

## The Enemy Within: A National Study on School Violence and Prevention

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### Abstract

This study investigated teacher, district, and site administrators' perceptions of school violence and violence prevention programs in 15 school districts of various sizes in 12 states located across the United States. The study focused on: (a) school personnel fears about violence, (b) frequency of school personnel as victims of violent actions over the past 2 years, (c) areas in the school environment that pose the greatest risk of violence for students or school personnel (d) profiles of typical victims and perpetrators of violence, (e) strategies implemented by schools to deal with violence, (f) perceptions regarding which strategies were considered to be the most and least effective in dealing with violence, and (g) the cost to school districts for violence prevention. The study concluded by providing a suggested plan of action to remediate and reduce violence in schools.

We are a society in crisis. A gunman fired into a crowd of hundreds gathered outside a bar, killing one and wounding several others. A 15-year-old boy was arrested. A man was beaten to death because of a \$20 debt. A 16-year-old boy was arrested (D. Baker, 1995). The incidence of juvenile violence is becoming more and more commonplace across the United States. The number of youths arrested on homicide charges between 1988 and 1992 increased by 101% in Ohio alone. "People think juveniles only run away and steal candy bars. They don't. They murder, they commit rapes, they use handguns" (D. Baker, 1995). Although the increasing tide of juvenile violence in the streets is alarming, it is particularly problematic because of insidious encroachment into the public school (Sautter, 1995). According to a 1994 National School Board Association (NSBA) survey of 700 schools, school violence is worse now than it was 5 years ago. Research has indicated that in the 4 years following September 1986, 71 persons were killed by guns in schools, 201 were severely wounded, and 242 were held hostage at gunpoint. These acts occurred in 35 states and in the District of Columbia (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1990). It is estimated that approximately 400,000 boys are carrying guns to school each year and 100,000 guns are being brought to schools daily (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1990; Stephens, 1994). A 1991 study indicated that 1 of every 18 students attending high school carried a gun (Schaff, 1995). In 1993, the North Carolina Governor's Task Force reported that the violent crime rate in North Carolina schools had increased by 35% since 1988 (Governor's Task Force, 1993). The United States Department of Justice reported that violent crimes among juveniles had risen 24% between 1988 and 1992 (Sautter, 1995). Although this age group accounted for only one tenth of the population in 1992, 25% of crimes involved a juvenile victim that year (Sautter, 1995). Fox and Pierce (1994) reported that more than 90% of the time, males have been the offender and the victim in violent crime and that male students between the ages of 14 and 17 were likely to be involved in related violent activities. Research has indicated that approximately 44% of the time, acts of violence occur in school hallways and classrooms, and the leading causes of school violence are gang disputes, drug disputes, accidents, long-standing arguments, romantic disagreements, and fights about material possessions (Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 1990). Although many violent incidents occur on school grounds, the causes for these actions may originate elsewhere.

In a recent survey of school administrators, more than 50% of the respondents felt that lack of parental involvement was the single most important contributor to school violence (Stephens, 1994). Societal changes, the breakdown of family relationships, violent media role models, and media-modeled violent behavior have also been cited as contributing to school violence (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1994).

Budgetary, scheduling, and resource constraints on American schools make it nearly impossible for the schools to focus adequate attention on this major problem, and they are therefore having to deal with violence issues in a piecemeal fashion. Violence programs established to target the areas of parental involvement, gang activity, drugs, and conflict resolution skills are being piloted in middle/junior high schools and senior high schools (Stephens, 1994). Other programs, including police partnerships/liaisons, use of advanced technologies (metal detectors, cameras, etc.), removal of lockers (or not installing them), and so forth, have also been tried, but the results of these efforts have been less than successful in overcoming the enigmatic problem of school violence (Johnson & Johnson, 1995b). Although a significant number of programs have been focused at the secondary level, little attention has been directed toward elementary schools

or toward determining what programs might effectively prevent violent behavior before it starts (Johnson & Johnson, 1995a, 1995b).

The purpose of this study was threefold. The first purpose focused on describing the types, frequency, and severity of violence in selected public schools. The second purpose was to identify what courses of action schools of various sizes were taking to combat the violence and also to focus on the perceived effectiveness of those interventions. The third purpose of the study was to recommend a violence prevention model that could be implemented effectively to reduce violence, beginning at the preschool/elementary level.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Teachers, building administrators, and district administrators in 15 school districts of varying sizes from 12 states, representing all geographical regions of the country, participated in the present study. A random sample of 202 teachers, 59 building administrators, 18 district administrators, and 2 school counselors responded to the survey instrument used (see Table 1). Of the 291 respondents, 90 were employed at the preschool/elementary level, 90 were employed at the middle school/junior high level, 84 were employed at the high school level, and 17 were involved in a multiple grade environment. Seventy-six respondents held a 4-year degree, 180 held a master's degree, and 23 held doctoral degrees. Respondents were 115 males and 164 females. The ethnic composition of survey respondents was .1% Asian, 12% African American, .4% Hispanic, and 77% Caucasian with 6% failing to respond. Eleven were in school districts having fewer than 999 students, 57 were from districts with 1,000 to 4,999 students, 46 were from districts of 5,000 to 14,999 students, 34 were from districts ranging from 15,000 to 29,999 students, 43 were from districts of 30,000 to 49,999 students, and 66 were from districts of 50,000 or more students, with 36 individuals failing to respond to this item. Of those who responded to the survey, 71 did not have children in school or had no children. Of those who had children in school, 58 had children at the preschool/elementary level, 46 had children at the middle school/junior high level, 57 had children at the senior high level, and 98 had children at the college or graduate school level.

