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Solicitor General Canada
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REPORT

**WEAPONS USE IN
CANADIAN SCHOOLS:
LITERATURE REVIEW**

No. 1994-16

Responding
to Violence
and Abuse

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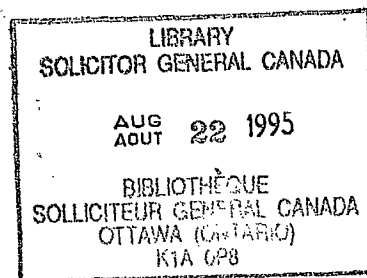
Police Policy and Research Division

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EDUCON Marketing and Research Systems

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The views expressed in this working paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

This comprehensive search of national and international books, journals and newspaper articles covers three topics:

- ◆ the nature and extent of weapons use in the schools
- ◆ the factors contributing to weapons use
- ◆ the responses to suppress weapons use

As anticipated, there was little Canadian information specifically addressing weapons use in schools. This study and its findings are therefore a benchmark of the Canadian experience.

There is considerable American research on violence in schools; however, it is not generally applicable to the Canadian experience. U.S. sources have been included where appropriate.

Because there is so little research, the nature and extent of weapons use and violence in Canadian schools, and responses to these issues are not well understood. This results in many varying definitions and responses to the problem — some conflicting.

Weapons use in the schools is dealt with in such various legal instruments as the *Young Offenders Act (Y.O.A.)*, the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *Criminal Code*, provincial educational acts and regulations, and provincial legislation dealing with child welfare and mental health. Each reflects its own particular philosophical underpinnings. This makes the job of applying such regulations in the real world of schools, communities and cities a difficult one.

Making sense of the legal and social ramifications is also complicated by the lack of standardized reporting, data collection, analysis and evaluation. Nor is valuable information not always shared by the different jurisdictions and youth agencies.

Violent crimes and weapons use do exist in many large Canadian cities. In most cases, research and intervention programs assume that offenders, victims and persons who fear crime in schools are three mutually exclusive groups. Evidence suggests that this is probably not true. Some individuals affected belong to more than one group. (Caputo, 1993; 1991; Caputo & Ryan, 1991; Fattah, 1993; Mathews, 1994; McDermott, 1985; Wilson, 1977)

Responses

Solutions to the problem of weapons use in the schools must be formulated and applied in the broad school-community context. Crime in the schools does happen in isolation from crime in the rest of society. Any myopic tendency to address it as such has two unfortunate consequences:

First, the blame tends to be placed solely on the schools and the police.

Second, solutions are almost always school-related. Some examples include:

- ◆ better teachers
- ◆ smaller classes
- ◆ fair and equal treatment of students
- ◆ relevant subject matter in courses
- ◆ tighter discipline and stricter rule enforcement involving suspensions and expulsions
- ◆ security
- ◆ fortress-like alterations to the schools

It has not been proven that school-related solutions significantly lower levels of school crime. Many such approaches do not take effect until after the violent act has occurred, while others only displace the problem to the community.

The social and psychological problems of weapons use and the violent tenor of our society will not go away by themselves. Though tempting, we must resist the lure of relying wholly on simplistic solutions. Some jurisdictions are doing that. Several

promising programs in classroom management, problem-solving skills training, violence prevention and safer violence-free environments for school children and youth have been developed, but few have been evaluated.

Influencing factors

This study reviews factors that *encourage and support weapons use among youth*. It discovered a wide range of findings that show how social and cultural contexts both promote and buffer violence.

Media: Though most Canadians abhor violence, heroes and media images often glorify interpersonal violence. Violent films are widely attended, and the news media present images reflecting violence in society, sometimes exploiting or contributing to it.

The violent influence of the media may be reduced by teaching critical viewing skills. There is also evidence that television is an pervasive and persuasive teacher of children and youth. It has the potential to educate and inform, and to make a major contribution to solving violence rather than contributing to it.

School peers: On the one hand, schools provide opportunities for bullying, harassment, intimidation, fights, thefts, and other forms of violence to occur. Students who feel that their personal safety is threatened may bring weapons to school. Students who are not doing well academically and who do not get along with others are more likely to get involved in violence, weapons, drug use and gangs.

