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STUDENT AND STAFF VICTIMIZATION

NSSC RESOURCE PAPER

National School Safety Center
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NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

STUDENT AND STAFF VICTIMIZATION

The student-related school problems of bygone days mostly consisted of a few playground squabbles and some schoolboy pranks. But a mischievous Tom Sawyer-type is the least of our worries now.

These days our schools face serious, daily threats to the safety of students and staff. Too many schools are having to deal with problems of crime, violence, vandalism and drug abuse. As these problems extend off the streets and into the nation's educational institutions, the victims affected include more students and school employees.

Only in recent years has the nation focused attention on crime victims and their rights. The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime was established in 1982 and prior to that, in 1976, the National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) was founded as an "umbrella" organization to coordinate victim advocacy efforts nationwide.

No individual or group of people is immune from possible victimization--not even our schoolchildren.

When crime and violence invade our campuses, students are victimized twice--once when they become actual victims of crime, violence, disruption or fear; and again when their education is interrupted.

No matter how excellent teachers and their instructional tools may be, learning is hampered when teachers are forced to teach and students are forced to learn in settings of fear, crime and violence.

Defining what is meant by student and staff victimization is an essential step toward solving the problem. In a very general sense, students and school employees become victims when experiencing a crime perpetrated against them or when they are threatened by the perpetration of a crime. On school grounds, these crimes most often are assaults, robberies and extortion.

Assaults are perhaps the least understood crimes occurring on our nation's campuses. All too often, educators are not trained to recognize the legal difference between fights and assaults, nor at what point a fight escalates into an assault. Most realize the importance of such a differentiation--fighting is non-criminal misconduct involving the mutual participation of all parties. An assault, however, is both a criminal and violent offense involving unlawful physical or violent actions that vary considerably in severity, ranging from simple assaults such as jostling, verbal abuse, tearing clothes or seizing a person, to serious assaults such as beatings, rape or murder.

A robbery occurs when something of value is taken from a person by using force or violence. Robbery can include extortion, which involves the use of mild threats or intimidation to demand money or something of value from another person. One of the most common occurrences is the extorting of lunch money by some students.

All three of these crimes involve another important but misunderstood aspect of victimization--the fear factor, or the fear expressed by students and school employees of being bothered or hurt while on school grounds.

EXTENT OF THE VICTIMIZATION PROBLEM

The pervasiveness of victimization problems has been explored in several studies conducted over the past decade. The earliest of these studies was the 1978 Violent Schools--Safe Schools, conducted by the National Institute of Education. The report highlighted a series of startling statistics about criminal activity in our nation's schools during a one-month period including the following:

- * Approximately 282,000 secondary students reported being attacked.
- * Almost 8 percent of urban junior and senior high school students missed at least one day of school a month because they were afraid to go to school.
- * Approximately 5,200 secondary teachers were physically attacked, 1,000 of whom were injured seriously enough to require medical attention.
- * About 6,000 secondary teachers had something taken by force, weapons or threat.
- * Approximately 525,000 attacks, shakedowns and robberies occurred in public secondary schools in one month.

The report also concluded that the risk of violence to teen-agers was greater in school than elsewhere. While an average of 21 percent of all secondary students said they avoided restrooms and were afraid of being bothered or hurt at school, 12 percent of teachers hesitated to confront misbehaving students because of fear of reprisal.

In 1983, the Cabinet Council on Human Resources, Working Group on School Violence and Discipline, was created to advise President Reagan about the nature of the school problem and how the federal government should be involved in any prevention and control efforts.

In 1984, the Working Group's Report was submitted to the presi-

dent. Among its basic premises were the belief that an orderly school environment was essential to learning; that disorder in some American schools was significant enough to pose obstacles to positive educational experiences; and that no amount of money, teacher raises or improved facilities, materials or curricula will encourage students to learn if they are distracted or fearful.

The first National Adolescent Student Health Survey, conducted during the fall of 1987, updates the Violent Schools--Safe Schools study and confirms that crime and violence continue to be serious problems for today's students. The study, which surveyed approximately 11,000 eight-grade and tenth-grade students in 20 states, revealed the following statistics:

- * More than one-third (34 percent) reported that someone threatened to hurt them, while 14 percent reported being robbed and 13 percent reported being attacked at school or on a school bus at least once during the past year.
- * Almost half of the boys (49 percent) and about one-fourth of the girls (28 percent) said they had been in a fight at least once during the last year.
- * Four out of 10 boys (41 percent) and nearly one-fourth of the girls (24 percent) reported that they could obtain a handgun. Three percent of the boys surveyed said they had brought a handgun to school, and 23 percent of the boys said they had carried a knife to school at least once during the past year.