### INSTRUMENTATION

The survey was developed using ethnographic interviews with teachers, site administrators, and district administrators from school districts of various sizes located in three Midwestern states. The interviews were tape-recorded and verbatim transcripts were made. This data, in conjunction with information obtained from a current review of the literature on school and juvenile violence, formed the basis for the construction of survey domains and questions to be used in this study. Survey questions were primarily based on a 5-point Likert scale. There were some forced-choice items and categorical items (primarily covering demographic information). Three specific questions were incorporated to test the validity of the instrument and were randomly placed in the survey to ensure respondents were reading each question and responding appropriately. One repeated question was also included to investigate respondent consistency. The initial screening of the survey instrument was conducted with administrators, teachers, and university faculty in

the presence of one of the researchers. These sessions were held to ensure survey domain and question clarity as well as to determine the length of time necessary for respondents to complete the entire questionnaire. These pilot sessions resulted in further revisions of survey length, question placement, and directions for completion. The final survey was six pages long with a cover page that included general instructions. It contained 162 items covering concerns about personal safety, changing behaviors, location of violent events, violence and grade level, perceived causes of violence, victim and perpetrator characteristics, legal and fiscal costs of school violence, and violence prevention programs. The time it took participants to complete the survey ranged between 10 and 22 minutes.

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Insert Table 1  
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## PROCEDURES

A review of the literature, which included a search of ERIC Document Reproduction Service and Psych Lit,<sup>1</sup> was undertaken. Recent articles in popular magazines and newspapers with articles on school violence were also examined. Areas of particular interest were located and general, open-ended questions regarding school violence were developed. Appointments were then made with teachers, site administrators, and district administrators to conduct ethnographic interviews. Interviews ranged from 1 to 1~ hours in length. All interviews were tape recorded and verbatim transcripts were made. Systematic examination of each interview was conducted using a two-part domain analysis (Spradley, 1979). Survey questions were constructed through the integration of domains and concepts generated from interview responses as well as from information previously obtained from a review of the literature.

A map of the 48 continuous United States was divided into the following familiar geographic regions: Northwest, West, Midwest, South, Southeast, and Northeast. Within each region, one large city (more than 1,000,000), one midsize city (30,000 to 200,000), and one small city/town (less than 20,000) were selected. Next, a list containing a randomly selected set of teachers, building administrators, and district administrators, including names and school addresses, was obtained from a commercial market research firm. This yielded a target sample of 611 school personnel. Each participant was assigned a number for confidentiality and tracking purposes.

Surveys were mailed to each participant with a cover letter explaining the nature of the study and with a self-addressed stamped envelope. Approximately 26% of the sample responded to the first mailing. Three weeks later, a second mailing was sent to each participant who had not returned the survey materials. The procedural follow-up eventually resulted in a final return of 295 surveys.<sup>2</sup>

Four respondents incorrectly answered one or all of the three validity items and were removed from the study. This resulted in a total sample size of 291 or a 48% return rate. The consistency of responses was investigated by correlating a repeated item, which resulted in a consistency indicator of .90.

## RESULTS

### PERSONAL SAFETY

The first section of the survey focused on school personnel's feelings of safety and on the frequency of experienced threats or actions. Of the respondents, 27% indicated they were concerned or very concerned about safety while at school. Respondents indicated that they were most concerned about physical threats or attacks from students as well as from students' parents. Of those responding, 14% were concerned or very concerned about physical threats or attacks by students, whereas 17% were concerned or very concerned about physical threats or attacks by students' parents. Concerns about physical threats or attacks were greatest in midsize to large districts, 23% and 17%, respectively, with only 7% of those in small schools being concerned. Of survey participants, 35% indicated they were concerned or very concerned about being verbally threatened or attacked by students, whereas 30% were concerned or very concerned about being verbally threatened or attacked by parents. Again, concern was most pronounced in midsize and large districts, 30% and 35%, respectively, with significant concerns expressed by personnel even in smaller districts (18%). Only 5% of those responding indicated they were concerned or very concerned about sexual harassment by students, and 2% indicated they were concerned or very concerned about sexual harassment by parents.

Survey participants were asked to evaluate their concerns for personal safety in dealing with other faculty and administrators. The responses from this survey indicated 6% or less were concerned or very concerned about verbal, physical, or sexual threats or attacks by other faculty or administrators.

### FREQUENCY AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Respondents were asked to indicate the frequency and types of violence they had experienced in the past 2 years. The categories for this section were never, 1 to 5 times, 6 to 10 times, and 10 or more times. Overall, a majority of respondents had experienced some form of violence at least one or more times in the past 2 years. Of the respondents, 63% indicated they had been verbally threatened or intimidated, 28% had been physically threatened or intimidated, 11% had been sexually threatened or intimidated, 68% had been verbally attacked, 9% had been physically attacked, .7% had been sexually attacked, and 55% indicated that their room, property, and/or school had been seriously vandalized.

The percentage of respondents who had experienced violence six or more times was equally significant. In the past 2 years, 16% had been verbally threatened or intimidated six or more times. Also in the previous 2 years, 3% had been physically threatened or intimidated, .6% had been sexually threatened or intimidated, 22% had been verbally attacked, .7% had been physically attacked, and 11% had had their room, property, and/or school vandalized six or more times. The data indicated that the larger districts consistently reported higher frequencies of these occurrences as well as increased violent behaviors of students and parents toward school personnel.