On the other hand, schools also provide youth with opportunities to follow sound principles of personal safety, strengthen academic and social skills, develop sound peer relationships and learn effective nonviolent solutions to social conflict.

School system: The school system presents a new frontier for creating effective and

sympathetic primary prevention programs. While there is no quick fix to end weapons use and violence, collaboration between schools and such community agencies as local police department offers the most promise.

NATURE AND EXTENT OF WEAPONS USE

The Canadian Experience

A 1991 Ontario Teachers Federation survey cited an increase in physical and verbal assaults in schools over the previous two years. More than 440 "major" incidents were reported, ranging from biting to kicking to the use of guns and knives.

The possession of weapons is a serious problem in many schools, and incidences of trespassing on school property have recently increased. The relationship between school administrators and law enforcement authorities was seen as extremely important. Some school boards have policies and procedures defining this relationship. Many others do not have guidelines directing when and how school personnel or victims should advise the police when violence or weapons use do occur.

Police chiefs attending the 1993 International Association of Chiefs of Police conference heard that school violence in the 1990s is a major problem that school administrators are not equipped to handle. In some Toronto schools, weapons — including semi-automatic handguns — have been found. Lack of discipline and lack of inservice training for educators about when to call police contributed to the escalating weapons use in some schools. Police school liaison/resource programs were seen as important to suppress violence. Consideration should be given to cost-sharing if local police services cannot keep officers in schools. "It's time the police fit into the school board budgets." (Millar, 1993, p. A17)

The 1994 Ottawa Board of Education *Interim Report* noted 96 weapon-related incidents and 55 other incidents (primarily including serious physical confrontations) in their schools in 1992-93. The Ottawa Roman Catholic School Board reported that its teachers estimated five per cent of students were involved in school violence.

One Metro Toronto School Board suspended more than 2700 students last year — about 80 per cent were males; half were suspended for verbal and physical abuse. Weapons use accounted for 4 per cent of suspensions, mostly for knives and some guns. Metro Toronto police stated that 80 per cent of violent crimes in Toronto schools go unreported.

A 1993 Montreal school principals study revealed that violence in their schools is often hidden, because publicity would give schools a bad name and provoke parents to send their children elsewhere. Many times, principals wouldn't support the teachers or deal with the violence.

Many of the 20 secondary schools in Montreal's French-language Catholic system perceive they have not yet been affected by the problem of violence, however, one quarter have installed electronic security systems and surveillance cameras. Some have security guards and most require students to show identification cards.

Montreal schools report that conflicts between youth of different ethnic backgrounds begin in the schools and then spill into the streets and transit system. Some school principals and Montreal Urban Community (MUC) police officers state that some students are so frightened of gangs in specific regions of the city that they refuse to attend classes, while others carry weapons for protection.

The B.C. Teachers' Federation (BCTF) Final Report (1994) said that weapons are becoming more common, with knives or razors being the weapon of choice. While not necessarily criminal, a report from the Manitoba Teacher's Society suggests that in many cases, verbal abuse is a forerunner of other forms of abuse and therefore should not be downplayed.

Any interpretation of these reports requires caution, as terms, definitions and collection

methods vary. Many agencies do not record violent incidents, at least not officially. Despite these caveats, it is possible to say with some certainty that weapons use and violence by youth is increasing. (Bala et al., 1994; Burke, 1989; Hamilton, 1993; Harting, 1994; Lefebvre, 1993; MacDougall, 1993; Mathews, Banner & Ryan, 1992; Montgomery, 1993; Ouimet, 1993; Palmer, 1993; Roher & Elliot, 1993; Roy, 1994; Shahin, 1993; Wallace, 1993; West, 1993)

Once again, it must be remembered that the background incidence of violence is also increasing. Neighbourhoods affected by drugs, gangs, crime and poverty spawn schools with similar problems.

Statistics Canada (1994) reported that, of the 135,348 youth (ages 12 to 17 years) charged in Criminal Code incidents in 1992, 15 per cent were charged with violent crimes. The rate of youths charged with violent crimes increased twice as fast as the rate for adults.

In 1992, police charged 900 youths in violent incidents for every 100,000 young people aged 12 to 17 years, up from 415 in 1986. Violent offenders are much more likely to be males than females, though the portion of female violence seems to be increasing (Bala et al., 1994; Statistics Canada, 1992-1993).

