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Addressing Violence in Public Schools Zero Tolerance vs. Ecologically Based Programs: A Policy Analysis

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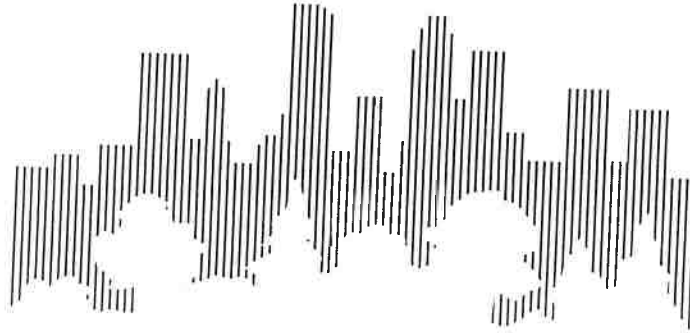*Augsburg College*

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MASTER OF ARTS
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Lee Lindsey, Jr.

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A Policy Analysis

Lee Lindsey Jr.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Addressing Violence in Public Schools

Zero-Tolerance vs. Ecologically Based Programs:

A Policy Analysis Addressing Violence in Public Schools

Lee Lindsey Jr.

December 2, 1998

Violence in public schools in the United States over the past decade has been a national and local concern. There are a number of schools in several States across the nation that have implemented violence prevention programs to address these concerns. Some States incorporate use predetermined consequences for specific violent behavior by implementing zero-tolerance approaches. Other States incorporate community resources to help solve the problem of violence within public schools. This thesis will take a look at the effectiveness of choosing approach over the other.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Context of the policy analysis

Two wounded, Richmond, VA.
The suspect: Quinshawn Booker, 14
The crime: Wounded two teachers with a gun
The date: June 15, 1998
The place: Armstrong High School, Richmond, VA.
The punishment: Booker will be tried as an adult and is currently being held in a juvenile detention center. He could be sentenced to as many as 70 years in prison if convicted on all charges (six felony counts). Prosecutor David Hicks said the decision to prosecute Booker as an adult was "a very easy call. Every parent was a victim. The whole city was a victim."

Four dead, Springfield, Ore.
The suspect: Kipland Kinkel, 15
The crime: Killing his parents and two classmates with semi-automatic weapons
The date: May 21, 1998
The place: Thurston High School, Springfield, Ore.
The punishment: Recently arraigned, Kinkel is charged as an adult with four counts of aggravated murder.

Two dead and two injured, Bethel, Alaska
The suspect: Evan Ramsey, 16
The crime: Murdering a principal and student and injuring two others with a gun
The date: Feb. 19, 1997
The place: Bethel, Alaska
The punishment: Authorities accused two other students of knowing the shootings would take place. Evan Ramsey was tried as an adult and sentenced to two 99-year terms.

Five dead and ten injured, Jonesboro, Ark.
The suspects: Mitchell Johnson, 14, and Andrew Golden, 12
The crime: Killing four classmates and a teacher in addition to wounding nine students and a teacher with gunfire
The date: March 24, 1998
The place: Westside Middle School, Jonesboro, Ark.
The punishment: Judge Ralph W. Wilson Jr. took only minutes to declare Johnson and Golden delinquent for carrying out one of the most notorious schoolyard massacres in U.S. history, but by law he was only able to sentence them to an "indeterminate" number of years in a juvenile prison near Little Rock. The maximum term -- life in a detention center until the day they turn 21 -- isn't long enough, the judge said. "Here, the punishment will not fit the crime," he told the boys. "We know the heinous and atrocious nature of these crimes."

Following a decade of escalating violence amongst youth and with concerns from the public, media, and the government, there evolved a national priority to address the issue of violence within public schools. The extent of the issues is such that most states have adopted some sort of program to address the incidence of violence in their state, and have passed legislation to look at ways that schools can handle violent incidents (Furlong, Babinski, Poland, & Munoz, 1996; James, 1994). Between 1992 and 1994, thirty-five states developed some kind of school based anti-violence program (Appendix A).

Purpose of the Study

Of the various types of interventions, most of the interventions have been geared specifically towards students and their behavior. Conflict-resolution, peer mediation, and *zero-tolerance* policies, are generally programs that seek to modify individual behavior. These programs identify the source of the problem to be with students, and their individual behavior.

Some schools take a more *ecological approach* to address student behavior. Programs that incorporate parents, law enforcement, community resources, industrial leaders, and in some cases support from the county, are sources where other systems have been involved with addressing school violence. An ecologically based program acknowledges that the problems are larger than an individual student's inability to resolve conflicts. **The purpose of this thesis** will be to make a policy analysis into how schools have been addressing violence at a national level, specifically ecologically based, and zero-tolerance interventions. As a result of this analysis, the most successful programs,

plus indicators for the future will be identified, with special reference to the field of social work.

Research Questions

There are school districts in Minneapolis and surrounding community that have been impacted by national efforts to address violence. Some districts have adopted approaches that are individually focused, and others have a more ecological approach. The research questions that will be addressed in this thesis will include: What is the effectiveness of ecologically based versus individually based school-based interventions to address violence? What are arguments for implementing policies of one vs. the other?

Policy Framework

The policy analysis will include:

- **Definitions of the issue and its history.**

How significant is the issue of violence and its impact in public schools? The analysis will include a brief history of violence within the past ten years, and how it has recently impacted public schools.

- **Goals and objectives of efforts to address school violence.**

What are schools trying to do in addressing issues of violence? Some schools are not tolerating any form of violence in their schools. These zero tolerance approaches seek to resolve issues of violence by removing violent students. Other schools involve parents, community leaders, police officers, neighbors, and County workers to address issues of violence. These ecologically based programs identify school violence as something

greater than a school problem, necessitating more than schools to seek resolution to the problem.

- **The underlying values of the policy chosen by school districts.**

  This analysis will discuss what the key underlying values of schools that choose either zero-based versus ecologically based interventions.

- **Strengths and limitations of policies chosen by school districts.**

  The strengths and limitations of zero-tolerance and ecologically based policies will be included in this portion of the analysis.