## CHANGING BEHAVIORS

The respondents were asked to rate how student and faculty behaviors have changed in school and in the classroom during the past 2 years. Survey participants were asked to rate 19 specific violent behaviors and/or changes in students (an "other" category was included) and whether these behaviors/changes have greatly increased, increased, remained the same, decreased, or were not a problem. Of the top 10 most increased behaviors, all were student-to-student behaviors with the exception of organic problems (i.e., F.A.S., crack babies, etc.) and faculty fear of involvement. Of the respondents, 60.5% indicated that verbal intimidation by students had increased the most during the past 2 years, and 58.1% indicated a significant increase in organic problems of students (i.e., F.A.S., crack babies, etc.). The list included behaviors that have greatly increased, such as pushing and shoving, 45%; sexual harassment, 40%; punching and hitting (hands only), 40%; kicking, 27%; the presence and use of guns, 26%; faculty fear of involvement, 26%; lack of conflict resolution skills, 26%; and the use of knives, ice picks, and razors, 25%. The smaller districts' data indicated that the presence and use of guns, lack of conflict resolution skills, and use of knives, ice picks, and razors were not increasing. Yet, these districts, along with midsize and large districts, saw an increase in rumors/peer escalation of events, vandalism, and arson.

## LOCATION OF VIOLENT EVENTS

The respondents were asked to list the school locations where violent events were most likely to occur. The five areas ranked as highest risk for school violence were hallways, 37%; restrooms, 26%; buses, 24%; extracurricular/athletic events, 19%; and cafeteria/ lunch areas, 17%. In midsize and large school districts, 25% of respondents also indicated that school classrooms were areas of moderate to high risk for violence. Only 10% of respondents from smaller districts indicated that classrooms were areas of potential violence. Regardless of geographic location, the data were consistent.

## VIOLENCE AND GRADE LEVEL

The respondents were asked to rate the changes in violent activity, based on their experiences, during the past 2 years at each of the various school levels. The ratings were "greatly increased," "increased," "remained the same," and "decreased" and included a category for "not a problem." Of the respondents, 26% saw violence increasing or greatly increasing at the preschool level. Of the respondents, 53% saw violence increasing or greatly increasing at the elementary level, whereas 69% saw the same increase at the middle school/junior high level and 63% saw violence as increasing or greatly increasing at the senior high level. The data were generally consistent for all district sizes, with incidents of violence increasing by the greatest percentage in the larger districts at each educational level.

## PERCEIVED CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

Based on the review of the literature, ethnographic interviews, and research interest, a list of 29 specific influences/causes of violence as well as an "other" category was developed and listed on the survey. The respondents were asked to rate each cause or influence as "strongly influential,"

"influential," "little influence," or "not influential" in causing school violence. The top 10 things seen as being strongly influential or influential in causing school violence were a lack of rules or family structure, 94%; a lack of involvement or parental supervision, 94%; violence acted out by parents, 93%; parental drug use, 90%; student drug/alcohol use, 90%; violent movies, 85%; student poor self-concept/emotional disturbance, 85%; violence in television programs, 84%; nontraditional family/family structure, 83%; and gang activities, 80%. The top six were consistent for all district sizes; only rank order differed. The midsize and large districts cited gang activities, availability of weapons, and peer rumor/peer escalation as being in the top 10, whereas smaller districts indicated the lack of trust in real or media authority figures and lack of family involvement in moral/religious activities as predominant causes of violent incident increases.

## VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

Demographic information regarding student victims of violence was solicited from survey participants. Respondents were instructed to base answers on experiences at their individual school sites. Responses received indicated that victim gender was primarily male, 66%. However, 20% saw females as primary victims, and 14% failed to answer. Of the respondents, 43% saw victim ethnic background as generally Caucasian, 27% saw victims as African American, 11% indicated that victims were generally Hispanic, 1% indicated victims as generally Asian, 1% denoted an "other" category, and 17% of respondents failed to answer this section. The ages of victims in relation to perpetrators were younger or the same, at 26% and 63%, respectively. Of the respondents, 1% indicated that victims were older than perpetrators, and 10% did not complete this item. The percentage of victims in middle school was cited as 39%, followed by high school at 32%, and then elementary school at 21%. Of the respondents, 25% indicated that they thought victims were involved with gangs, and 20% indicated that they thought victims were involved with the sale and/or use of drugs. School personnel were asked about the family structure of victims. Survey results indicated that 50% of the respondents perceived victims as coming from single-parent homes, whereas 34% indicated that they were not familiar with the family structure. Of the respondents, 5% indicated that victims came from two-parent homes, 3% indicated that they came from some other type of home structure, and 8% failed to answer this item. The stability and emotional atmosphere of the family of the victim was perceived by 56% of the respondents as being unstable, 2% as being punitive, 5% as being stable, with 30% not knowing and 7% failing to complete the item. Of the respondents, 65% indicated that the academic performance of the victims was seen as below average, 16% saw it as average, 3% as above average, 10% of the respondents did not know, and 7% failed to complete the item.

## PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

Survey participants were asked to provide demographic information regarding student perpetrators of violence. As with the identification of victims of violence, respondents were instructed to base their responses on their experiences within the school setting. Of the respondents, 82% indicated that perpetrator gender was primarily male, whereas 6% indicated that females were primarily the perpetrators, and 12% failed to answer the item. Of the respondents, 37% saw the ethnic background as generally Caucasian, 38% saw perpetrators as



generally African American, 12% indicated that they were generally Hispanic, 1% indicated perpetrators were generally Asian, 1% denoted an "other" category, and 16% of respondents failed to answer this section. The ages of perpetrators as compared to victims were in most cases seen as about the same or older, at 69% and 21 %, respectively. Of the respondents, 2% indicated that perpetrators were younger than their victims, and 9% did not complete this item. The greatest percentage of perpetrators was perceived to be at the middle school level (35%), followed by high school (33%), and then elementary school (23%). As for perpetrator involvement in gangs and drugs, 31% of respondents indicated that they thought perpetrators were involved in or were members of gangs, and 29% indicated that they thought perpetrators were involved with the sale and/or use of drugs. School personnel were asked about the family structure of the student perpetrators. Respondents indicated that 53% perceived these students as coming from single-parent homes and 5% as coming from two-parent homes, whereas 31% indicated that they did not know about the family structure, and 8% failed to answer this question. The stability and emotional atmosphere of the families of perpetrators were perceived by 65% of the respondents as unstable, 1% as punitive, 1% as stable, whereas 25% did not know, and 6.2% failed to complete the item. Of the respondents, 77% indicated that the academic performance of the perpetrators was perceived to be below average, 10% saw it as average, 0% saw it as above average, 9% of the respondents did not know, and 7% failed to complete the item.

To triangulate the self-reported data on victims and perpetrators, information on the background, number, and types of office referrals and school disciplinary actions taken on students involved in violent activities were requested from each of the participating district and building administrators in this study. Yet, after several written and telephone requests, the authors were unable to obtain this information.

## LEGAL AND FISCAL COSTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Seventy-seven site and district administrators were queried about the legal and fiscal costs of violence and violence prevention incurred by their districts. They were asked to rate whether various actions and programs regarding violence had "greatly increased," "increased," "remained the same," "decreased," or were "not a problem." In dealing with class action lawsuits due to violence, 20% stated legal costs had increased or greatly increased in the past 2 years, and 25% stated that fiscal compensation (i.e., workman's compensation, medical costs, settling out of court, etc.) had increased or greatly increased during the past 2 years. Of administrators, 35% indicated that legal prevention costs had increased or greatly increased during the past 2 years.

The site and district administrators were asked to rate whether violence prevention programs were "overfunded," "properly funded," "underfunded," or "not funded" in their districts. Underfunding was seen as a major problem for various programs and equipment in a majority of districts surveyed. For example, 52% indicated that monies available for security personnel were underfunded, 60% indicated that staff training in conflict resolution was underfunded, and 48% stated that security equipment (i.e., cameras, metal detectors, etc.) was underfunded, whereas 48% saw a severe shortage of district money for alternate programs/schools, 65% for site maintenance/repair/upkeep, and 34% for personnel replacement due to burnout, fear, or injury.

The 18 districtwide administrators were asked to estimate the cost to the district of programs primarily related to violence and/or violence prevention using the following scale: \$0 to \$49,999, \$50,000 to \$249,999, \$250,000 to \$1,000,000, and \$1,000,000 or more per year. Administrators indicated that various amounts were spent on security personnel. Of the administrators, 44.4% related spending of \$0 to \$49,999 on security personnel, 5.6% spent \$50,000 to \$249,999, and 11.1% spent \$1,000,000 or more. In the area of staff training, 38.9% spent \$0 to \$49,999 and 16.7% spent \$50,000 to \$249,999. In the area of security equipment, 33.3% spent \$0 to \$49,999, 22.2% spent \$50,000 to \$249,999, and 5.6% spent \$1,000,000 or more. Of district administrators, 27.8% indicated that they spent between \$0 and \$49,999 in the area of alternate programming/schools, 5.6% spent \$50,000 to \$249,999, 16.7% spent \$250,000 to \$1,000,000, and 5.6% spent \$1,000,000 or more. Site maintenance, repair, and upkeep found 33.3% of districts spending between \$0 and \$49,999, 11.1% spending between \$50,000 and \$249,999, 5.6% spending from \$250,000 to \$1,000,000, and 5.6% spending more than \$1,000,000 in maintenance costs. District costs for personnel replacement due to burnout, fear, or injury were equally high. Of administrators, 27.8% indicated they spent from \$0 to \$49,999 a year, 6% spent between \$250,000 and \$1,000,000, and 11% spent \$1,000,000 or more on the replacement and/or injury of school personnel due to violence.

## VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

All respondents were asked to answer yes or no to items concerning whether their schools had 26 of the most commonly cited programs found in the interviews and literature reviews. An "other" category asking them to describe any programs their districts or schools were using but which were not included in the list was provided. A description of the program was requested from any administrators marking this response. The 10 most commonly implemented programs overall were poverty issue programs (i.e., breakfast programs, book programs, etc.), tried by 84% of the districts; teacher placement in hallways, attempted by 79%; alternate schools or educational models, used by 72%; visitor registration and the wearing of identification passes, also tried by 72%. Of the respondents, 71% had tried to involve the community through business-school partnerships, 69% had implemented before- or after-school programs, 68% had district and school programs to increase parental involvement, 67% had a dress code or clothing restrictions for students, 66.3% had incorporated peer mediation/conflict resolution training into their curriculum, 65% of the districts had uniform discipline policies, and 65% had integrated multicultural/ diversity awareness programs into their curriculum.

All respondents were also asked to rank order the top five most effective programs they or their schools had personally implemented. The top 10 programs/actions most commonly ranked as effective were teachers placed in hallways, security personnel, police liaisons, peer mediation/conflict resolution training, alternate schools or educational models, closed campuses, metal detectors, removal of lockers, uniform discipline policies, and before or after-school programs. Smaller schools placed alteration of class schedules, cameras, and programs to increase parental involvement on their lists of most effective programs. Midsize districts placed teacher conflict management training and the use of dogs in their top 10 list. The larger districts also placed dogs (i.e., drugs, explosives, etc.) in their top 10 lists.