According to a report by l'Association des directions d'école de Montréal on violence in educational institutions, it is difficult to separate 'inside' and 'outside' violence:

the inability to counteract violence outside the school will inevitably lead to contamination of the school environment; either by an increase in inside violence or through the development of a climate of fear and insecurity. The weaknesses common in school security systems thus enables schools to be

infiltrated by hard-to-control criminal elements ...

It is an illusion to believe that violence is caused only by outside groups intruding on school territory. Recent incidents have involved students from the schools where they occurred. Intervention strategies which go beyond the school itself must be developed, in contrast to the previous tendency to promote the application of discipline inside the school. This rekindles the debate regarding the role of the police in the school system. (ADEM, 1993, p.97)

The U.S. experience

Several major reports on crime and violence in American public schools were most enlightening, some reaching as far back as 1974 (Boothe et al., 1993; McDermott, 1985; Nolte, 1985; Sawyer, 1985; Toby, 1980; U.S. Senate hearings, Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice, 1984). Many parallels can be drawn from these reports and applied to the Canadian experience.

The National U.S. Crime Survey (1993) showed that almost three million crimes occurred in or near U.S. schools every year — 1 every 10 seconds. There is considerable evidence that the alarming rise in youth homicides in the U.S. is related to the availability of firearms. One student in five carries a weapon of some kind and about one student in twenty carries a gun. The American Psychological Association (1993) reported that students carry an estimated 270,000 guns to school every day.

Between 1979 and 1989, there was a 61 per cent increase in homicides by shootings committed by 15- to 19- year-old White and African-American youth. During the same period, the rate of homicides by objects other than guns declined 29 per cent.

Some report that guns have become a fetish of manhood and power, in a world that has given the young neither self-discipline or much to hope for. If children have trouble expressing themselves, guns are definitely articulate. In a study of eleventh-grade students in Seattle high schools, six per cent reported owning handguns, and a disproportionately high number of these handgun owners admitted having been expelled or suspended from school, having sold drugs, or having engaged in assault and battery.

Some American schools have developed a fortress mentality. For example, a California school built a 10-foot wall to separate the rear boundary from a housing project and its gang gunfights. New York schools have increased security. There are more police officers in schools; most schools have locked doors; some have metal detectors; and others allow entry only with computerized ID cards. The cost of all this security in New York schools was \$60 million annually (A.P.A., 1993; Morrow, 1992; U.S. National Crime Survey, 1993; Ostling, 1989).

A recent American national survey of 1216 elementary and high school principals, and superintendents from mainly rural districts (only 11 per cent worked in districts with 25,000 or more students) revealed that one in five elementary school principals and one in four middle school principals reported:

- ◆ an increase in gun-related incidents
- ◆ a general increase in school violence compared to five years ago
- ◆ low-achieving students were the most likely perpetrators of violence
- ◆ a lack of parental involvement contributed strongly to school violence
- ◆ more violence was infiltrating to the elementary schools
- ◆ there was an upsurge in fights between female students

Many school executives dealt with the problem by enforcing school disciplinary

codes, banning gang clothing and insignia, and closing campuses to visitors rather than electing extreme methods such as metal detectors or video surveillance. In addition, many preferred to use in-school suspensions rather than out-of-school suspensions or expulsions. The majority of the respondents said that their districts were not training teachers how to deal with violence and weapons use. Special training was more likely in the larger urban centres (Boothe et al., 1993).

Report of the National Institute of Education to U.S. Congress

Two reports addressed this elaborate 350 page 1978 study, which surveyed principals in over 4000 schools from urban, suburban and rural cities, plus over 31,000 students and 23,000 teachers from junior and senior high schools. Over 6000 students were also randomly selected for individual interviews. Though this was a scientific report, it inevitably had political overtones.

