), and the halls (13.8%, n=36). Other less mentioned locations were the playground, the parking lot, the bus, dark and/or unsupervised areas, and anywhere you may be afraid.

Figure 9

Methods Used to Protect Self (n=157)



A minority of the students reported less healthy behaviors. Three (1.9%) students reported they would skip class while eight (5.9%) reported they would skip school altogether. Six students (3.8%) reported they would carry a weapon. Students that filled this area in were asked to list what type of weapon they would carry. Three students listed a knife, one a fist filler, one a sharp stick, and one student indicated (s)he would use their fists as a weapon. Two (1.3%) students reported they would carry a gun.

Inner City Middle Schools versus Suburban Middle Schools

Now that the information has been presented as a whole from all the respondents, a comparison was conducted to see if there were statistically significant differences between the suburban middle school and the inner city middle school children. To determine these differences chi-square tests were utilized. These tests were determined to be the most appropriate due to both the descriptive nature of this study as well as the nominal nature of the data. This information will follow the order of the descriptive data just presented. First, a discussion about knowledge of acts will occur.

Inner City versus Suburban: Knowledge of Described Acts

When a comparison about knowledge of acts was conducted, the following knowledge of acts were statistically different between the two schools: knowledge of robberies, attacks without weapons, attacks with weapons, and carrying weapons (other than guns) to school.

Table 3 illustrates the differences between the schools for knowledge of robbery. Forty children from the suburban school (43.5%) reported knowledge of robbery. However, children from the inner city were less likely to know of robberies occurring at school (76.9% reported no knowledge).

Table 4 depicts the differences in knowledge of attacks without weapons. Here, 84.8 percent of the suburban students report having knowledge of such an attack. The inner city students were less likely to know of such an incident (35.4% reported no knowledge).

Table 3

Knowledge of a Robbery

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	23.1%	43.5%	35%
No	76.9%	56.5%	65%
$\chi^2=6.966, p\leq.008$			

Table 4

Knowledge of an Attack without Weapon

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	64.6%	84.8%	76.4%
No	35.4%	15.2%	23.6%
$\chi^2=8.600, p\leq.003$			

Knowledge of an attack with a weapon also reflects that suburban students were more likely to have knowledge (14.4% reported yes). All but one inner city student reported that they had no knowledge of an attack (98.5% answered no). Table 5 reflects these findings.

Knowledge of carrying weapons to school was greater than the knowledge of them being used in an attack. Table 6 illustrates that suburban students (27.2% responding yes) reported having knowledge of a weapon being carried. Inner city students (87.7% answered no) were less likely to have such knowledge.

Table 5

Knowledge of an Attack with Weapon

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	1.5%	14.1%	8.9%
No	98.5%	85.9%	91.1%
$\chi^2=7.436, p\leq.006$			

Table 6

Knowledge of Carrying a Weapon

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	12.3%	27.2%	21%
No	87.7%	72.8%	79%
$\chi^2=5.071, p\leq.024$			

Overall, students from the suburban schools were more aware of the listed acts than were students from the inner city.

Inner City Students versus Suburban: Students Witnessing Acts

Statistical differences only existed in two areas between the two sets of students: witnessing attacks with weapons and witnessing attacks without weapons. Almost 10 percent of the suburban students (9.8% answered yes) witnessed an attack with a weapon. On the other hand, only one student (1.5% stated yes) from the inner city reported witnessing such an act. Table 7 illustrates this.

Table 7

Witnessing an Attack with a Weapon

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	1.5%	9.8%	6.4%
No	98.5%	90.2%	93.6%
$\chi^2=4.341, p \leq .037$			

A much larger group of children from each school witnessed an attack without a weapon. Table 8 represents this category. However, suburban students (75% reported yes) were still more likely to have witnessed this act as well. Inner city students (43.1% responded no) were less likely to witness this form of violence.

Statistical differences were not found between the two groups of middle school students for worry about acts, victimization, or commission of acts.

Table 8

Witnessing an Attack without a Weapon

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	56.9%	75%	67.5%
No	43.1%	25%	32.5%
$\chi^2=5.675, p \leq .017$			

Inner City versus Suburban: Location of Acts

This item on the questionnaire listed a number of possible locations in which these described violent acts could occur. It also allowed for write in locations listed under a location labeled “other”. Statistical differences between the two schools was determined to exist for several locations: school stadium, locker rooms, bathrooms, bus, playgrounds, and other.