These same respondents were asked to rank the top five least effective programs they had personally implemented. The top 10 most commonly mentioned programs that were ineffective included transparent bookbags, dogs (i.e., drugs, explosives, etc.), removal of lockers, social skills training (i.e., students and teachers), security cameras, dress codes or clothing restrictions, multicultural/diversity awareness programs, programs to increase parental involvement, metal detectors, and alteration of class schedules (i.e., changing between class times, lunch times, etc.). The smaller districts included poverty issue programs and alternative school/educational models in their top 10 least effective programs. Midsize districts placed business school partnerships and poverty issue programs in their top 10 least effective, and the large districts placed teacher conflict management training among their top 10 least effective programs.

## DISCUSSION

### LIMITATIONS

This study was limited in the scope of coverage by the sample that was chosen. Although it incorporated school districts of various sizes from various regions, it was not able to assure sufficient representation of all schools in the country. Data on the environments and cultures of participating schools as well as on the overall socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds of students in these schools were not obtained. Therefore, some error may have been introduced into the findings due to inadequate sampling. Additionally, although the researchers indicated as many possible interpretations of the data in the report as they were able, there may be other plausible explanations for the data that are as yet undiscovered.

### IMPLICATIONS

The survey results provided interesting and unique findings regarding the issue of school personnel safety, victim and perpetrator profiles, locations of violent events, perceived causes/influences of violence, strategies to combat the violence issue in schools and their effectiveness, and the costs to districts. These results, although limited, have provided enough information to give the researchers the ability to suggest strengths and weaknesses inherent in the current approaches to the problem of school violence. The results also allow the development of a model for prevention and remediation of school violence.

The respondents indicated that more than one in four (27%) school personnel were concerned or very concerned about their personal safety while at school. The greatest safety concerns for school personnel focused on verbal attacks or physical threats of violence by the students (35%) and/or the students' parents (30%). The greatest concerns for physical threats and verbal attacks were in the midsize and large districts. Although school personnel's fears of student threats, attacks, and violence had been expected, the nearly 30% of school personnel who indicated that they were equally intimidated by parents was unexpected and had not been found in the review of the literature. This finding will require a more in-depth investigation of parental profiles as well as of current programs that deal with parental violence in schools. However, it appears to be a significant area in need of attention if prevention and remediation programs are to be successful in schools.

Based on responses of school personnel, a profile of students who were most frequently victims of violence was compiled. The most frequent victims were males (66%) from a Caucasian (43%) or African American (27%) background who were the same age as or younger than the perpetrators. These victims were most frequently students in middle school or high school from unstable single-parent homes. Their academic success was viewed as below average, and their gang affiliation was largely unknown by the respondents, as was their involvement with drugs or alcohol.

A profile of students who were most frequently perpetrators of violence at schools was also compiled. Students most frequently seen as perpetrators were males (82%) from a Caucasian (37%) or African American (39%) background who were the same age as or older than their victims. Perpetrators were most frequently students in middle school or high school from unstable single-parent homes. The academic success of this group was viewed as below average, and their gang affiliation was largely unknown by the respondents. Yet, the perpetrators were generally viewed as involved with drugs or alcohol.

The methods as well as the influences of school violence, which were seen as increasing or greatly increasing violence during the past 2 years, were also compiled. Number one was verbal threats by students, number two was organic problems of students (F.A.S., crack babies, etc.), followed by pushing or shoving (student to student), sexual harassment (student to student), punching or hitting (student to student), kicking (student to student), presence or use of guns, faculty fear of involvement in student disagreements, lack of conflict resolution skills, classroom building vandalism, rumor/peer escalation of violence, and the use of knives/ice picks/razors (student to student).

Asking school personnel to recount the number of actual incidents of violence they had experienced allowed the researchers to determine whether the expressed fears were based on actual experience or were due to media influences, rumors, or other fear engendering sources. Respondents were asked about the frequency of verbal, physical, and sexual threats/intimidation or attacks. They were also questioned about the frequency of classroom or school building vandalism. In the past 2 years, 64% had been verbally threatened or intimidated, 28% had been physically threatened or intimidated, and 11% had been sexually threatened or intimidated one or more times. School personnel indicated that 55% of their classrooms and/or school buildings had been vandalized during the past 2 years. These results suggest that if these actions remain constant, school personnel have greater than a 50% chance of being verbally attacked within the next 2 years, a 1 in 4 chance of being physically intimidated, and a 1 in 10 chance of being sexually harassed in the next 2 years. Furthermore, the results indicated more than 1 in 10 will be physically attacked in the next 2 years.

Results from this study also indicated that the school environment has general areas where the risk of incidents of school violence are moderately high to very high. The areas of greatest risk were hallways, restrooms, buses, athletic or extracurricular activities, cafeterias, and classrooms. This is consistent with previous research in this area. The greatest risk seems to occur during unstructured time when large numbers of students are interacting with one another (i.e., athletic events, cafeteria, etc.) However, more than one in four respondents saw the classroom as equally unsafe. This was more pronounced in the midsize (30%) and large districts (34%).

The results of the survey provided information on the major elements that were perceived by the respondents to contribute to school violence (see Table 2). The three unanimous components cited by respondents as causes for school violence were a lack of family involvement or supervision/rules, a lack of family structure, and parental use of violence. Along with these elements, drug and alcohol use by students and parents was seen as contributing to school violence. Other factors were consistent with previous studies done in this area. They included youth violence in the media, gang activities, and changing family structures.