Summary of the findings

- ◆ crime and violence tended to be located in the larger cities
- ◆ relationships existed between high crime rates, low academic achievement, and a high proportion of minority students
- ◆ parents with middle-class values were enrolling their children in private or parochial schools out of fear of crime, as well as out of a desire for better academic instruction
- ◆ crime was worse in junior high schools than in high schools
- ◆ urban teachers were likely to be victimized more than suburban or rural teachers
- ◆ the notion that intruders were responsible for a great deal of school crime was a myth
- ◆ younger students were disproportionately victimized, however, most of those who attacked or robbed them were roughly the same age and

- not older students preying on younger students
- ◆ that a small percentage of students (10 per cent) in each school were responsible for all the violence and they were easily identifiable and generally known both to staff and students (for example, violence was described as interactive with a small group of students frequently causing problems and often setting off a chain reaction among other students)
- ◆ violence occurred mainly in hallways, stairs, cafeterias, locker rooms, washrooms and other areas where teacher supervision was weak
- ◆ a strong relationship existed between laxness in enforcing school rules and the rate of violent crime, especially in urban schools

Recommendations

Principals, teachers and students were asked to recommend measures to create a safer environment. Eight categories were identified:

- ◆ security devices
- ◆ security personnel
- ◆ discipline and supervision
- ◆ curriculum and counselling
- ◆ training and organizational change
- ◆ physical-plant improvement
- ◆ parental involvement and community relations
- ◆ improvement in school climate.

Discipline and supervision was the most popular category. The report also described, based on questionnaire responses from principals, efforts made to cope with student violence and crime. The following 10 procedures were identified:

- ◆ visitors must check in at the office
- ◆ suspension
- ◆ students must carry hall passes if out of class
- ◆ student referral to a mental-health agency
- ◆ transfer to another regular school

- ◆ paddling
- ◆ transfer to a special school
- ◆ assignment to a special day-long class for disruptive students
- ◆ student I.D. cards
- ◆ expulsion

Except for paddling, a measure more popular in rural areas, visitor checks and suspensions were favoured by large and small city, and suburban principals.

In addition, the report commented on the growing separation of the school from students' families and neighbourhood. The larger the school, the more likely that teachers and administrators would operate according to professional standards instead of in response to local sensitivities.

The advantages of autonomy were obvious. The disadvantages, however, took longer to reveal themselves. For example:

- ◆ students developed distinctive subcultures unrelated to education
- ◆ students were doing their own thing
- ◆ principals did not call the police, preferring to organize their own disciplinary procedures
- ◆ teachers were used to monitor behaviour in the halls and lunch-rooms
- ◆ order was chronically problematic when hundreds of students came together for congregate education
- ◆ school architects were uninformed about 'defensible space concepts', resulting in schools with too many entrances, rooms and corridors where surveillance was difficult
- ◆ lost control over potential student misbehaviour when parents were kept away

In short, isolation of the school from the local community always means that if a large enough proportion of students misbehave, teachers and principals cannot maintain order. (p. 28)

Other trends

- ◆ continuing pressure to keep children in school longer, which raised education levels for some students who were now compelled to remain in school when they didn't wish to be there
- ◆ increased sensitivity to the rights of children made it very difficult for schools to deal with students guilty of intractable and violent behaviour
- ◆ decreased ability of schools to get help with discipline problems from the juvenile courts
- ◆ an erosion of the authority of the classroom teacher
- ◆ a decline in homework in secondary schools
- ◆ a reduced teacher and student commitment to the educational process.

The report also cited that arbitrary expulsions and suspensions incite students to violence:

At first glance it might appear that the expulsion, push out ... phenomenon, ... might at least create a somewhat more orderly atmosphere for those remaining in school as a result of the absence of youngsters evidently experiencing problems adjusting to the school environment. The opposite, however, appears to be the case. ... the vast majority of students who are ... excluded from schools do, in time, return to those schools. In many instances the frustration and inadequacies which caused their absence in the first place have only been heightened by their exclusion and the school community will likely find itself a convenient and meaningful object of revenge. (p. 35)

Long-term strategies were identified as necessary to reduce school crime, such as:

- ◆ greater parental and neighbourhood involvement

- ◆ designing more intriguing curricula
- ◆ selecting more stimulating teachers
- ◆ more discipline
- ◆ credible rewards and punishments
- ◆ more home instruction and alternative schools for those students when there is no recourse but expulsion
- ◆ a systematic national effort to reduce school crime