Millions of violent incidents occur on school campuses nationwide each year. James R. Wetzel, director of the Center for Demographic Studies at the U.S. Bureau of the Census, stated in the article "Kids and Crime" (School Safety, Spring 1988):

"Nearly 3 million incidents of attempted or completed street crime (which is defined as assault, rape, robbery and theft) took place inside schools or on school property during 1986, according to National Crime Survey respondents."

Wetzel goes on to say, "Among the more serious personal victimizations were an estimated 61,500 aggravated assaults (25,500 with injury), 44,000 robberies (8,700 with injury) and more than 300,000 simple assaults (80,900 with injury)... A weapon was used in more than 70,000 of these violent crimes, including more than 20,000 with knives and an estimated 1,700 with guns."

If they ever were once "islands of safety," schools certainly are no longer. Urban, suburban and rural communities across the country are experiencing school crime and violence firsthand. Some incidents that have occurred in recent months include:

- * A 15-year-old high school student in Pinellas Park, Florida, opened fire during a confrontation with school officials in the cafeteria at lunch, killing an assistant principal and wounding another administrator and a teacher.
- * Just weeks before she was to retire, a 71-year-old Brooklyn schoolteacher suffered extensive damage to her hand when she tried to save her students from an M-80 firecracker--the equivalent of a quarter stick of dynamite--that was thrown into her classroom by student pranksters.
- * A school bus driver in St. Louis, Missouri, had to pull over after a fight broke out between two teen-age girls, one armed with a meat cleaver and the other with a club. One of the students received a cut on her arm.
- * In Pasadena, Texas, a 14-year-old junior high school student whipped a snub-nosed .38-caliber pistol out of his jacket and held the assistant principal hostage for two hours.
- * A pipe bomb hidden inside a tennis shoe in a school locker exploded and seriously injured a Buffalo, N.Y., youth when the boy touched the shoe to see what was inside.

Dr. Alfred M. Bloch, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, says he has examined more than 1,000 teachers, many of whom describe the setting in which they teach as the "combat zone." They describe symptoms of fatigue, of headaches, of gastrointestinal problems, of cardiovascular problems, hypertension," Bloch says. "What we are seeing is very much akin to the kind of stress that soldiers in World War II and the Korean War had experienced."

It is important to note that the educational community is not in agreement about whether victimization figures have actually increased or decreased since the Violent Schools--Safe Schools study. However, there is agreement that any level of victimization is unacceptable.

Everybody in school is a potential victim. Research indicates, however, that students more frequently are victims of violent crime in school than are teachers. But younger, less experienced teachers are more likely to be attacked or robbed than their older colleagues.

Statistics indicate male students are more than twice as likely to be victims of both robbery and assault as female students, and junior high school students are twice as likely to be robbed or assaulted as senior high students.

Minority students are more likely to be attacked or robbed at school than white students. This probably is because they are

more likely to attend schools in low-income neighborhoods, according to a 1983 study by Jackson Toby, school crime researcher. Also, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of violent school crimes are recognized by their victims, indicating most of the offenders are fellow students, not intruders.

When an intruder does come on campus, the results can be disastrous. In the worst recorded incident of school violence, a man carrying an AK-47 semi-automatic assault rifle walked onto an elementary school campus in Stockton, California, on January 17, 1989, and opened fire. Less than five minutes later, the gunman had killed five children and injured 29 other students and a teacher--15 seriously--before fatally shooting himself.

Several other armed intruders have terrorized schools in recent months as well:

- * A woman entered a second-grade classroom at Hubbard Woods Elementary School in Winnetka, Illinois, on May 21, 1988, and went on a shooting rampage that claimed the life of an 8-year-old student and injured six others before killing herself.
- * The crowded cafeteria of a Greenwood, South Carolina, elementary school was the site of a September 26, 1988, shooting spree in which a 19-year-old armed youth left two 8-year-old students dead and nine other people injured.
- * Just four days before the South Carolina attack, a man stalked a school in Chicago, killing four people and injuring two others before a wounded police officer gunned him down.
- * In Mascotte, Florida, on October 3, 1988, a gunman dressed in a camouflage outfit opened fire on a school playground during a third-grade gym class and seriously injured a girl before he fled.

Former President Ronald Reagan acknowledged the seriousness of the issue in a speech to secondary school principals given during his presidency: "As long as one teacher is assaulted, one classroom disrupted, or one student is attacked, then I must and will speak out to give you the support you need to enforce discipline in our schools. I can't say it too forcefully, to get learning back into our schools, we must get crime and violence out."