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To identify underlying elements, the 28 possible perceived causes for school violence were subjected to a factor analysis investigation. A principal components analysis using varimax rotation indicated that one main factor accounted for more than 30% of the variance. This factor was best described as the general decline of societal/family structures. As the data held one main factor, this analysis was followed up by a principal components analysis using an oblique rotation. The data indicated three to six factors as possible, using the eigenvalue rule of one and the scree test. These factor models were investigated, with the five-factor solution making the most sense. The five factors seen as most significantly contributing to school violence were a lack of school resources or skills to deal with violence, violence in the media, drug-related factors combined with family violence, the decline in family structure, and the breakdown in moral/ethical education of youth. These data confirm previous research that implicated the role of declining societal modeling, media violence, and declining family structure as root causes in the development of school violence. The data further suggest, aside from the previously stated factors, that a lack of skills and resources for professional educators combined with the lack of a moral/ethical education are significant contributors to this ever-increasing problem. This indicates that American society must consider and decide the future role schools must play in our society—a role that focuses on pure academics or a role that focuses on schools as an alternate family. The data of this study strongly suggest that to effectively combat violence, schools will have to become an alternate family.

The information regarding strategies that schools are currently using to combat school violence was compiled in Table 3. Researchers then examined the programs implemented to determine which were seen as the most effective (see Table 4) and the least effective (see Table 5).

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Perceived effectiveness was fairly consistent for all but small schools, which had not implemented some of the more costly programs or strategies. The areas that were cited as the most effective in dealing with the issue of school violence involved training and allocation of resources for professional educators as well as the use of nonschool personnel to support educators. Programs that affect moral/ethical development of children/adolescents such as social skills training or conflict management skills were also found in this list. However, the data

revealed that schools tended to rely on the use of police/security personnel and technology to combat violence after the issue had become problematic, when a proactive stance would have proved more beneficial. This is mirrored in the areas seen as ineffective (see Table 5). Six of the top 10 ineffective strategies dealt with this issue only after it became problematic. Additionally, many schools find diversity awareness education and social skills training ineffective as tools to deal with violence.

## SUGGESTED VIOLENCE PREVENTION MODEL

The violence prevention model proposed here is limited due to the nature of self-reporting data and its ability to make decisions regarding future actions and/or program effectiveness. Although the five major components in this program have been derived through an empirical process, the effectiveness of the model in reducing or preventing school violence has not been tested. This caveat aside, the proposed model is designed to target preschool and elementary school-aged children. The need for intervention at the preschool/elementary level is essential because interventions targeting middle schools and high schools have met with limited success (Johnson & Johnson, 1995b). Research has also demonstrated that prevention models focused on at-risk populations are effective when implemented at the preschool/elementary level (Baker, 1992). An explanation of the model components follows.

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Insert Tables 4 & 5  
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### Family Commitment

Data from this study indicate that the preschool/elementary model must address the factors discussed earlier, which were implicated as significant contributors to school violence. One of the most significant of these factors was the perceived decline in family structure and the breakdown in moral/ethical education of youth. Whereas schools struggle to implement reactive measures of violence prevention, the data suggest that to successfully address the problem, a proactive, comprehensive reorganization of the existing school structure must be undertaken. A key element in this reorganization is the recognition that schools will need not only to incorporate an academic focus for the student, but also to include the family within the educational structure. The restructuring of schools should include a new definition of the school as town center, which supports, includes, and engages the entire family in the scope of the educational setting. Research confirms that the typical American family has changed in many ways. Only 7% of families in this country could be described as typical of the families that shaped the legislation of the great society in the mid-1960s. Those families had two parents with defined roles: a working father and a homemaking mother who provided structure, nurturing, and support for school-aged children (Heath & McLaughlin, 1987). In the past 20 years, the percentage of children living with two parents has decreased dramatically (Hofferth, 1987). As the basic structure of the family disintegrates, violence among family members increases, and this domestic violence spills into the classroom (Lystad, 1985). A new picture of the school must emerge to provide the variety of services that are needed by families to alleviate incidents of school violence. Home, school, and community must come together in a central location (i.e., the school campus) to make possible this reorganization of schools. Schools should strive to become

part of any positive community effort (Hranitz & Eddowes, 1990). The successful combination of administrators, faculty, health care practitioners, counselors, social workers, childcare workers, technological support, and community agency availability and funding is an essential component of the proactive elementary model. The family must be committed to the educational process, whereas the educational structure must be committed to the family. Because the data indicate that schools need to take on roles previously played by family members, the roles of teacher and administrator must also evolve. It may be that schools will need to fill the gap in these areas for families who are unable or unwilling to become involved.

### Evolution of Teacher/Administrator Roles

This component would require schools at the preschool/elementary level to staff their buildings with personnel trained not only in traditional pedagogical methodologies, but also in a comprehensive values education (Kirschenbaum, 1992). This goes beyond the current implementation of ethical and social skills curriculums, to an integrated and inclusive school environment involving the daily modeling of these skills by school personnel for students. As Kirschenbaum (1992) states in his article, "Young people deserve to be exposed to the inculcation of values by adults who care: family members, teachers, and the community" (p. 775). A significant component of values education is its emphasis on responsible or right decision making. Incorporation of this concept into daily actions and lessons would help to prepare students for independence and could act as a vehicle in examining other factors considered as serious contributors to school violence: drug education, personal responsibility, social skills/conflict training, and media violence. The return of character education to the national education agenda in the early 1990s is also a reflection of the need for school personnel to address nonacademic issues on a consistent basis. Family disintegration, rising youth violence, and the impact of these trends (i.e., legal and fiscal costs, personnel safety issues) on schools emphasize that the responsibility for teaching ethical and moral behavior cannot be ignored by the schools. In addition, this responsibility includes more than simply teaching the cognitive attributes of character development; it must also include the emotional attributes of moral maturity, such as conscience, self-respect, empathy, and self-control (Lickona, 1991; Lickona & Skillen, 1993).