To fail to utilize informal controls is to throw the entire burden of preventing school violence on formal agencies ... Part of the reason that school violence has been handled gingerly is the American tradition of local control over education ... The development of a nation-wide school resource network dedicated to systematic advocacy, reform, and a safer environment on behalf of students and teachers is needed to provide overall direction and coordination of existing and new school resources. The promotion of due process, fairness and consistency in school security, and disciplinary policies and practices is important in assisting schools to develop and operate crime prevention and control programs. (p. 36-41)

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO WEAPONS USE

Movies, television and videos

The 1993 Spears and Seydegart 20-year analysis of violence on the three major U.S. commercial networks established that levels are remarkably stable. In prime-time drama, the 20-year average is 15.4 violent acts per hour (e.g., in which someone is hurt or killed). In children's cartoons, by contrast, an average of 21 violent acts an hour occur.

Over the last 20 years many studies have attempted to discover the strength and direction of the relationship between viewing *electronic media violence* (television, movies, videos) and the subsequent levels of *aggression* manifested by the viewer. (Bandura, 1973; Doob & Wood, 1972; Eron, 1987, 1963; Feshbach & Singer, 1971; Gerbner, 1988, 1972; Provenzo, 1992)

Other researchers have sought a more comprehensive and contextual account of why and how children view programs, and what is learned from the experience. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Lewin, 1936; Luke, 1985; Manley-Casimir, 1992; Rubinstein & Comstock, 1982; Spears & Seydegart, 1993)

Overall, researchers seem unable to resolve these issues and the debate continues. Whether aggressive children prefer violent programs is difficult to determine. The relationship is not straightforward and impact is best predicted by taking into account the viewer's:

- ◆ pre-existing aggression skills
- ◆ aggression restraints
- ◆ proportion of reinforcements provided for aggressive conduct
- ◆ contextual variables encountered during their daily interactions
- ◆ perception of the program (e.g., the way they make sense of it, the way they treat the medium, how they select, integrate and reject information)

Television and movies are for many the '*window on the world*'. The average television viewing in 1988 per week by Canadian children aged 2 to 11 years was 20.3 hours. The average teen spends about eight hours a day with some form of mass media. (Fine, et al., 1990; Manley-Casimir, 1992; Statistics Canada, 1991)

Being exposed to a steady stream of media violence can incite aggression in some vulnerable children. Though images of violence occur far more frequently in the media than in real life, some people tend to mistake this illusion for reality. Some researchers argue this produces the so-called '*world syndrome*' or '*cultivation paradigm*'. This states that while aggression may be an occasional consequence of television violence, there is a pervasive lingering sense of insecurity, fear and mistrust that desensitizes the viewers to violence, whether children or adults.

Youth become very aware of the disparity between their situations and what they view. Yet those who view more television express greater interpersonal mistrust and perceive the world as a '*mean*' place. They are more likely to endorse statements that reflect alienation and gloom. Some will be fearful of venturing out among others, which has an obvious impact on their ability to build a sense of community. (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al, 1982; Campbell, 1993; Murray & Kippax, 1979; Premiers Council in Support of Alberta Families, 1993; Rubinstein & Comstock, 1982; Signorielli, 1990; Theilheimer, 1993)

Regardless of which theories of aggression and learning we ascribe to, it has been suggested that our media are our metaphors, and that these metaphors create the content of our culture. (Postman, 1986) Changes in the symbolic environment are like changes in the natural environment. They are both gradual and additive at first. Then a critical mass is

achieved; not unlike a river that has been slowly polluted and suddenly becomes toxic. For example, by the time children leave elementary school, some will have witnessed 8000 murders. Videos are a big contributor: *Die Hard 2* depicted 264 violent deaths, *Robocop* 81 violent deaths and *Total Recall* 74 violent deaths.

Has the electronic media decisively and irreversibly changed the character of our symbolic environment? The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) hopes not. It is attempting to strike a balance between free speech, informing the public and protecting children from violence. Its tougher October 1993 Television Violence Code includes such key provisions as an outright ban on 'gratuitous' violence, confinement of scenes of violence intended for adults to after 9 p.m. and viewer advisories to help in program selection.

