

Youth Assembly

Action paper I on the protection of children from school violence

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Introduction

The topic of school violence is one that has come to the attention of communities in recent decades due to the increase of incidents and the recurrence of extreme cases such as shootings. It has become a serious problem which includes violence between school students such as emotional and physical ridicule or bullying, assaults, threats and sexual offenses. The term can also refer to physical attacks by students towards school staff, as well as the less apparent components of graffiti and vandalism, trespassing and gangs. Victims can suffer serious injury, significant social and emotional damage, or in some cases, even death. Aside from interfering with the learning process, the long range effects of school violence affect all of society since, statistically, children who engage in bullying behavior are more likely to become adult criminals. According to the majority of the research to date, many children who display violent behavior at school are exposed to violence or abuse outside of school and are repeating the violent behavior of adults.

Definition of Key-Terms

As it has been foretold, school violence can take many forms such as:

- Indirect violence which includes
 - Verbal violence (racial slurs, cursing, insults)
 - Social violence (isolating a student, spreading rumors, making details of one's personal life public)
- Physical violence both moderate (pushing, shoving) and severe
- Property related violence such as stealing and vandalizing one's belongings
- Sexual violence including verbal harassment and physical forms of unwanted sexual behaviors and
- Weapon related violence which can include the possession and use of a range of weapons, such as pocket knives and guns
- Gang violence: a youth gang can be considered as a collectivity of primarily adolescents and young adults who interact frequently are frequently and deliberately involved in illegal activities share a common

collective identity and typically adopt certain methods of identification and/or claim control over certain areas.

Background Information

Research on youth violence in general has given us a better understanding of the factors that increase the chances of a young person becoming violent but are not necessarily direct causes of youth violence or school violence. These factors can stem from the individual himself (Individual Risk Factors) and include history of early aggressive behavior, association with delinquent peers, low commitment to school or school failure, exposure to violence and conflict in the family, social rejection by peers and deficits in social, cognitive, or information-processing abilities. Risk factors may also come from the person's relationship with his family (Relationship Risk Factors) and include harsh, lax, or inconsistent disciplinary practices and low parental involvement, education and income. Furthermore, there are the Community/Societal Risk Factors such as diminished economic opportunities, high concentrations of poor residents, low levels of community participation and socially disorganized neighborhoods.

Relevant Events

Regarding the school environment the data collected by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Justice show the following results.

- Approximately 38% of public schools reported at least one incident of violence to police during 2005-2006.
- In 2007, 23% of students reported gangs at their schools.
- From 2003-2004, 10% of teachers in city schools reported that they were threatened with injury by students, compared with 6% of teachers in suburban schools, and 5% in rural schools

As far as victimization is concerned the following results emerged:

Nonfatal Victimization

- In 2006, there were 29 violent crimes at school per 1,000 students. This included rape, both sexual and aggravated assault, and robbery.
- In 2007, about 32% of students reported being bullied during the school year.
- About 4% of students reported being cyber-bullied in 2007.

- Children who bully are more likely to get into fights, vandalize property, skip school, and drop out of school.

Violent Deaths

- During the past seven years, 116 students were killed in 109 separate incidents—an average of 16.5 student homicides each year.
- Rates of school-associated student homicides decreased between 1992 and 2006. However, they have remained relatively stable in recent years. Rates were significantly higher for males, students in secondary schools, and students in central cities.
- Most school-associated violent deaths occur during transition times—before and after the school day and during lunch.
- Violent deaths are more likely to occur at the start of each semester.
- Nearly 50% of homicide perpetrators gave some type of warning signal, including making a threat or leaving a note, prior to the event.

Possible Solutions

The key elements of preventing school violence are the awareness of potentially violent behavior as well as early intervention. Victims, as well as observers usually do not report the incidents due to shame, embarrassment and fear of escalated violence. Therefore prevention efforts should strive to reduce risk factors and promote protective factors at the individual level as well as the relationship, community, and societal levels.

Individual level strategies can include special programs that are based on school prevention and aim to reduce aggression and violent behavior among students. These programs are delivered to all students in a school or a particular grade and focus on many areas such as emotional self-awareness and control, self-esteem, positive social skills as well as social problem solving, conflict resolution, and teamwork.

Regarding the relationship level prevention strategies, family-based interventions can help families gain a better level of communication among their members. It has been shown that such interventions which start early and recognize the diverse factors that influence a family can have substantial, long-term effects in reducing violent behavior. What is more, mentoring, “the pairing of a young person with a volunteer who acts as a supportive, nonjudgmental role model, when implemented correctly, can significantly

“improve school attendance and performance, reduce violent behavior, decrease the likelihood of drug use, and improve relationships with parents and friends” .

Last but not least, as far as community and societal levels are concerned, prevention strategies should include improvement of the school’s social environment such as classroom management practices, promoting cooperative learning techniques, teacher/staffing practices, student monitoring and supervision, and reducing bullying by involving parents/caregivers as well as the environmental design of the school.

One should also keep in mind that schools are part of a larger community environment by which they are influenced. Therefore, measures to change the broader community environment should be implemented and may include increasing community participation; providing more formal and informal supervision for youth through afterschool programs and recreational opportunities; reducing youth access to alcohol and drugs; and improving financial, housing, and employment opportunities in impoverished areas.

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