- **An identification of alternative strategies.**

  Zero tolerance and ecologically based policies are all but two out of several other means of addressing violence in schools.

  This thesis will focus primarily on the impact that national policy has played on addressing violence in schools. Ecologically based, and zero-tolerance based policies have been two common frameworks that schools across the nation have used, and will be used as frameworks in this thesis to discuss how schools are addressing violence.

  Chapter II will give a theoretical summary of the ecological perspective and how it is applied in schools to address school violence. A brief definition of behavior modification, with special attention to punishment will also by discussed as a way of modifying violent behavior in schools.

  In chapter III, the literature review will be discussed. The chapter will begin with a brief history of violence in schools in the United States over a ten-year period. The purpose of this section is to focus on how current concern has evolved over the past two decades, and the initiative schools have taken to address those problems. It is not to take a

look at a complete history of what schools have done over an extended amount of time to address violence. The chapter will also examine specific behavior modification programs and specific ecologically based programs that are used across the nation.

In chapter IV, an analysis of zero-tolerance versus ecologically based interventions will be made, which will incorporate an analysis of the goals and objectives. Statistics, and case examples will be used as the means to highlight the key differences of effectiveness in zero-tolerance and ecologically based interventions.

This thesis will conclude in Chapter V with limitations, and recommendations for schools who are seeking to take initiatives to address violence.

In recent years, media has captured the pervasiveness of violence in public schools, which has led to national attention. The severity of violence in schools has prompted most states, and the federal government to take initiatives towards resolving issues of violence in schools.

The purpose of this analysis will be to analyze two frameworks that are used by schools across the country: zero tolerance and ecologically based policies; the former addressing violence with an intervention that is targeted towards the individual, and the latter having a more holistic approach. The analysis will seek to answer what the effectiveness is of the policy chosen by schools, and what are the arguments for implementing one policy over the other.

The framework that will be utilized to analyze the two policies will include: definitions of the issues and its history, goals and objectives of efforts to address school violence, the underlying values of the policy chosen by school districts, strength and limitations of policies chosen by schools, and identification of alternative strategies.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptual Framework

Ecological Framework

The ecological perspective is one that focuses on the relationships between an organism and it's environment. For the purposes of this analysis, the organism is the student. The key component of the ecological perspective is that it is transactional by nature and that the transaction is between the organism and the environment. The exchange between the student and environment serves a reciprocal relationship, in that one is continually being shaped and influenced by the other (Association for Advanced Training, 1989).

Another key component of the ecological perspective is that a person's needs or problems are a result of the exchange between the organism and environment, and not because of the environment or personality alone (Association for Advanced Training, 1989). The review of the literature demonstrates that there are programs that schools have adopted that look primarily at the student's behavior in school, with little or no emphasis on other systems within a student's life that may be contributing to the reasons for the behavior. Wider systems constantly make an impact on the individual (Germain, 1992).

The ecological perspective can best be understood as a whole that is composed of interrelated and interdependent parts (Hartman and Laird, 1983). A change in one part of the system affects the whole system. A key component of the ecological perspective is that it focuses on the relationships between entities, rather that on entities in isolation. A school that incorporates the ecological perspective in its practices to address violence will take a more broad approach in coming to resolve incidents of violence. These schools

involve micro, meso, and macro levels of intervention, namely: parents, law enforcement, community leaders, the business community, and county social service agencies are the parts that make up the whole when schools emphasize the ecological perspective. When the emphasis is focused on the whole rather than parts, processes become centered on transactions and social interactions rather than individual behavior. This does not imply that individuals are not responsible for their behavior; rather that insight about behavior can be found when complex systems interacting are recognized.

When interventions to modify a student's behavior do not acknowledge the complexities of parts interacting with each other, the emphasis falls on the individual student. Zero tolerance approaches are one way to modify a student's violent behavior. The next section will introduce the principles involved with behavior modification.

Behavioral modification

There are several components involved when one speaks of behavioral modification. The components of behavioral modification are typically categorized as respondent or operant behavior. Respondent behavior has been referred to as a specific kind of behavior that is elicited by a specific kind of stimulus. It refers to a reflexive-type response, and the stimulus comes before the behavior (such as blinking an eye or salivating) (Nye, 1996). When schools utilize zero-tolerance policies, there are automatic responses to specific behavior.

Operant behavior has been defined as behavior that operates on the environment to produce a consequence (Nye, 1996), and is emitted rather than elicited response. When

a student gets into a fight (the behavior) in a school that primarily utilizes zero-tolerance interventions, the intervention (consequence) is administered or emitted by the school.

For the purposes of this study, this thesis will focus on operant behavior: behavior can be reinforced in two different ways---positively and negatively. Positive reinforcement involves the adding of something to a situation, and negative reinforcement (aversive stimulus) involves the removal of something in a situation (Nye, 1996).

Punishment is a common way to control violent behavior in schools. In order for something to be punishing, a known negative reinforcer is presented or a known positive reinforcer is removed. An intended result of punishment is that a particular behavior will be suppressed(Nye, 1996).

This analysis has conceptualized interventions by schools to combat violence from an ecological framework, and through behavior modification by the use of zero tolerance policies. The ecological perspective looks at the relationship between the organism and the environment, and is transactional by nature. The transaction between the organism and environment is reciprocal, in that one is influenced by the other.

Modifying violent behavior by implementing zero tolerance policies is another way in which schools seek to combat violence. Operant behavior is an emitted response to produce a consequence. Punishment is a form of operant behavior that attempts to surpress violent behavior.

CHAPTER III

Literature Review

<u>Brief History</u>

Thirty-five years ago, for every 100,000 Americans, five would fall victim to

homicide, and by 1980, the figure had doubled (Prothrow-Stith). Those figures back then

still placed the United States highest out of the twenty most industrialized countries. A

disproportionate number of these deaths in the United States are young males; 11.2 per

100,000 are white males, and a staggering 85.6 per 100,000 are African American males.

The overall homicide rate for young males is 21.9 per 100,000 (figure 2).

HOMICIDE RATES FOR YOUNG MEN 15 TO 24
IN DEVELOPED NATIONS

Young Men at Risk
Killings per 100,000 men 15 through 24 years old for 1986 or 1987.