The Code lays down stiff, specific rules for children's programming, and violence in news, sports and public affairs programming. CAB also stresses the importance of similar strong standards applying to all sectors of broadcasting. The CAB code will not apply to American networks piped in on cable, or border cities that pick up American signals; video rental stores located in most neighbourhoods or video arcades. (Boone, 1993; Canadian Association of Broadcasters, 1993; MacKay, 1994; Spears & Seydegart, 1993)

To further extend these standards, parents can be more discriminating in what they allow children to watch. Children can be taught '*critical viewing skills*' by parents and in schools to better interpret what they see. For example, children can learn to distinguish between fact and fiction. In addition, children can be taught to recognize how violence is portrayed unrealistically, and to think about alternatives to the violence portrayed.

Advertising

Advertising is yet another dominant force in the relationship between electronic media and aggression. Very few studies have examined the broader social and cultural contexts in which this medium has developed. (Gerbner, 1976; Postman, 1986; Postman & Powers, 1992) Electronic media is concerned, among other things, with the making of consumers. It is possible that the presentation of material goods through advertising increases expectations unrealistically, thereby aggravating existing problems, garnering frustration and consequently contributing to aggression, violence and weapons use.

Other influences

Electronic media violence and advertising are not the only factors encouraging violence and weapons use in society. Other powerful candidates include:

- ◆ discrimination, racism and bigotry
- ◆ a loss of 'community' (e.g., that society values independence, autonomy and consumption and those values do not build tight-knit communities)
- ◆ unstable environments (e.g., recent changes in family life by high divorce and separation rates, transient relationships, two-job families, uncertain out-of-school care, lack of quality of child care and shift-work can combine to reduce the amount of parenting available)
- ◆ violence in the home (e.g., living with violence normalizes violent behaviour and inhibits the development of healthy self-image and relationships)
- ◆ tight economics and unemployment create stress for family relationships
- ◆ lack of self-esteem
- ◆ alienation
- ◆ gang involvement
- ◆ aspects of the legal system (e.g., frustration with sentencing, ineffective bail conditions, retribution)
- ◆ the educational system itself (e.g., lack of discipline and control over student conduct, reduced teacher and student

commitment to education, overpopulated schools, and administrators downplaying violence)

(BCTF, 1994; Billings, 1992; Cook, 1993; Corbett, 1993; Craig, 1992; Demers, 1993; Drummie, 1993; Fulmer, 1991; Jaffe, 1992; Lefebvre, 1993; Manitoba Justice, 1993; Shamsie, 1985; Shalliday, 1991; Stainsby, 1993; Theilheimer, 1993; Toby, 1980)

Youth gangs

Extensive research on youth gangs has been conducted in the United States. There is comparatively little Canadian research, especially on the relationship between weapons use, gangs and schools. Social perceptions of youth gangs complicate their study. Some describe groups of youth who 'hang out' on street corners or malls and become involved in anti-social, and perhaps criminal behaviour as gangs or 'wannabe' gangs. Others define gangs as those involved in hard-core, organized criminal behaviour.

There are however, at least *three features common* to the concept of youth gangs:

- ◆ gang activity is dynamic and it changes over time depending on location and opportunity
- ◆ gang violence is not exclusive to any one ethnic group
- ◆ there is diversity in the behaviour and characteristics of gangs

It seems that gang violence results from a variety of internal and external provocations, and that gang members are vigilant in their attention to possible slights. Among the external factors most likely to provoke violent behaviour are:

- ◆ disputes over girlfriends or boyfriends
- ◆ territorial boundaries
- ◆ rumours
- ◆ bad looks'
- ◆ ethnic tensions
- ◆ drinking or drug use
- ◆ out-of-neighbourhood parties.

Internal provocations include:

- ◆ leader power needs
- ◆ compensation for inadequate self-esteem
- ◆ acting-out to convince oneself of potency, to obtain group affection, or to retaliate against real or imagined aggression

(A.P.A., 1993; Bala et al., 1994; Bandura, 1973, 1986; Banner, Ryan & Mathews, 1993; Brannigan & Caputo, 1993; Caputo, Ryan & Proulx, 1991; Copple, 1993; Horowitz, 1990; Mathews, 1993; 1992; National Youth Gang Information Center, 1993; Taylor, 1988; Thornberry et al., 1993; Vold & Bernard, 1986; Westons, 1993)

Fasiolo and Leckie (1993) say that the *media's characterization of gangs* portrays them as a modern phenomenon, widespread and a threat to society. They tended to focus on polarization along ethnic lines, dwelt on severity, and, offered little analysis on causes or solutions. Increased media attention to each gang incident was viewed as fuelling public paranoia about the influence of gangs, although gang-motivated crime may account for a fraction of violent crime.