### Student Success

The third component of the model involves creating a success identity, as referred to by Glasser (1992) and Dinkmeyer (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1982; Dinkmeyer, McKay, & Dinkmeyer, 1980). The critical factor in meeting the basic needs of individuals is the creation of individual responsibility, which significantly affects personality development. If parents are able to demonstrate and convey a sense of responsibility for themselves as well as for their children, children will develop an integrated concept of self-worth. This ultimately leads to what Glasser refers to as a success identity or to what Dinkmeyer calls significance. Learning effective ways to satisfy basic needs actively contributes to building self-esteem. Violence can be viewed as a reaction to unmet needs. The establishment and encouragement of self-esteem in students is an absolute requirement of any successful model because self-esteem is, in itself, a deterrent to participation in violent acts. School atmosphere can help engender self-esteem by encouraging individual pride and by creating a sense of student ownership in specific ways. Rutter, Maughan,

Mortimore, Ousten, & Smith (1979), in a study of inner-city London schools, found that negative behavior and vandalism decreased significantly in schools in which academics were stressed, incentives and rewards were made available to the students, and students participated in decision making. Establishing the appropriate emotional environment, building self-esteem, and establishing a democratic school structure are essential elements in assuring student success (Bien, 1994; Dreikurs, 1982).

### Conflict Mediation

This component of the elementary model is not suggesting that there is a specific program of mediation that should be implemented in every classroom. Given the diversity of the various models as well as the expense of training and implementing these types of programs, we suggest that schools must carefully choose a conflict resolution program to achieve the specific desired outcomes of that school. We also suggest that any conflict mediation program chosen for implementation should have sound empirical validation to ensure its effectiveness. As Johnson and Johnson (1995a) have repeatedly suggested, the norms, values, and culture of a school should promote negotiation and mediation procedures by including classroom lessons on improving communication skills, ways to control anger, appropriate assertiveness, problem-solving skills, perspective taking, creative thinking, and other related interpersonal and small-group skills. Educators should also be trained to include the pedagogy of these skills at the earliest educational stages to achieve the best results. David Hamburg, president of the Carnegie Corporation, states that reversing the trend of violence in the schools is dependent on teaching children the value of cooperating, sharing, and helping others (Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1982; Johnson & Johnson, 1995b). Programs must emphasize student participation and discussion, while including and emphasizing cooperation, trust, community, autonomy, and self-reliance (Bien, 1994; Dreikurs, 1982).

### Media Intervention

There have been numerous conclusive studies that indicate a causal relationship between television violence and actual violence. Regardless of whether the relationship has a direct correlation, the power of the media should be addressed by educators when discussing the subject of school violence. Teachers must be equipped to deal with the influences children are exposed to outside the classroom. There are certain inclusive strategies that every teacher should implement in the classroom. These key elements include creating a safe classroom atmosphere, planning a curriculum that presents alternative reading material that meets each child's developmental needs and allows for the resolution of personal and ethical questions, communicating with children in the classroom while creating the opportunity to make informed choices, and reaching out to parents to involve them in discussions and decisions concerning family choices for viewing, listening, and reading (Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1995). The influence of the media in the lives of children is pervasive. As Jane Healy (1990) states, schools will have to assume a more positive and educational role in guiding children who are visually vulnerable into analyses and evaluations of their content. Visual literacy must now be taught in addition to print literacy (Greenfield, 1984). Teaching children to critically evaluate the violence they see on a screen teaches them to interact with their viewing choices and evaluate the impact of those



choices on their own lives. The effective use of media within the classroom can have positive effects on the reduction of school violence.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research would benefit from further examination of several areas discussed in this study. Due to the essential component parental roles play in effective school reform (Westerberg & Brickley, 1991), the school personnel's fear of parents needs to be investigated more thoroughly. Furthermore, investigation into the effective components of alternative schools and their ability to deal with violent students should be performed. A closer examination of the currently implemented effective violence prevention/reduction strategies at the various school levels and district sizes needs to be undertaken. The training of school personnel in the effective application of ethical/moral education needs to be more clearly defined, implemented, and tested. Finally, the implementation and testing of this study's proposed model and its components should be performed to assess the model's ability to prevent and/or reduce school violence.

## NOTES

1. Psych Lit is a compilation of abstracts for journals in psychology and the social sciences. It is accessible via computer from a CD-ROM disk available in most university libraries.
2. At the time of submission of this article, three more surveys arrived, but their results were not included in this article.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE:

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Table 1  
Demographics of Survey Respondents

Gender	Ethnicity <sup>a</sup>	Education <sup>b</sup>	School Level <sup>c</sup>	District Size (student population)	Children in School
164 (females)	3 (Asian)	76 (bachelor's)	90 (preschool/elementary)	11 (1-999)	71 (no children)
115 (males)	35 (African American)	180 (master's)	90 (junior high/middle school)	57 (1,000-4,999)	58 (preschool/elementary)
	12 (Hispanic)	23 (doctorate)	84 (high school)	46 (5,000-14,999)	46 (junior high/middle school)
	224 (Caucasian)		17 (all grades)	34 (15,000-29,999)	57 (senior high school)
				43 (30,000-49,999)	98 (college/graduate school)
				66 (more than 50,000)	

NOTE: Numbers in this table are based on frequency counts for each category. Respondents to this survey were comprised of school personnel from the following familiar geographic regions: Midwest, Northwest, Northeast, South, Southeast, and West.

a. Seventeen respondents failed to answer the question regarding ethnicity.

b. Twelve respondents failed to answer the question regarding educational level obtained.

c. Thirty-four respondents failed to answer the question regarding school level of work site.