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As educators, judges and lawmakers begin to recognize students have an undeniable right to a safe school environment, our legal system has turned its attention to the plight of school crime and violence victims.

The United State Supreme Court's recognition of school safety as an issue is reflected in its statement "maintaining order in the classroom has never been easy, but in recent years school disorder has taken particularly ugly forms: drug use and violent crime in the schools have become major problems."

In the words of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger, "The serious challenge of restoring a safe school environment has begun to reshape the law." This can be seen most notably in California, where the drive to promote safe schools led to an amendment of the state constitution that says students have "the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure and peaceful." In other states a right to safe schools is being developed through court decisions.

California's "Right to Safe Schools" amendment was part of Proposition 8, which was passed by voters in 1982. The initiative, known as "The Victims' Bill of Rights," was designed to "restore victims' rights and help bring violent crime under control."

It is a school's responsibility to make sure students are provided educational opportunities in a peaceful learning environment. In its final report, dated December 1982, the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime made recommendations for federal and state action as well as for various agencies and institutions, including schools.

"Educators carry a public trust in the instruction of children," states the report. "This trust means that educators are obliged to teach shared cultural values in an environment that is both scholarly and safe."

The task force made several recommendations to help educators lessen crime's impact and reduce the number of victims:

1. School authorities should develop guidelines for statistical tracking and prompt reporting of violent crimes committed in schools, crimes committed against school personnel, and the possession of weapons or narcotics.
2. School authorities should check the arrest and conviction records for sexual assault, child molestation or pornography offenses of anyone applying for work in a school, including contractors doing work within regular proximity to students, and make submission to such a check a precondition for employment.
3. Educators should develop and provide courses on the problems, needs and legal interests of victims of crime.
4. School authorities should be mindful of their responsibility to make students aware of how they can avoid being victimized by crime.

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH VICTIMIZATION

Understanding what comprises student and school employee victimization, as well as the extent of criminal activities, is just the first step to solving the problem. Educators then must assess the nature of their particular problem--when and where victimization is occurring, how often, and why--before they can plan and carry out appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

The most effective way of crime tracking is by keeping accurate and regular victimization records through a formal procedure known as incident reporting. Incident reporting requires that school districts design and implement a standardized system for reporting and regularly analyzing all criminal incidents, including victimization.

Individual school administrators must be equally committed to implementing the adopted incident reporting system on their campuses. To incur such a commitment, the school board should pass a written districtwide policy requiring school personnel to report all criminal and violent incidents through a standardized procedure. Once such a policy is passed, it remains for district and school administrators to work with law enforcement officials to design and implement a cooperative reporting system.

Once district and school personnel have assessed their particular victimization problems, they must explore a wide range of prevention, intervention and response strategies that have already been successful in other schools. Over the past decade, the issue of student and school employee victimization has prompted a wide array of programs.

Prevention Strategies

1. Clear school policies

Written school policies should be distributed to students, parents and community members so it is clear that any assault or violent action (as defined by state penal codes or local ordinances) is a crime and will result in arrest, as well as vigorous school efforts to help prosecute the offender.

2. Workshops and seminars

Teachers and students can learn how to control anger in a potentially explosive situation through the help of workshops and seminars conducted by law enforcement, human relations managers and medical personnel.

3. Specific assignment of roles

School officials should have a plan that outlines who will respond to various types of emergencies related to student

and staff victimization. Knowing what to do and who is responsible can help contain not only the existing crises, but it also can prevent successive crises.

4. Peer-tutoring corps

Secondary students are trained by educators, community members and law enforcement officers in crime prevention tactics and anti-victimization strategies. Corps members give speeches, lectures and demonstrations to elementary schools and community-based organizations. In some cases, corps members become trained actors and present their message through theatrical vignettes.

5. Adults on campus

Having high visibility of adults on campus at all times ensures that students know criminal activity will be witnessed and handled strictly according to school rules.

6. Effective communication system

An effective system of communication should be established between the school's front office and all classrooms, and between school peace officers and the front office, so that adult supervisors and security personnel can maintain open contact for back-up assistance.

5. Community committee or task force

Form a community delinquency prevention committee or task force comprised of community members, educators, students and law enforcers who design, coordinate and implement a community-wide delinquency prevention project.

6. Law-related education curricula

Establish curricula designed to create an understanding of and support for the legal, political and educational institutions of America's constitutional democracy and the values, processes and principles upon which they were founded.

7. Educator in-service training

Hold in-service training aimed at changing how teachers perceive and relate to nonconforming, troubled youth in the daily school routine, as well as developing and implementing more responsive procedures and techniques for positive interaction with non-conforming students.