Tables 9 and 10 discuss incidents occurring at the school stadium and in locker rooms, respectively. It should be noted that these two locations exist only at the suburban school. It can also be noted that the occurrence of violence is perceived as similar in these two locations at the suburban school.

Incidents in the bathroom were more likely to be mentioned by suburban students (75% responded yes). Inner city students (47.7% answered no) were less likely to name the bathroom as a location for violence. Table 11 represents this location.

Table 9

Acts Occur at School Stadium

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	0%	22.8%	13.4%
No	100%	77.2%	86.6%
$\chi^2=17.128, p \leq .000$			

Table 10

Acts Occur in Locker Rooms

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	0%	25%	14.6%
No	100%	75%	85.4%
$\chi^2=19.039, p \leq .000$			

The bus was also described differently by the students (see Table 12). Suburban students (92.4% responded yes) were more likely to indicate violent acts occur on the bus. Inner city students (46.2% answered no) were less likely to describe acts as occurring on the bus. It should be noted here that more students from the suburbs are

riding the bus, while inner city students are using the bus, walking, and being driven by parents.

Table 11

Acts Occur in Bathrooms

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	52.3%	75%	65.6%
No	47.7%	25%	34.4%
$\chi^2=8.692, p\leq.003$			

Table 12

Acts Occur on the Bus

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	53.8%	92.4%	76.4%
No	46.2%	7.6%	23.6%
$\chi^2=31.416, p\leq.000$			

Reports on playground incidents also indicated differences. Here, inner city students (81.5% answered yes) were more likely to list the playground as an incident location. Suburban students (93.5%) were less likely to indicate the playground. Noting

the two school environments, the inner city did have a more structured and identifiable playground (swings, slides, basketball, etc.) and a recess period. The suburban school did not offer such recreational items and an actual playground area is not clearly defined or identified. Table 13 describes these differences.

The listing of “other” locations by students provided for the last area of difference in this category. Table 14 illustrates these findings. Inner city students (29.2% responded yes) were more likely to name other locations. Again, this question allowed for a fill-in response so that specific locations could be determined. The most common location listed was the classroom. Other locations included the auditorium, on field trips, at the bus stop, and outside of school. Suburban students (83.7% answered no) were less likely to indicate acts occurring in other locations. However, the locations of field trips and the bus stop came solely from the suburban students.

Table 13

Acts Occur on the Playground

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	81.5%	6.5%	37.6%
No	18.5%	93.5%	62.4%
$\chi^2=91.377, p<.000$			

Table 14

Acts Occur in Other Locations

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	29.2%	16.3%	21.7%
No	70.8%	83.7%	78.3%
$\chi^2=3.751, p\leq.053$			

Inner City versus Suburban: Methods of Getting to School

Only one area provided for statistical differences under this category. This relates to the above stated information regarding where acts occur as it pertains to bus transportation. Here we can see that inner city students (41.5 answered yes) were more likely to be driven to school by their parents. Suburban students (90.2%) were less likely to be driven. Remember, it appears that suburban students are riding the bus in greater numbers. Table 15 depicts these differences.

Inner City versus Suburban: Methods of Self-Protection

In the last area of statistical difference by school type, the method of greatest difference was the students' indication that they would go to an adult at school (teacher, guidance counselor, and/or principal) for assistance if they feared being harmed. It should be noted that several students noted beside this question that they would involve their parents as well. Inner city students (83.1% answered yes) were more likely to turn

to an adult for assistance. Suburban students (45.7% reported no) were less likely to request assistance from an adult. Table 16 represents these differences.

Table 15

Parents Drive to School

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	41.5%	9.8%	22.9%
No	58.5%	90.2%	77.1%
$\chi^2=21.735, p \leq .000$			

Table 16

Protect Self by Talking to a Teacher, etc.

Responses	School		Total n=157
	Inner City n=65	Suburban n=92	
Yes	83.1%	54.3%	66.2%
No	16.9%	45.7%	33.8%
$\chi^2=14.058, p \leq .000$			

Statistical Differences by Gender

Again, chi-square tests were used to determine statistical differences based on gender. Gender was determined to be an appropriate variable for differences based on

the well-established differences between boys and girls. Also, Nolin (1996) used gender as a variable and documented gender-based differences in her research. She stated that boys were more likely to be victimized. However, similar levels of exposure and worry were reported by both boys and girls. This information will be presented in the same order as the previous sections.