0.3 Austria	1.4 Greece	3.0 Finland
0.5 Japan	1.4 France	3.3 Norway
1.0 W. Germany	1.4 Switzerland	3.7 Israel
1.0 Denmark	1.4 Netherlands	4.4 New Zealand
1.0 Portugal	1.7 Belgium	5.0 Scotland
1.2 England	2.3 Sweden	**United States 21.9**
1.2 Poland	2.5 Australia	
1.3 Ireland	2.9 Canada	

Source: Journal of the American Medical Association

For the last ten years, the issue of violence in public schools has been a major

subject of news stories when it comes to discussion about schools. Popular media has

portrayed American schools to be places where beatings, stabbings, rapes, and shootings

occur. Blockbuster movies have portrayed public schools as war zones, where only the

strong survive. As a result, more and more attention has focused on school violence (Sharp, 1993).

In 1994, a Gallup poll (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994) stated that the American public viewed violence as the number one problem that schools face. Government surveys and reports have been focused on discussing the amount of crime and violence occurring in schools (Bastian & Taylor 1991; Pearson & Toby, 1991). The federal government's National Education goals panel said in 1994 that by the year 2000, schools in the United States will be free of drugs, violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms, and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. The year 2000 is fast approaching, and this well-intentioned yet lofty goal seems far from being met.

Review of the Literature

Kelly and Pink define school violence as disrespect to teachers, administrators, and students, theft and physical assaults. More broadly defined indicators of youth aggression include such factors as extreme competitiveness, quarrels with peers, and verbal and physical assaults (Bandura, 1973); Moyer, 1987; Ross, 1981; Steward & Kelso, 1987). This writer prefers a more narrowly defined definition to focus on the most serious behavior, as does others (Alexander & Langford, 1992; Dentler, 1977). These more serious definitions include rape, robbery, and simple and aggravated assaults (Bastian & Taylor, 1991). Reasoning for the more serious definition is because there are more serious crimes that are occurring in school.

Current initiatives that have been made on a national level include a survey (the Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence), which was conducted by the

National Center for Education Statistics. The survey asked respondents to indicate how many of three specific actions were taken against students for each of the following offenses:

- The possession or use of a firearm;

- The possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm;

- The possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs, including tobacco; and

- Physical attacks or fights.

The three disciplinary actions that schools were asked to report were expulsions, transfers to alternative schools or programs, and out-of-school suspensions lasting 5 or more days (figure 3).

Figure 7.—Percent of specified disciplinary actions taken by public schools for specific offenses, by type of action taken: 1996-97
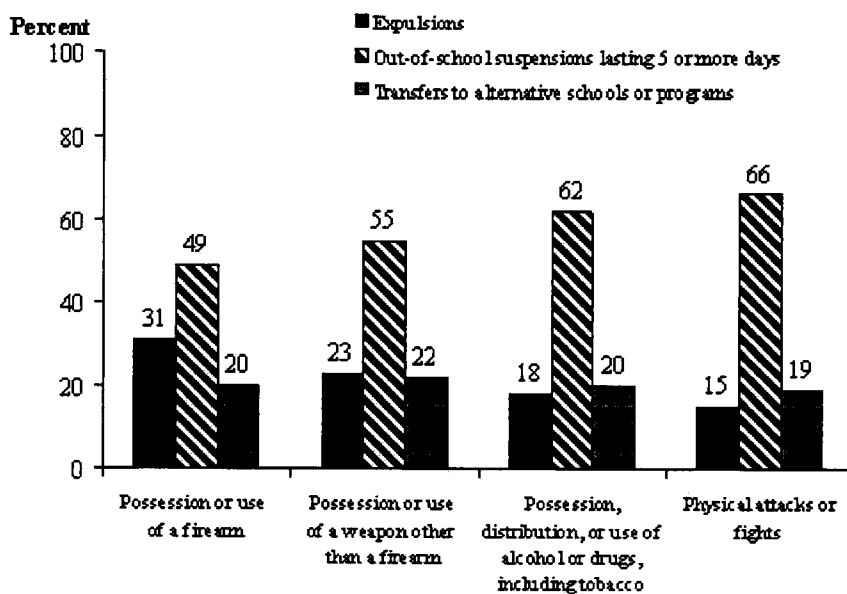
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence," FRSS 63, 1997.

The most common form of intervention was out-of-school suspensions lasting five or more days. Physical attacks or fighting was the most common reason for out-of-school suspensions, followed by: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs, including tobacco; possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm; and possession or use of firearm.

Being expelled from school was the second most used disciplinary action taken by schools to address violence. Expulsion was used mostly for the possession or use of a firearm, followed by: possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm; possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs, including tobacco; and physical attacks or fighting.

Zero Tolerance Policies

"Zero tolerance policy" was defined in this survey as a school or district policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses. Three-quarters or more of all schools reported having zero tolerance policies for a variety of student offenses. About 90 percent of schools reported zero tolerance policies or firearms (94 percent) and weapons other than firearms (91 percent). Eighty-seven and 88 percent had policies of zero tolerance for alcohol and drugs, respectively. Seventy-nine percent had a zero tolerance policy for violence and 79 percent had a zero tolerance policy for tobacco (figure 4).

Figure 8.—Percent of public schools that have adopted zero tolerance policies for various student offenses: 1996-97
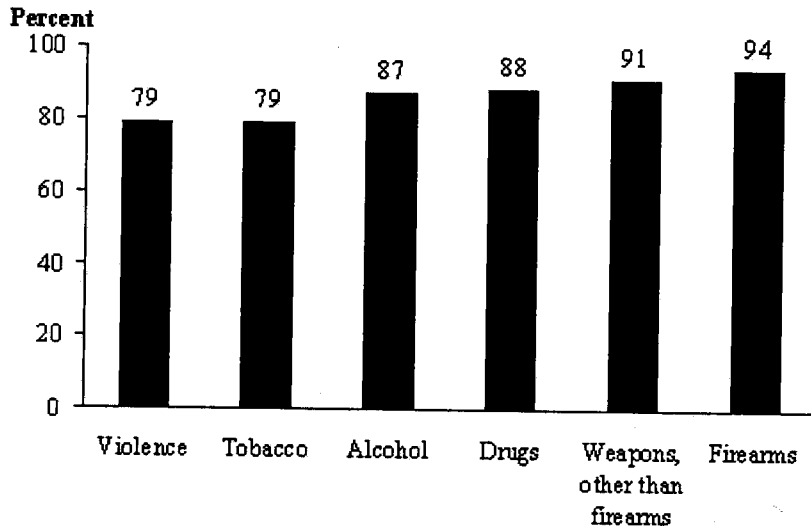
Percent

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Principal/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence," FRSS 63, 1997.