8. Special student activities

Hold lunch time, on-campus activities and after school, com-

munity activities designed to encourage students, school employees and community members to communicate and participate in recreational activities together in a positive manner.

9. Assertiveness training

Conduct assertiveness training for students and school personnel to help people learn how to stand up for their beliefs and rights in a non-aggressive, positive and assertive manner.

10. Safe corridor programs

Establish a program whereby educators, law enforcers and community members identify certain safe pathways between school and home and provide assistance when going to and from school.

11. Buddy system

Coordinate a system with students that teams a victim with other students while they pass through high-risk areas on the school campus.

12. Victim witness programs

Establish programs that train youthful and adult volunteers to act as appropriate witnesses.

Intervention Strategies

Intervening in assaultive and other violent behavior is one of the most difficult strategies for school personnel. Often, it is easier to prevent or respond to a situation than it is to intervene or divert. However, some successful intervention strategies have been identified:

1. Teacher in-service training

Provide in-service training designed to help teachers know how to keep a fight from escalating into an assault.

2. Arbitration and mediation

Form teams of educators, law enforcers and community members that provide specialized services to identified violence-prone students or groups, as well to potential victims of violence.

3. Community newsletter

A monthly newsletter published by the school helps inform parents and community members of arbitration and mediation efforts, victimization-avoidance strategies or workshops, and school involvement in community intervention efforts.

4. Safe school legislation

Support legislation, such as the California model, that mandates the right of students to attend safe schools. Such legislation should be written cooperatively by educators, law enforcers, attorneys and community members who, in turn, lobby their state legislators for passage.

Response Strategies

Responding to assaults and other violent school crimes places any school in a short and long-term crises situation. To comprehensively deal with such a situation, both short-term response strategies designed to immediately handle the incident and long-term strategies created to punish offenders and counsel the victims are necessary. Successful response strategies include:

1. Close and collaborative partnership with law enforcement

Law enforcement always should be notified when a violent crime occurs at school. Offenders should know that committing an act of violence--at school or elsewhere--is illegal and will be dealt with by law enforcement.

2. Immediate arrest

The perpetrator should be arrested immediately, then a brief explanation of the facts should be given to students, school personnel, parents of offending youth and community groups.

3. Immediate media contact

The principal should immediately call a trusted local reporter from whom an accurate account of the campus problem may be expected.

4. Interagency team for crises referrals

Schools, law enforcement and health professionals work together to form a team to provide referral services for offenders and victims.

5. Safe schools/internal affairs department

Districts form such departments with the aim of making schools safer and more conducive to a positive educational process. Staff activities would include assisting school administrators with investigating serious crimes; teaching crime prevention and anti-victimization classes to students and school personnel; and serving as liaisons with appropriate law enforcement and social service agencies after a crime is committed.

6. Youth re-entry program

Students who are institutionalized for an assaultive or other violent crime should be enrolled in a program that includes educational, vocational and psychological components. Specialized assistance should continue when a student is returned to the school district. School representatives should work with the courts to establish conditions of probation. Educators are involved in the institutional program component and law enforcers, probation officers and health professionals are involved in the school re-entry component. Information about the background and nature of this individual should be shared with those school personnel who are responsible for the perpetrator's educational program.

7. Victimization adjustment classes

Students, family members and school personnel victims should be offered specialized assistance from health and law enforcement professionals about how to deal with their victimization. Classes emphasize that the victim's problems are largely determined by how others perceive and treat the victim and his or her victimization. Further, classes assist school victims in meeting four specialized crises needs: medical treatment, emotional support, financial help and legal assistance.

8. School board policies

Policies should guarantee the safety of educators and other school personnel from physical attacks on their persons or property and provide reimbursement for loss. A possible model is the policy suggested by the National Education Association which states:

The Association believes that when school personnel are the victims of physical attack, verbal abuse, harassment, or theft, they should receive the full support of their employer in pursuing legal and other remedies.

The Association further believes that the local association must have the right to reflect the concerns of the profession at a student suspension or expulsion hearing.

The Association urges its affiliates to cooperate with juvenile court systems to secure strict enforcement of juvenile law in cases involving disturbances in the public schools.

9. Retraining alternatives

Retraining for school personnel victims gives them an opportunity to move into a new profession or accept another posi-

tion within the district. Such training is reimbursed by the district.

10. Schedule adjustments

Efforts should be made to prevent contact between the victim and perpetrator as much as possible. Make sure they are not in the same classes and have the staff help watch for the victim's safety.