Gender Differences for Knowledge of Described Acts

Table 17 illustrates the differences between genders in knowledge of weapons, other than guns, being carried to school. Thirty-one percent of the males reported having knowledge of a weapon at school. In contrast, females (91.4% reported no) were less likely to have knowledge of such an act. It is possible that this is something the males may be more interested in discussing and more apt to know about, especially if it is also possible that the boys are bringing the weapons to school.

Table 17

Knowledge a Weapon was Carried to School

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	31%	8.6%	21%
No	69%	91.4%	79%
$\chi^2=11.790, p<.001$			

Gender Differences in Witnessing Described Acts

Again, male students (21.8% answered yes) were more likely to witness a weapon at school. Females (94.3% responded no) were less likely to witness a weapon. The possible reasons behind the differences in knowledge and interest of weapon carrying may apply here as well. Table 18 depicts these differences.

Table 18

Witnessed a Weapon was Carried to School

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	21.8%	5.7%	14.6%
No	78.2%	94.3%	85.4%
$\chi^2=8.066, p\leq.005$			

Gender Differences in Worry That Described Acts May Happen to Self

The differences in the responses to this question only occurred under the category of rape. Female students (18.6% responded yes) were more likely to be worried that they may be raped. Male students (92% answered no) were less likely to worry about being a victim of rape (see Table 19). Differences here are consistent with well-established research that more females are victims of rape, therefore, are often more concerned about their risk of victimization.

Gender Differences in Victimization

The only difference noted in this category is differences in being victims of

attacks without weapons. Twenty-three percent of males responded they had been victims of such an attack. In contrast, the majority of females (94.3%) reported they had not been victimized by an attack (see Table 20).

Table 19

Worry That Rape will Happen to Self

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	8%	18.6%	12.7%
No	92%	81.4%	87.3%
$\chi^2=3.866, p\leq.049$			

Table 20

Victim of an Attack without a Weapon

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	23%	5.7%	15.3%
No	77%	94.3%	84.7%
$\chi^2=8.938, p\leq.003$			

Gender Differences in Committing Described Acts

Overall, few students admitted to committing any of the described acts. However, when admissions were made, differences were noted in only two categories. First, male students (9.2% reported yes) were more likely to report committing robbery. No females reported any such action (100% answered no). Male students (24.1% answered yes) were also more likely to report attacking without a weapon. The majority of females (97.1% answered no) did not report such action.

Table 21

Admission of Committing Robbery

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	9.2%	0%	5.1%
No	90.8%	100%	94.9%
$\chi^2=5.965, p\leq.015$			

Gender Differences in Reporting Where Acts Occur

Under this category, three locations provided for significant differences. In all three females were more likely to report occurrences in hallways, parking lots, and in the “other” locations. Tables 23-25 illustrate these findings.

Female students (68.6% answered yes) were more likely to indicate hallways as locations for violence. Male students (47.1%) were less likely to report hallways (see Table 23). Parking lots were listed more frequently by female students (40% answered

yes). Male students (78.2% answered no) were less likely to indicate this location (see Table 24).

Table 22

Admission of an Attack without a Weapon

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	24.1%	2.9%	14.6%
No	75.9%	97.1%	85.4%
$\chi^2=14.049, p<.000$			

Table 23

Acts Occur in Hallways

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	52.9%	68.6%	60%
No	47.1%	31.4%	40%
$\chi^2=3.979, p<.046$			

Finally, “other” locations were indicated by more females (28.6% answered yes) as locations where violence occurs. When asked to list these other locations, only

females listed field trips as an “other” location. Male students (83.9% answered no) did not indicate other locations as often. Table 25 illustrates these differences.

Table 24

Acts Occur in Parking Lots

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	21.8%	40%	29.9%
No	78.2%	60%	70.1%
$\chi^2=6.100, p\leq.014$			

Table 25

Acts Occur in Other Locations

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	16.1%	28.6%	21.7%
No	83.9%	71.4%	78.3%
$\chi^2=3.561, p\leq.059$			

Gender Differences in Methods of Self-Protection

Table 26 illustrates the last area of statistical difference found when tested by gender as a variable. Females (80% responded yes) were more likely to talk to an adult if

they feared they were at risk of being victimized. Male students (44.8% answered no) were less likely to employ the assistance of an adult at school.

Table 26

Protect Self by Talking to a Teacher, etc.