Figure 4

Schools with no crime reported were less likely to have a zero tolerance policy for violence (74 percent) than schools that had reported one or more serious crimes (85 percent).

The survey indicated that a majority of public school principals (78 percent) reported having some type of formal school violence prevention or reduction programs. The percentage of schools with both 1-day and ongoing programs (43 percent) was almost double the percentage of schools with only ongoing programs (24 percent) and quadruple the percentage of schools with only 1-day programs (11 percent). Schools in which a serious crime was reported were more likely to have violence prevention programs than those in which no crime or only less serious crime had occurred (93 percent compared with 74 and 79 percent, respectively; tables 25 and 27). Schools with serious crime also had more programs per school. They reported a mean of 6 programs

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per school compared with 3.4 violence prevention programs in schools with no crime or lesser crimes only.

In some public schools, incidents during 1996-97 requiring police contact were used to modify or introduce new violence prevention programs. Of schools with violence prevention programs that had reported one or more crimes in 1996-97, 31 percent had used these incidents to introduce or modify their violence prevention programs.

In the survey, school principals were asked if, during the 1996-97 school year, they had any formal programs or had made any efforts for the purpose of preventing or reducing school violence. Selected components of prevention/reduction programs were listed and principals were asked if any of their programs included each of the following:

- Prevention curriculum, or training for students (e.g., social skills training)

- Behavioral programming or behavior modification for students

- Counseling, social work, psychological, or therapeutic activity for students

- Activities involving individual attention for students (e.g., tutoring, mentoring)

- Recreational, enrichment, or leisure activities for students

- Student involvement in resolving student conduct problems (e.g., dispute or conflict resolution or mediation, student court)
- Training, supervision, or technical assistance in classroom management for teachers

- Review, revision, or monitoring of school-wide discipline practices and procedures

- Community or parent involvement in school violence prevention programs or efforts

- Reorganization of school, grades, or schedules (e.g., school within a school, "houses" or "teams' of students)

The prevention curriculum, counseling/social work, and review/revision

of school-wide discipline practices were components used most often by schools with violence prevention or reduction programs (89 percent, 87 percent, and 85 percent, respectively), while reorganization of school, grades, or schedules was used least often With the exception of community/parental involvement, which 48 percent of schools reported using, between 63 percent and 81 percent of the schools with violence prevention or reduction programs reported using the remaining components.

Ecologically-based programs/policies

Literature on programs and policies used by schools that address violence on a systemic level is vast. There are numerous programs that are utilized across the nation that use resources outside of the school to address violence. This thesis will choose a range of programs to give the reader an idea of what ecologically based programs entail.

In 1992, President George Bush launched a "Weed and Seed" program to address the rising gang and youth violence. The program consists of collaboration with police, correction officials, educators, social-service providers and community organizations to remove criminals off the streets and foster a sense of community in high-crime areas. Local children were used to assist with cleaning up graffiti and cleaning up litter. After-school and late night recreational activities were also developed (CQ researcher, March 15, 1996).

In Charleston County, S.C., there is a "Shared Responsibility" program in which parents opt to attend school with their children rather than have them suspended. Parents spend up to 5 days practically hand-to-hand with students going to and from classes. Administrators cite improvement in 79 percent of the cases. Student behavior as well as greater involvement and cooperation from parents as they gain better understanding of

the discipline problems in school. Howard County Maryland assistant principal Stephen Wallis proposed that parents should be charged a fee whenever teachers are forced to work overtime in order to pay for the teacher's time needed to address the behavior. Wallis stated that public schools have contributed to the problem by gradually taking on more responsibilities once assumed by parents.

Increasing security has also been an intervention by policymakers. Consultants have recommended that teachers, parent volunteers, students, and security staff should play a role in monitoring the common times when violence would occur – before school opening, during school day, during weekend activities, and during periods when school is out (Vertermark & Blouvelt, 1978).

One way of involving parents would be to get students to play a role in getting parents involved in school. In one situation, a back-to-school night (which involves parents to meet with teachers) had consistently poor attendance rates. The gym teacher had told them that they would not have to run laps if they were able to get their parents to the event; Eighty-five percent of the parents showed up for parents night. One organization that effectively involves parents with schools is Communities in the Schools (CIS). CIS is composed of public, private partnerships and assists at risk youth and their parents through tutoring mentoring, and other functions that reduce discord in American schools.

Four high schools, and one middle school in Atlanta Georgia are part of the "Go to High School, Go to College" project. The project couples 100 successful older African American males with adolescent African-American males, who are struggling academically, are at risk of dropping out of school, or who are having behavioral

problems. The mentors are given a forty-page curriculum to assist them with ideas of what ways they can interact with the adolescent, so that the students self esteem and grades are improved. A local fraternity will provide scholarships for those in the program that want to continue to college.

"Teens on Target", in Oakland, California, grew out of a coalition of parents, elected officials school personnel, and community agency representatives who thought students could be more effective with the problem of violence, than adults. Selected high school students are trained during the summer to be violence prevention advocates, specifically in the areas of drugs, guns, and family violence. After the students complete the training, they become peer educators to other high school students, and children in middle schools.

In New York, New York, a program called "Resolving Conflict Creatively Program" (RCCP), has been recognized as one of the most promising violence prevention programs available. The program provides a model for preventing violence by focusing on conflict resolution and intergroup relations. RCCP assists students to realize that aggression or passivity are not the only choices for resolving conflict, and that by increasing their choices on dealing with conflict, they can play a powerful role in creating a peaceful world.