In 1987, one youth shot and killed another in front of 50 onlookers at a high school in Portland, Oregon. The police suspected gang involvement. Prophet (1990) describes the importance of finding a balance between responsible attention to real gang behaviour while avoiding the fuelling of public hysteria or feeding news-media-exploitation of youth activities that had nothing to do with gangs.

The *Montreal Gazette* (Arpin, 1993) cited that gangs were actively involved in the schools. A spokesman for the Montreal Urban Community police was quoted as saying that many school principals bury their heads in the sand, refusing to acknowledge the existence of teen violence in their own school yards.

Ethnic factors

The effects of ethnic culture on individuals can be distinguished from the general effects of society on an individual. Culture serves to bind groups together, to provide a set of norms that guide behaviour, and to help shape the identity of the group.

According to the American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth, 1993, some ethnic minorities must negotiate several cultural realms. For example:

- ◆ the realm of the indigenous ethnic culture, which embodies the cultural values of the homeland
- ◆ the elements of minority status
- ◆ the mainstream culture

The "interrelations among these realms are complex, and they often come into conflict." (p.36)

Clearly, both schools and our communities must promote *cultural acceptance, understanding and diversity* among ethnic minority youth. If we do not, the psychological violence of racism will probably result in physically violent incidents among different ethnic minority groups.

Youth who are barred from full participation in the economic and social opportunities of the mainstream may be at risk for involvement in violence, particularly when ethnic minority cultures are devalued by the mainstream culture. (A.P.A., 1993, p. 37)

This duty can present many challenges, especially when many ethnic youth are also first- and second-generation immigrant students, often from war-torn countries with considerably different cultural backgrounds, values and belief systems from the mainstream Canadian experience, and who are 'visible' minorities.

Between January and October 1993, 218,296 immigrants arrived in Canada.

Four provinces received most of the newcomers:

Ontario	53.1%
Quebec	17.5%
British Columbia	17.5%
Alberta	7.3 %

The distribution of immigrants by major metropolitan areas was:

Toronto	28.8%
Ottawa	2.2%
Hamilton	1.2%
Montreal	15.1%
Vancouver	14.2%
Calgary	3.3%
Edmonton	3%
Winnipeg	1.7%
Halifax	1%

(Immigration Canada, 1994)

RESPONSES TO SUPPRESS WEAPONS USE

Police School Liaison Officer

As many police departments gradually restructure police priorities to include more proactive and preventive strategies, police managers are learning valuable lessons. Every aspect of policing can benefit from more collaboration with the community.

It is a myth that the police are expert technicians who know best how to deal with crime. When the community participates in and supports the process, police work is made easier. (Chacko & Nanchoo, 1993; R.C.M.P. Commissioner Inkster's Directional Statement, 1991; Normandeau & Leighton, 1990; Ryan et al., 1994; Shabin, 1993; Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1990; Walker et al., 1992; Weston; 1993)

This shift in attitude will not happen overnight; it will evolve over time. Within the school context this is especially true, as some school officials do not feel the police belong in the schools. Differing professional philosophies and false beliefs about each other's agendas can make collaborative partnerships between educators and police very challenging.

As many communities grapple with the emergence of violence in schools, the *police school liaison officer* (SLO) is emerging as an effective way to promote positive relationships with students and cope proactively with crime. Grant (1993) discusses the importance of balancing enforcement, investigation of complaints, crime prevention education and informal positive contacts to help SLOs develop effective relationships with students.

Grant, who is a R.C.M.P. officer, said that victim disclosures are the best criterion to measure the success of SLO programs. After a year of operation, his SLO program had a 74 per cent clearance rate for all violent or personal victimization offences, and a 54 per cent clearance rate for property offences.