Responses	Gender		Total n=157
	Male n=87	Female n=70	
Yes	55.2%	80%	66.2%
No	44.8%	20%	33.8%
$\chi^2=10.692, p \leq .001$			

Summary

This study indicates that there is a level of violence that needs to be addressed in Mahoning County Middle Schools. While overall the violence tends to be bullying and physical fighting without weapons, the discussion of the other listed acts indicates that some students have already experienced an escalation in the lethality of violence. Furthermore, it appears that the children from the suburban schools have more experience with these violent acts. This contradicts the stereotypical opinion that violence occurs only in the inner city schools.

When gender differences are discussed it is seen that the genders differ in perceptions and experiences with violence. This seems to have to do with the nature of the incident and whether or not a weapon was involved.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the occurrences of violent crime in Mahoning County Schools. As with any research, limitations exist in this study. Here limitations existed in the access to information and response rate and the understanding of incident definitions.

First, the initial intent was to collect data from sixth and tenth graders from several school systems. The resulting research was conducted on only sixth graders from only two school systems. Therefore, the resulting research is a better reflection of the occurrence of violence within middle schools in Mahoning County.

When meeting with the Superintendents of the school systems, a general concern was shared. The school systems did not want the results of the study to be available to the general public. The two systems that did participate were satisfied by the personal guarantees of confidentiality. However, the third system that denied participation altogether verbalized their concerns directly. They refused to participate because they did not want to alarm parents that these kinds of acts could happen at school. The schools that were supposed to participate but never responded may have also shared this viewpoint.

Hurdles in acknowledging school violence as a problem was discussed earlier and one is reminded of it here. People naturally want to be safe. To acknowledge that a school may not be as safe as one thinks, challenges one's sense of security. Denial

preserves this security. However, persistent denial and a false sense of security can be just as dangerous as the violent acts themselves (Gaustad, 1991).

Second, the true definitions of the violent incidents could have been misunderstood. For example, robbery and burglary are often confused and misused by the general public. A robbery refers to forcibly stealing another's belongings through force, the threat of violence, or intimidation. A burglary occurs when someone breaks into any building with the intent to commit a theft. Often, when people are burglarized they refer to the incident erroneously as a robbery. If respondents did not read and understand the definitions provided for each violent incident they may have mismarked the questionnaire, especially in the case of the robbery items. This could mean that the occurrence of robbery is lower than what the present study suggests.

In addition, participants may have misunderstood Question Three. It dealt with worry caused by the thoughts that any of the listed incidents may happen to the respondents. As discussed earlier, the items concerning weapon carrying and gun carrying could have been confusing. It is not known whether respondents that marked these items were concerned that they would carry these items or that they were worried that someone else would carry a weapon or gun.

Implications

It appears from the research that Mahoning County middle schools have a problem with bullying and physical attacks. It should be noted that attacks without weapons occur more frequently than those with weapons according to this data. While it may appear that this is good news compared to what the public may perceive from the

media, a false sense of security in these facts should be avoided. As discussed earlier, bullying affects its victims on a number of levels. It also effects the safety climate of the school (Pepperdine University, 1995). Bullying and physical violence can lead to more lethal forms of violence (Haynie, 1997).

It appears that these two middle schools, as well as other schools in Mahoning County, would benefit from individual violence and safety assessments. These assessments should be conducted by reviewing student, staff, and parental opinions and perceptions concerning the issue. A more in-depth review of events should also be conducted. Beyond the categories included in this study, the following items should be examined as well: offender/victim relationship, evidence of intent, possible motives, circumstances preceding event, drug involvement, resulting injury, severity of outcome, etc.

In addition, the physical environment of the school should be assessed. In this study, several locations were determined to be havens for violent acts. They included: hallways, bathrooms, buses, the playground, the cafeteria, parking lots, and the classrooms. These locations are consistent with locations cited in national research. Therefore, school administrators should pay particular attention to these areas and make either structural or supervisory adjustments.

Consistent with the recommendation for individual school research and assessment comes the strong recommendation for continued research in the area of youth violence, both at school and at large. Research lays the foundation for both prevention and reaction to these types of issues. While we guarantee a right to an education to

children, we need to deliver safety as well. Research is an essential step in this process. Research can lead to more effective prevention strategies.

Violence is a chance occurrence, in the sense that no specific characteristic, circumstance, or chain of events makes it inevitable. Violence can occur in those settings classified as low-risk (based on established risk factors) and fail to occur in those settings classified as high-risk (Roth, 1994).