One of the key strategies of RCCP is professional development with principals, parents, teachers, and any other adult that may be in their lives. RCCP works with these adults to teach them the skills and concepts of conflict resolution in an ongoing way.

Ecologically Based Interventions used Locally

In seeking to address violence in public schools, there are several schools within Minneapolis who have incorporated a more ecological approach with their suspension policies. The Minneapolis Public School district encourage students to attend school close to home so that it will be easier for parents to get involved with their children's education. The district also encourages neighborhood support to establish a sense of security. The methods that are set up by the district to make this partnership possible and which families can be supportive of their children include:

- Encouraging two-way communication with families through phone calls and messages, progress reports, and newsletters.

- Opportunities to become involved in school decision-making by becoming members of the PTA, the school's Site Team, or the Leadership council.

- Opportunities to learn how to support a child's success in education by attending events such as "Family Science Night" or utilizing the homework help line.

- Participating on the Minneapolis Public Schools Parent Partnership Council, which is a vehicle for parents and school administration to communicate about district issues.

- Seeking support from the Office of Family Involvement, which assists schools to improve family involvement.

Another way of incorporating other systems such as law enforcement, parents and other relatives, etc., with schools to address violence has been a growing practice with schools in the Twin Cities are to exercise "wrap-around" practice. Hearthstone of Minnesota is one agency that incorporates this process. The wrap-around process encourages all that are affected by a particular problem, to help with seeking a solution

to the problem. The elements that serve as the philosophical base for the wrap-around are as follows:

1. Wrap-around efforts must be based in the community.

2. Services and supports must be individualized to meet the needs of the children and families.

3. The process must be culturally competent and build on the unique values, preferences, and strengths of children and families.

4. Parents must be included in every level of development of the process.

5. Agencies that are involved must have access to flexible, non-categorized funding.

6. The process must be implemented on an inter-agency basis and be owned by the larger community.

7. Wraparound plans must include a balance of formal services and informal community and family resource.

8. Services must be unconditional. If the needs of the child and family change, the child and family are not to be rejected from services. Instead, the services must be changed

9. Outcomes must be measured. If they are not, the wraparound process is merely an interesting fad. (VanDenBerg, 1996).

The wraparound team should be 5 to 8 people consisting of children, parents, the business community, neighborhood and cultural leaders, law enforcement, and community service organizations. No matter whom the team is composed of, the importance is the mix of both formal and informal systems (VanDenBerg, 1996). Ideally, the parent whose child has been suspended for violent acts can be the primary facilitator. The parent can then be empowered to partner with the school. The team should initially meet every week for the first month, and then once per month after that point. The meeting place should be wherever the families feel the most comfortable (VanDenBerg, 1996).

Behavior Modification based Interventions

Although there were some programs that integrated other systems, there was a high concentration of programs whose interventions focused primarily on students, and secondarily to parents and teachers (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company & Harris Poll, 1993-1994). In more than 12 states there are "No pass, No drive" laws that suspend the driver's licenses of young adults in high school that skip classes.

Horne, Glaser, Sayger, and Wright (1992), discussed a model to work with children who have serious conduct disorders. These series of interventions includes social competence, peer counseling, academic mediation, behavioral self control strategies, training educators, parent training in child management skills, social learning, family therapy, parent individual training, couple or single-parent counseling, and parent education.

Mase & Shea (1989) stated that student problems could be managed early before more intrusive and more restrictive interventions are used. They recommend a behavioral self-management intervention strategy consisting of self-management, self-evaluation, self-reinforcement and self-instruction. This model is appropriate for schools because it is time efficient and allows more students to be served, uses least restrictive positive techniques, and allows input from teacher, students, and special service providers in design, administration, and evaluation.

Some schools have paradoxically endorsed corporal punishment to correct disruptive student behavior. However, there have been several people who have spoken against the use of corporal punishment. Straus (1991), based on a cultural spillover theory, talks about violence in one area of life dictates violence in another area of life,

and that this process of carrry-over goes beyond the bounds between legitimate and criminal use of force. Straus also found that punishment is effective in the short-term, but has long term negative consequences.

Punishment is most effective if it is administered under three conditions (Bowen and Hilgard, 1981). The conditions are:

1. Immediate delivery – Punishment must follow objectionable behavior as soon as possible.

2. Severity – The punishment must be of sufficient magnitude to be aversive to the recipient.

3. High probability – The punishment must follow undesirable behavior on almost every occasion when it occurs. Also, if others observe the punishment, it will decrease the probability that others will repeat the behavior.

Zero tolerance approaches are forms of punishment used by schools, which are intended to suppress violent behavior. The implementation of zero-tolerance policies serves as symbolic meanings for schools to demonstrate and re-establish power and control.

Behavior Modification Used in Robbinsdale---Zero Tolerance

Most "zero tolerance" policies have a common theme of mandatory expulsion for committing a specified act. These acts commonly involve incidents of harassment, assault, possession of weapons or dangerous weapons/objects, and possession or use of drugs in school.

One school district that has a zero tolerance approach is Robbinsdale Area Schools in Minnesota. The school board instituted this approach to address several different types of behavior, and fighting being one such behavior. The Student Discipline

policy opens by stating that the responsibility of making reasonable policies and rules within the district is that of the school board. The school board notes that discipline should also be a learning experience, and not just a form of punishing students. The policy goes on to state that discipline:

- Helps the student learn a lesson that will positively affect his or her present and future behavior

- Is designed to help the student control and change his or her behavior, thereby guiding the student into adulthood.

- Helps the student to grow intellectually and emotionally.

- Enhances the student's self-confidence, self-worth and self-image.

Specifically, the district's stance on fighting is that to engage in any form of fighting is prohibited, regardless if a student was acting in self-defense or if a student initiated the fight. Hitting, pulling hair, kicking, slapping or any other act where a student deliberately inflicts or attempts to inflict bodily harm on another person. For grades nine through twelve, anyone who is caught fighting on the first offense is suspended for five days and recommended for expulsion out of the school district.