Table 2  
 Top 10 Perceived Causes for School Violence by All Districts and by District Sizes (in percentages)

Cause	All Districts (n = 291)	Small Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 68)	Midsized Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 80)	Large Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 109)
Lack of family involvement/supervision with lives of children/adolescents	93.8	95.5	100	91.7
Lack of family rules and/or structure	93.8	94.1	99.8	93.6
Violence acted out by parents	92.5	91.1	97.5	91.7
Drug/alcohol use/abuse by students	89.7	91.1	91.3	91.7
Parental drug use/abuse	89.7	83.8	97.5	89.0
Students' poor self-concept or emotional disturbance	84.9	88.2	85.0	83.5
Violent movies	84.9	79.4	91.3	83.5
Change in family patterns to non-traditional patterns (i.e., single parent, etc.)	82.5	82.4	90.0	
Violence in television programs	83.6	76.5	93.8	83.5
Gang activities	80.5		83.4	89.9
Lack of family involvement in moral/religious activities		77.9		
Lack of trust/credibility in authority figures (real and portrayed)		76.5		
Availability of weapons			83.4	85.3
Rumors among peers or peer escalation			83.4	

NOTE: Empty cells indicate not 1 of the top 10 perceived causes of school violence.

a. Numbers represent the percentage of positive responses to each cause. Small districts were 0 to 4,999, midsized districts were 5,000 to 29,999, and large districts were 30,000 or more students.

Table 3

Top 10 Procedures or Strategies Implemented in Schools by All Districts and by District Size (in percentages)

Program	All Districts (n = 291)	Small Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 68)	Midsize Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 80)	Large Districts <sup>a</sup> (n = 109)
Poverty issue programs (breakfast, book programs, etc.)	83.8	82.3	83.8	84.4
Teachers placed/present in hallways	79.0	72.1	81.3	82.6
Alternative schools or educational models	71.8	67.6	83.8	73.4
Visitor registration, wearing passes, doors locked	71.8		81.3	85.3
Business/school partnerships	70.8	52.9	72.5	79.8
Programs to increase parental involvement	68.0	66.2		71.6
Dress code or clothing restrictions	74.3	58.8	77.5	
Peer mediation/conflict resolution training	66.3	55.8		78.9
Uniform discipline procedures/policies (or stricter approach)	65.3	63.2	72.5	67.9
Multicultural/diversity awareness programs	65.3		67.5	74.3
Before- or after-school programs		57.4	77.5	71.6
Closed campus (no off-campus lunches, etc.)			67.5	
Social skills training programs (teacher or students)		60.3		

NOTE: Empty cells indicate not 1 of the top 10 strategies implemented.

a. Numbers represent percentage of schools that have implemented each strategy. Small districts were 0 to 4,999, midsize districts were 5,000 to 29,999, and large districts were 30,000 or more students.

Table 4

**Perceived Top 10 Most Effective Violence Prevention Strategies by All Districts and by District Size**

Strategy	All Districts' Rank	Small Districts' Rank	Midsized Districts' Rank	Large Districts' Rank
Teachers placed/present in hallways	1	1	1	2
Security personnel	2		7	1
Police liaison or specialty trained positive police presence	3		3	6
Peer mediation/conflict resolution training	4		2	7
Alternative schools/educational models	5	3	5	10
Closed campus (no off-campus lunches, etc.)	6	9	10	5
Metal detectors	7			3
Removal of lockers	8	6		4
Uniform discipline policies/procedures (or stricter approach)	9	4	8	8
Before- or after-school programs	10	10		
Alteration of class schedules		3		
Programs to increase parental involvement		8		
Social skills training for students or teachers		5		
Cameras		7	6	
Dogs (drugs, explosives, etc.)			4	9
Teacher conflict management training			9	

NOTE: Small districts were 0 to 4,999 students, midsize districts were 5,000 to 29,999 students, and large districts were 30,000 or more students. Empty cells indicate not ranked in the top 10 strategies perceived as least effective. Ranking based on effectiveness of implementation of each strategy.

Table 5  
 Perceived Top 10 Least Effective Violence Prevention Strategies by All Districts and by District Size

Strategy	All Districts' Rank	Small Districts' Rank	Midsized Districts' Rank	Large Districts' Rank
Transparent book bags	1			1
Dogs (drugs, explosives, etc.)	2		2	3
Removal of lockers	3		1	6
Social skills training (teacher or student)	4	9	4	2
Cameras	5		6	7
Dress code or clothing restrictions	6	5	7	5
Multicultural or diversity awareness programs	7	4	5	8
Programs to increase parental involvement	8	7	8	9
Metal detectors	9	1	3	
Alteration of class schedules	10			4
Peer mediation/conflict resolution training		2		
Programs to increase community involvement		3		
Poverty issue programs (breakfast, book programs, etc.)		6	9	
Security personnel		8		
Alternative schools/educational models		10		
Business school partnerships			10	
Teacher conflict management training				10

NOTE: Small districts were 0 to 4,999 students, midsize districts were 5,000 to 29,999 students, and large districts were 30,000 or more students. Empty cells indicate not ranked in the top 10 strategies perceived as least effective.

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