Because there are various causes and risk factors associated with violence, it should be clear that no single program will prevent violence. Prevention programs should include many individuals and groups. They should occur in a variety of settings. School violence exists, essentially, because violence persists in society at large. While targeted approaches are a starting point, widespread efforts must be made. If violence exists in the community, its filtration into schools will always be a threat.

Prevention programs should have two general objectives. First they should attempt to prevent people from becoming perpetrators of violence. Second, they should aim to protect potential victims from violence. Programs need to teach peaceful strategies that resolve conflict and deflect violence. They need to heighten awareness of the effects and consequences of violent behavior. Finally, they should teach how to avoid conflict and dangerous situations or places (National Crime Prevention Council, 1994).

School leaders are responsible for creating and protecting a safe learning environment (Buckner, 1996). A safe environment provides an environment in which learning can thrive. As cited in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Report (1996):

School climate acts as a sort of catalyst, not visible in educational outcomes, but very much affecting the

process of teaching and learning that leads to those outcomes. Safety and order must prevail at all times. Only in such an environment may teaching and learning thrive. For starters, this means making high school a place where everyone feels secure and relaxed. Youngsters who are intimidated and fearful cannot be at ease; they cannot give education the single-minded attention needed for success. Nor can teachers teach with the required clarity of purpose if they are anxious and worried about their own safety and that of their students (5).

This confirms that there is no room for denial.

The Journal of School Health (1994) published recommendations for the implementation of school violence prevention programs. First, schools should establish violence prevention as a long-term priority. Second, community, student, family, and teacher involvement should be utilized. Third, violence prevention can be included as a part of school-based health services. Fourth, careful evaluations should be conducted on any programs or interventions being used. Fifth, allocate resources to those at highest risk. Sixth, establish a consistent, developmentally, and culturally sensitive curriculum teaching conflict management from elementary through high school. Finally, technological and environmental controls should be integrated into any prevention efforts (Coben, 1994).

Summary

While this study indicated that there are problems within the Mahoning County middle schools, it appears that timely interventions are possible in order to minimize the risk to students. While further academic research is called for, a certain need for further local research and assessment is substantiated. As stated previously, violence can occur

anywhere. It infiltrates every community. It is infiltrating Mahoning County. The key is to stop it before it escalates.

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Appendix A
Data Collection Instrument:
Student Questionnaire

4. Have any of the acts listed below happened to you this past school year? Check all that apply.

- Robbery (have had possessions forcibly stolen by another)
- Rape (forced to have sexual intercourse with someone against your will)
- Sexual assault (forced sexual contact other than intercourse)
- Attacked without a weapon
- An attack/fight with weapon(s)
- Bullied (intimidated or threatened with harm)

5. Have you committed one of these acts this past school year? Check all that apply.

- Robbery (forcibly stole another's belongings by threatening harm)
- Rape (forcibly having sexual intercourse with someone against his or her will)
- Sexual assault (forcing sexual contact other than intercourse)
- Attack or fight without a weapon
- An attack/fight with weapon(s)
- Bullying (intimidating or threatening harm upon someone to get something from him or her)
- Carrying a weapon other than a gun
- Carrying a gun

6. Where do most of the acts listed in the questions 1-4 occur? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hallways | <input type="checkbox"/> Playground |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bathroom | <input type="checkbox"/> Parking lot |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buses | <input type="checkbox"/> At school stadium |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Locker rooms | <input type="checkbox"/> At school gymnasium |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cafeteria | <input type="checkbox"/> List other _____ |

7. How do you get to school? Circle the method that occurs most often.

- Bus Walk Drive self Friends drive Parents drive Friends' parents drive

8. If you fear you will be harmed, how do you protect yourself? Check all that apply.

- Don't attend certain class(es)
- Avoid certain locations
Please list those _____
- Skip school
- Talk to a teacher, principal, and/or guidance counselor about the problem
- Carry a weapon other than a gun
Please list weapon(s) carried _____
- Carry a gun

Note: If any of these questions upset you and you want to discuss a particular issue, school guidance counselors are available.

Appendix B
Directive to School Principals

June 8, 1998

Dear Principals:

Your school is one of several schools that has been selected to conduct a school violence assessment for purposes of a research project through Youngstown State University's Criminal Justice Graduate Program. ***Your school's participation has been approved by the [name of school system] Schools Superintendent.*** The results will be kept confidential and will not be specifically named in the final project. All data, once collected and assessed, will be destroyed.