Curbing students to join organized gangs, Rich (1992), stated that establishing an organized atmosphere of learning and living in schools can help (p.38). Several programs were initiated without regard for theoretical justification or evaluation for program effectiveness. Although most of the interventions were discussed from a psychological perspective (APA, 1993), they are applicable for social work because of the field history in intervening in these systems.

The key points in this chapter are that violence is any act of verbal or physical assault against anyone in the school environment. These acts include rape, robbery, and simple aggravated assaults. Some schools intervene with incidents of violence from an ecologically based point of view, and others emphasize zero-tolerance approaches in combating violence.

Over the past ten years initiatives have been made on both national and local levels to combat violence in public schools. National surveys such as the "Principles/School Disciplinarian Survey on School Violence" have indicate that the most common forms of interventions for violence in schools are out-of-school suspensions, followed by expulsion, and transfer to another school or program. The majority of schools surveyed that reported violence in their school, stated that they had zero tolerance policies.

Of the schools that had violence prevention programs, there were ten key components that were used most often. Of the ten components that were most commonly used, the second least commonly used component of violence prevention was community/parental evolvement.

There are several programs used by schools that utilized ecologically-based programs, such as "Weed and Seed", "Shared Responsibility", and the "Go to High School, Go to College." Local school districts such as Minneapolis encourage students to attend school close to home so that it will be easier for parents to get involved with their children's education. Wrap-around services, which is a means by which all that are affected by a particular problem, help seek a solution to the problem. Locally,

wraparound services are becoming more commonly used by schools to address school violence.

Zero-tolerance approaches tend to have a more punishing way of averting violence in schools, and have a more individualistic flavor for addressing violent behavior. Zero tolerance approaches seek to modify the behavior of individuals who are involved in violent incidences in schools. Zero-tolerance programs designed to modify individual student behavior include behavioral self-management interventions, and corporal punishment.

Of the several different types of programs that are used by schools across the nation, ecological and zero-tolerance based are two ways of dichotomizing some of these interventions. The following chapter will take a closer look at ecological and zero-tolerance based policies by analyzing the goals and objectives that drive schools to focus on either ecological or zero-tolerance based policies. The chapter will also look at arguments for ecological or zero-tolerance based policies, and the underlying values and assumptions behind the two policies.

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Analysis

Every now and then, one will speak of the African proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child." This writer believes the same holds true when it comes to addressing the issues of violence within the school system. This belief has its roots in the ecological perspective, which takes a look at organisms within its environment and the demonstrated successes of policies which incorporate this broad approach. For the purposes of this analysis, the organism has been contextualized as students within the school system.

On the other hand, zero-tolerance policies (which are used as a way to punish students for violent behavior) are intended to suppress violent behavior *for the individual.* The question of the use of punishment and its effectiveness is difficult to prove. If punishment was an effective deterrent, then the number of crimes people commit should decline. Statistics put out by the FBI say the opposite; violent crimes are sharply increasing (Prothrow-Stith, 1993).

Analysis of Policy Points

As outlined in Chapter one, the following elements are included as the framework for this policy analysis: definitions of the issue and history; goals and objectives of efforts to address school violence; the underlying values of policy chosen by school; strengths and limitations of policies chosen; and an identification of alternative strategies. The last two policy points will be discussed in Chapter five.

- **Definitions of the issue and its history**

As indicated in Chapter 1, for the past couple of decades, violence has been on the rise. With organizations such as the National Rifle Association which allow the accessibility of guns easier for people, the number of deaths that occur in the United States continues to escalate. As a result, the number of violent incidents, as well as the severity of violent incidents in schools has been directly influenced.

The number of violent incidents in public schools has been barraged media headlines. The violence occurring in schools in the United States has not been limited to disrespect to teachers, theft, and physical assaults; violence has escalated to the point to include rape, robbery, simple and aggravated assaults, and drug possession.

- **Goals and Objectives**

The goal for any school that has implemented ecological or zero-tolerance based programs is ideally to eradicate violence in schools; to maintain an atmosphere where education can thrive without the threat of ones own safety. The objectives of efforts by schools to address violence is not only how effective policies have been in *reducing* violence, but should also analyze *the process* by which these policies seek to address the issues. The ecological perspective is a theory of process. Schools that exercise an ecological perspective will not focus on individual "problem" students, but on the social interconnection between systems with the school (Clancy, 1995).

If schools measure success solely by decreases in the incidents of violence, then there is no question that *the perception* of zero tolerance approaches are effective (which is likely why three-quarters or more of all schools have zero-tolerance policies). Removing students from school for violence as the primary intervention creates an out-

of-sight, out-of-mind false sense of security that are misguiding schools efforts to combat violence. Zero-tolerance approaches punish students for their behavior, but the student may not be any better disciplined with violent behavior than before.

However, if we factor in an ecological perspective to combat violence in schools, then initiatives made will pay attention to developing a process by which a variety of sources can interact with each other in way that decreases violence. Namely, schools personnel, parents, law enforcement, community organizations, and students themselves need to establish some semblance of order for the entire system to become healthy.

In order to minimize the incidence of violence in public schools, a child needs to have a loving relationship with a parent or caregiver (Prothrow-Stith, 1993). Children need the support and encouragement from adults to feel good about themselves and about others. In order for a child to give and feel love, and to mature into responsible adults, they need the participation of loving adults who will be there year after year. (Prothrow-Stith, 1993). Social workers can play a vital role in developing these relationships using an ecological perspective.

- **Underlying Values and Assumptions**

One of the underlying assumptions of schools that are choosing to punish students by exercising zero-tolerance policies vs. exercising a more holistic approach by applying an ecological perspective, is that one is just as effective as the other. The critical question here is effectiveness measured solely on the reduction of violent incidence? Or is effectiveness measured on the capacity for other "organisms" outside of the school to work together in addressing issues of violence. If violence that occurs in schools is perceived solely as a school problem, schools are left to deal with it.

Another assumption is that with zero-tolerance interventions, if you get rid of the student, you get rid of the problem. But zero-tolerance policies are fundamentally reactive; they deal with the problem after it has occurred. So, the problem still remains; it's the student that is being "rid" of, and not the problem.