VICTIMIZATION PROGRAMS

The National School Safety Center has become aware of the following programs designed to prevent, intervene in and respond to assaultive and other violent action that may occur on campus:

Boston Youth Program
818 Harrison Avenue
Education Building, 1st Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02118
617/424-5196

Contact: Dr. Deborah Stith

The educational unit of an adolescent health project encourages students to accept anger as a normal emotion and learn how to creatively control such anger to avoid violent behavior. The course is taught by a specially trained physician to a 10th grade Health Education class at Boston's inner-city Jeremiah Burke High School.

Students are encouraged to "play out" various anger-producing situations, including peer-related fights, family violence and interpersonal relationships. The situations are discussed and strategies are developed to deal appropriately with feelings of potential violence. Students also learn that if they respond violently to practices they consider to be unfair, they diminish their power to influence change.

Retraining Program
Los Angeles City Schools
450 North Grand
Los Angeles, California 90012
213/625-6864

Contact: Lee Cazes

Any school employee who is injured as a result of school violence and whose doctor says he or she cannot return to his or her job, is retrained by the district. Under the workmen's compensation program, personnel can choose to be retrained for a job within

the district or for an entirely new career. Employees receive pay during retraining endeavors.

The school district contracts with a local firm that acts as the worker's compensation agent that handles the program.

Mediation Alternative Project (MAP)

50 Clinton Street
Hempstead, New York 11550
516/489-7733

Contact: Rebecca Bell, Director

MAP is a nonprofit center for the development of innovative criminal justice and education programs. Its primary goal is to offer conflict resolution services to help youth, families, schools and the community-at-large to resolve youth-related disputes. MAP employs professional, impartial mediators to help disputing parties reach a written agreement. MAP also conducts follow-up interviews and meetings. All mediation is voluntary and MAP services are available to Nassau County, New York residents free of charge.

Among the disputes handled by MAP are: parent/child conflicts; community/youth problems like harassment and vandalism; school-related problems such as fighting between youths; minor criminal acts involving restitution; neighborhood disputes between families; and interracial conflicts.

NATIONAL RESOURCE ORGANIZATIONS

U.S. Department of Justice
Community Relations Service
5550 Friendship Blvd., Room 330
Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815
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For regional offices, contact:

Atlanta	Room 900 75 Piedmont Avenue, NE. Atlanta, Georgia 30303 404/331-6883
Boston	Boston Federal Building 10 Causeway Boston, Massachusetts 02220 617/565-6830

Chicago Room 1113
175 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, Illinois 60604
312/353-4391

Kansas City Room 2411
911 Walnut Street
Kansas City, Missouri 64106
816/426-2022

New York Room 3402
26 Federal Plaza
New York, New York 10278
212/264-0700

Philadelphia Room 309
2nd and Chestnut Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
215/597-2344

San Francisco Room 1040
211 Main Street
San Francisco, California 94103
415/974-0101

Seattle Room 1898
915 Second Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101
206/442-4465

National Crime Prevention
Institute
Shelby Campus
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky 40292
502/588-6987
Contact: Barbara Bomar, Assistant Director

National Alliance for
Safe Schools
4903 Edgemoor Lane, Suite 403
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
301/654-2774
Contact: Dr. Robert Rubel, Director

American Bar Association
Standing Committee on Dispute Resolution
Pru Kestner, Assistant Director
2nd Floor South
1800 M Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/331-2258

National Association for
Mediation in Education (N.A.M.E.)
c/o Mediation Project
425 Amity Street
Amherst, Massachusetts 01002
413/545-2462
Contact: Ann Gibson, Executive Director

National Institute for
Dispute Resolution
Michael Lewis, Senior Adviser
1901 L Street N.W., Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/466-4764

National Organization for
Victim Assistance (NOVA)
717 "D" Street, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20004
202/393-6682
Contact: Michaela Cohan, Information Specialist

Institute for Dispute Resolution
Pepperdine University
School of Law
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, California 90265
213/456-4655
Contact: L. Randolph Lowry, Director

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE INFORMATION

The following resources are available to inform and assist educators, community members and the general public with school victimization issues:

Blauvelt, Peter D. Effective Strategies for School Security. Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981.

Bybee, Rodger W., and Gordon E. Gee. Violence, Values and Justice in the Schools. Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1982.

Goldstein, Arnold P., Steven J. Apter, and Berj Harootunian. School Violence. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984.

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Rubel, Robert J. Unruly School Disorders, Disruptions and Crimes. Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1977.

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Vestermark, Seymour D. Jr., and Peter D. Blauvelt. Controlling Crime in the School, A Complete Security Handbook for Administrators. West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1978.