Students in the sixth and tenth grades are being asked to answer the questions on this questionnaire voluntarily. If any of the students feel uncomfortable doing so they may be excused from participation. It is hoped that the students will answer as truthfully as possible.

As you can see from reading the survey, the questions are similar yet they graduate from simple knowledge of an incident to direct personal victimization. The acts themselves have been defined on the questionnaire to better assist everyone involved. If students have any questions concerning the terms or how to mark something it is hoped that the teachers will be able to offer assistance.

This activity should only take ten minutes to complete. The Superintendent requests that these surveys be distributed and completed [whenever specified], possibly during a homeroom period. A self-addressed, postage paid envelope has been included so that your office can mail the completed surveys to my office for assessment purposes.

Instructions for the teachers have been enclosed for your convenience.

Thank you so much for assisting me in this endeavor. I realize that this is an extremely busy time of year and truly appreciate your efforts to help. If you have any questions concerning this study please contact either myself, my advisor (Dr. Tammy King, YSU Criminal Justice Professor, 742-xxxx), or the Superintendent himself.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Varley Gray
(330) 726-xxxx

Appendix C

Instructions to Teachers and Students

Dear Teachers:

Your school is one of several schools that has been selected to conduct a school violence assessment for purposes of a research project through Youngstown State University's Criminal Justice Graduate Program. The results will be compared to national studies of school violence. Participating school systems will be kept confidential and will not be specifically named in the final project. All data, once collected and assessed, will be destroyed.

Students in the sixth and tenth grades are being asked to answer the questions on this questionnaire voluntarily. If any of the students feel uncomfortable doing so they may be excused from participation. It is hoped that the students will answer as truthfully as possible.

As you can see from reading the survey, the questions are similar yet they graduate from simple knowledge of an incident to direct personal victimization. The acts themselves have been defined on the questionnaire to better assist everyone involved. If students have any questions concerning the terms or how to mark something it is hoped that the teachers will be able to offer assistance.

This activity should only take ten minutes to complete.

Instructions to be shared with the students:

This questionnaire is a part of a study being done by a Youngstown State University student. It is about school violence. You are being asked to complete the questions truthfully. This is a study only about what happens at school, on the way to or from school, or at school related functions. This questionnaire is only concerned about this school year. If you do not want to participate please just turn in a blank sheet. Do not put your names on the questionnaire. Read each question carefully and ask a question if you do not understand something. Please answer all questions on the front and back of the paper.

Thank you so much for your time and assistance. It is very much appreciated. Have a relaxing and enjoyable summer!

Appendix D
Parental Consent Form

**Youngstown State University
Human Subjects Research Committee**

Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

We are conducting a study to determine the level of school crime and violence within Mahoning County Schools. Your child attends one of the schools selected for the study. In this study your child will be asked to complete a questionnaire concerning school crime and violence. Their participation should take about ten minutes.

There are no risks to your child.

All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner, so that no one will be able to identify your child when the results are recorded/reported.

Your child's participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw simply contact one of the researchers listed below.

In addition, if you have any questions concerning this study please feel free to contact the below listed researchers at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Jennifer Varley Gray
Graduate Student
Department of Criminal Justice
Youngstown State University
(330) 726-xxxx

Dr. Tammy King
Graduate Advisor
Department of Criminal Justice
Youngstown State University
(330) 742-xxxx

I understand the study described above and agree to allow my child to participate with his/her assent.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Print your child's name _____

Grade _____

School _____

I understand what I must do in this study and I want to take part in the study.

Signature of Child

Date

Appendix E
Human Subjects Committee Approval



Youngstown State

August 3, 1998

Ms. Jennifer Varley
c/o Dr. Tammy King, Advisor
Department of Criminal Justice
UNIVERSITY

Dear Ms. Varley:

Thank you for responding to the Research Committee of Youngstown Protocol, HSRC #35-98, "School V reviewed the modifications you h your protocol now fully meets YS guidelines. Therefore, I am ple project has been approved.

Any changes in your research act to the Human Subjects Research C without HSRC approval except whe to human subjects. Any unantici subjects should also be promptly Research Committee.

We wish you well in your study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive, appearing to read 'Eric Lewandowski'.

Mr. Eric Lewandowski
Administrative Co-chair
Human Subjects Research Committee

cc

c: Dr. James Conser, Chair
Department of Criminal J
Dr. Tammy King, Advisor
File