Based on this writer's research, the underlying value of the policy is displayed in the programs that a school district utilizes. Some schools focus more on the individual and their behaviors. The underlying value here is that individuals are primarily responsible for their behaviors, and so interventions to address those behaviors tend to focus on individual accountability, such as zero-tolerance.

Arguments for Zero-Tolerance-Based Interventions

Although research has been ambiguous at best to the overall effectiveness of zero-tolerance approaches to modify violent behavior, there is at least a perception that it works. An example of this is at Robert E. Lee High School in Houston, Texas, where a "zero-tolerance for gangs in school" policy has been implemented.

In addition to the policy, a core group of teachers, administrators, Houston Police Department officers and Houston Independent school District security guards work together to identify gang members and take any necessary steps to evict them from the high school if they are/were violent offenders. Since the policy was implemented in 1993, it has caused a dramatic change in the school's climate. State test scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) at Robert E. Lee High School have improved over the last three years and pre-TAAS test scores have shown a 100% increase in the passage rate.

The head of a teachers' union says the state's zero-tolerance policies are beginning to make schools safer and has vowed to fight any attempt to weaken the law when the Legislature convenes next year. "We have a good law in the Texas Safe Schools Act," John Cole, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT), said this week. "It is starting to make our schools safer. It should not be tinkered with. And we should stay the course when it comes to keeping our schools safe from drugs, safe from guns, safe from violence" (Walt, 1996)

There has been some attention on zero-tolerance policies that have focused on schools that have kicked students out of school for calling classmates names, carrying over-the-counter medication or giving another student a seemingly innocent kiss on the cheek.

The use of zero-tolerance policies in these situations is "probably an unthoughtful response on the part of some school districts (that) fear a lawsuit," said Richard Powell, assistant director of governmental relations for the Texas Association of School Administrators (Walt, 1996).

Apart from the highly publicized, exceptions to the norm, Cole and other education officials say there is evidence to suggest that the law is working, as it was intended, which was to remove violent students and those who continually disrupt classrooms. Citing an informal, nonscientific survey of some of the union's members, Cole has indicated that fewer teachers have reported threats of violence, assaults, abusive language and thefts than in 1993 (Walt, 1996).

Arguments for Ecologically-Based Interventions

Because parents are not as involved, schools have become desperate, so punitive measures have been taken. But what they are really doing is reinforcing in the parent the feeling that he or she is not succeeding. Daniel Safram, director of the Center for the Study of Parent Involvement at John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, California states that punishment to change parent behavior is regressive, and in the long run, ineffective.

When violence occurs in schools, several organisms are effected in the system. When an intervention is used that fails to (or minimally utilizes) other systems to address the problem, the impact of the intervention not only impacts the student (whether positively or negatively), but also other systems that can be affected by the intervention.

What is more effective are efforts to understand the obstacles that make it difficult for parents to be involved in their children's schooling. The more appropriate response is to not punish parents, but to involve the larger community and to admit that it is hard work. "How are we going to help each other?" should be the central question. Outreach is more important than punishment. The best solution to school violence will be found with the active participation by the entire educational community (Bayh, 1978).

Suspension and expulsions have traditionally been used to deter students from committing crimes on school property. However, these measure have been counterproductive because they are often used with minor offenses (Bogh, 1978). Harsh punitive discipline towards school violence aggravates the potential for violence rather than control it (Besag, 1989). Specifically, a policy of school expulsions as a means to control school violence is counterproductive.

Forms of punishment such as zero tolerance policies that seek to suppress violent behavior can theoretically reinforce violent behavior: a student who gets suspended for defending themselves in a fight may win the sympathy of their classmates. Or being removed from school may be something desirable by a student so they won't have to go to class (Nye, 1996). The effectiveness of punishment is limited and is an undesirable means of control (Skinner, 1969).

The goals of schools that adopt policies to address violence is to get rid of violence in schools. Some schools have indoctrinated an individualistic approach by punishing students using zero-tolerance approaches. Other schools use ecologically based programs to reduce the incidence of violence in their school.

The effectiveness and success of the policy chosen should not only be measured by the reduction of violence in schools, but also the process by which a particular incident of violence was resolved. Zero-tolerance policies look more at individual behavior, and less at the process of intervention regarding violent behavior. The effectiveness of zero-tolerance policies is ambiguous, but some districts are committed to maintaining the policy in schools. Ecologically based interventions acknowledge that when school violence occurs, several organisms are effected in the system. Hence, all that are effected become a part of the solution.

The underlying assumption is that one policy is just as effective as the other. The critical question is how effectiveness is measured; by simply the reduction of violence in the school, or by the process by which efforts are made to reduce violence.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

This final chapter will take a look at the final two policy points of the analysis; alternative strategies that schools can use as interventions for violence and limitations of choosing one policy over the other. Most of the alternative interventions aim to address violent behavior, and not as a violent individual. Implications for social work will also be discussed in this chapter.

- **Alternative Strategies**

Primary prevention programs of the type that promote social and cognitive skills seem to have the greatest impact on attitudes about violent behavior among children and youth. Skills that aid children in learning alternatives to violent behaviors include social perspective taking, alternative solution generation, self esteem enhancement, peer negotiation skills, problem solving skills training, and anger management (APA, 1993, p.56).

Teachers can also play a critical role with the reduction of violence in schools. The way that teachers conduct themselves in the classroom have a calming and role modeling effect on behavior in schools. A professional's lack of sensitivity to differing tolerance levels can contribute to student violence (Wells, 1978), as well as a lack of crisis intervention skills by teachers (Bell & Semmel, 1978). One effective method teachers and social workers can use to reduce violent incidents is to give both parties the opportunity for direct verbal expression of particular issues (DeCecco and Roberts, 1978). Both parties should be given the opportunity to critically look at the dilemma, and think about why it is such a problem for the other; both parties should have a common

statement to the issue; both parties should agree to what they can gain and sacrifice; both parties should agree to who will be responsible for implementing the agreements that have been made; and both parties should agree to evaluating the implementation of the agreements.

Schools in these times should conduct safety assessments to review how school policies are in force as they pertain to violent students, staff training, and how schools can promote a positive climate within schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Children spend at least eight hours per day, five days per week in school; that is a significant amount of time to assist children with coping and effectively managing violence. Any initiative that schools make towards the resolution of violence is a step in the right direction all of that time.

In working with the student, it is important for the social worker to develop an approach that takes a look at issues at a micro level (i.e. the individual and family) and the macro level (i.e. the environment, organization, or community) (Gordon, 1969). If there is a maladaptive transaction between the environment and the person, the social worker will assist with modifying the transaction.

- **Limitations**

One limitation of this analysis has to do with the widespread use of zero tolerance policies by schools to modify violent behavior, despite increases with violent behavior. Perhaps people feel more comfortable with eliminating the problem by eliminating the student from school, without attention to how the behavior itself was eliminated. The impact of eliminating the student from the environment without addressing the behavior, and how that impacts the community is also an area which deserves further research.

Recommendations and Implications for Social Work

School social workers are an integral part of the equation when considering intervention to address school violence. For example, social workers can inform school-training programs to include teachers and social workers in national school violence legislation. Social workers and teachers can collaborate community members to generate strategies, such as those indicated in Chapter three. National school violence surveys were intended to yield interdisciplinary data from teachers, social workers and psychologists to develop collaborative violence reduction strategies.

Another key issue is the school population. Gottfredson & Gottfredson (1985) found that there were less victims of a crime in smaller schools than in larger schools, and recommended forming smaller schools as an intervention for violence. Blyth, Thiel, Bush, and Simmons (19980) found in their study nearly the same thing; students had a higher rate of victimization when they attended a large school than when they attended a smaller school. Subsequent research has demonstrated similar results (Russell, 1990).

Schools and teachers taking hardening procedures such as becoming more observant, tended to be victimized less that those teachers who less observant; it is important for teachers to be aware of what is happening in the classroom. Other means of curbing classroom violence are to send a student for help, to disperse large crowds, to keep calm, and follow school policy regarding the reporting of incidents (Chernow & Chernow, 1989).

Of the programs that have been used across the nation, there are several key characteristics of violence prevention programs. These characteristics are

- Staff development – to assist staff who work with disruptive students to mediate conflict and to incorporate prevention strategies in their school activities. This characteristic acknowledges that interventions should not be limited to focusing on modifying a student's behavior, but also by modifying systems that are associated with students. Here, one can see that the problem is not the students, but rather a problem that includes other parts of the system.

- Parental Involvement -- to get parents involved by training with violence prevention skills, using parents as volunteers, and by making home visits.

- Interagency Partnership and Community Linkages – several programs that have been successful with addressing school violence by working collaboratively with law enforcement, social service agencies, businesses and private groups such as fraternities.

Dialogue with and support from "the real world" is essential; if isolated, schools are destined to be beset with persistent violence (Reising, 1995). For example, the private sector holds sixty percent of the positions on each state's board of directors. These people believe that schools belong to all citizens, and are not simply the responsibility of just those working within the schools. Systems that are far from the classroom such as industrial leaders are another type of organism to assist schools to address violence (Moyers, 1995). Industrial leaders have played a significant a role doing authentic assessments, which are standards and tests situated in real-word tasks. Other systems that have been integrated in the various school-based programs include law enforcement (e.g. officers on school grounds), and community volunteers.

There is much to be learned from programs such as "Shared Responsibility" (discussed in Chapter three), where administrators cite a 79 percent improvement; or the 85 percent improvement in the attendance rate for parents showing up for parents night because the gym teacher promised they would not have to run laps. These programs are examples of how systems that work together can have a significant impact with problems within public schools. The key measure of effectiveness for schools that are seeking to address violence is the long-term versus short-term consequences of the interventions.

Although zero tolerance approaches are widely accepted by a number of schools, the impact is at best short term because the specific behavior (by definition) is often not specifically addressed. Ecologically based interventions are what is needed to slow down the cycle of violence that has continued to escalate in the United States, and consequently in the public schools. When we are able to make the distinction between these two policies and their effectiveness, then we will begin to see the true benefits of one versus the other.

The arguments for implementing ecologically based interventions rather than zero- tolerance is that: the problem of "school" violence becomes identified as a community problem; zero-tolerance approaches can be counterproductive; and the effectiveness of zero tolerance approaches is ambiguous.

This thesis has described the difference between zero tolerance and ecologically based approaches. The policy discussion has identified very different results with these contrasting ways of responding to violence. Ecologically based interventions focuses on the relationship between the student and environment, whereas zero tolerance approaches

focus on the individual behavior. The exchange between the student is more reciprocal in an ecological perspective, and the emphasis is on process.

APPENDIX A

State	Created gun-free school zones	Eased restrictions on suspension, transfer or expulsion of violent students	Established alternative schools for violent or disruptive students	Promoted measures to improve school security	Implemented conflict-resolution or peer mediation curricula or programs	Targeted at-risk children and youth for special services
Alaska	*					
Arizona	*			*		*
California	*	*	*	*	*	*
Colorado	*	*				
Connecticut					*	
Delaware		*	*	*	*	*
Florida	*	*	*	*	*	*
Georgia	*		*	*		*
Hawaii			*		*	*
Illinois	*		*	*	*	
Indiana				*		*
Iowa	*			*	*	*
Kansas						
Kentucky				*		
Louisiana	*		*	*	*	*
Maryland			*			
Massachusetts		*			*	*
Michigan	*	*				*
Mississippi	*		*	*	*	*
Minnesota	*		*	*	*	*
Nebraska			*		*	
New Hampshire	*	*				
New Jersey		*	*	*	*	*
North Carolina	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ohio				*	*	*
Oklahoma	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pennsylvania				*	*	*
Puerto Rico	*	*		*	*	*
Rhode Island	*					
Tennessee						*
Utah			*	*	*	*
Virginia	*	*	*	*	*	*
Washington	*		*	*	*	*
West Virginia					*	*
Wyoming	*	*	*			
Total	**21**	**16**	**18**	**21**	**22**	**22**

Note: States not listed either don't have programs or initiated programs earlier
Source: National Governors' Association survey, February 1995

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