Some police estimate that fewer than 1 in 50 cases involving violence are reported

because the victims are too frightened to talk. They add that the problem seems to be getting worse as students gain more access to weapons, especially knives and in some areas, guns. (Fennell, 1993; Mathews, 1993; Shabin, 1993; Summerhays and Lindbloom, 1989)

Other studies show that many school districts and police departments still have problems cooperating to solve young people's problems. There is an urgent need for some police departments to renew outreach efforts to local school administrators.

Many educators and parents appear unrealistic or naïve when dealing with the police and crime. Principals may decline to act publicly because they are worried about the image of their schools. Ryan et al. (1994) reported in their excellent study on developing a police and school partnership model that some parents believed that the presence of a police officer meant the school was unsafe.

Regardless of the length taken to educate parents and the community about the project ..., some refused to believe that a project involving a police officer was designed to develop a safe and positive learning environment. (p.2)

Zero Tolerance

Many educational institutions across Canada are promoting '*zero tolerance*' policies to suppress weapons use and violence in schools. This concept takes many forms: automatic suspension and possible expulsion, peer mediation and conflict resolution strategies, and schools working with other professionals to develop alternative options from the justice system.

Ryan et al. (1994) suggest that zero tolerance does not mean 'automatic expulsion' but it confronts the violent act, provides demonstrated consequences for violent behaviours, and seeks solutions that support, not simply punish, the perpetrator.

Selective sanction must accompany a zero tolerance policy. This is the process of deciding how to respond to the incident. It involves gathering information such as mitigating circumstances, victim impact and previous involvement in violence, and considers all possible solutions. The Ryan project identified three essential strategies in dealing with violence:

- ◆ acknowledge that a problem exists
- ◆ undertake a comprehensive identification of the problem
- ◆ work toward building partnerships between the school and the community and police

Ottawa defence lawyer Rob Lewis (1994) stated that zero tolerance has become a "buzzword of the day ... We're seeing that very minor incidents result in very serious charges ... I see a disturbing trend among the schools to hand over all their social problems to the police' (p. A1). In the same article, Dave Cooke (Ontario's education minister) was quoted as saying that all school boards need a zero tolerance policy to deter violence in schools.

In November 1993 the Ontario Minister announced strategies to address violence in schools. The underpinning of these strategies were:

- ◆ violent behaviour will not be accepted
- ◆ effective partnerships are needed
- ◆ students need opportunities to acquire skills to be responsible citizens

Under this policy, students who commit violent acts could be permanently expelled. Lash (1994) reported that zero tolerance was drawing strong criticism from Ontario educators and social workers, who viewed the policy as a short-sighted approach to dealing with teens who often are the victims of violence themselves. He stated, " ... the Ministry of [Ontario] Education has decided to drop the term zero tolerance and replace it with zero violence [violence-free schools]." (p. A7)

Tobin (1993) reported Cooke's requirement that "every school must begin to note on

student's records when the student is suspended for violent acts." (p. A1) Other reports said that Cooke had suggested school boards also develop alternative programs for violent students who were expelled (e.g., home schooling or special programs that put expelled students together); that boards must notify police immediately when violence occurs on school property; and that a task force would develop special programs for suspended and expelled students. (Crone, 1994; Liaken, 1993; Tobin, 1993; Warburton, 1994)

Approximately 18 Community Summits for Violence-Free Schools are being held throughout the province (at the time of this writing — those conclusions are forthcoming in June 1994) to look at long-term solutions to creating safe schools.

The following highlights the Ministry's draft policies on violence:

By June 30, 1995 all school boards must develop a policy for reporting violent incidents to the police and recording information about them.

Policies must include:

- ◆ Violence prevention must be incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum from junior kindergarten to secondary school.
- ◆ The school ... must be a safe environment so that learning can happen.
- ◆ School boards must ensure a code of behaviour exists.
- ◆ School boards will develop a set of procedures for dealing with violent incidents.
- ◆ School boards will develop short- and long-term strategies to deal with the aftermath of a violent occurrence.
- ◆ School boards must ensure that all teachers and staff have knowledge, skills, and values to develop and maintain a safe school environment.
- ◆ Policies must identify ways of making students, teachers, staff, parents and guardians, and the larger community aware of their responsibilities for a violence-free environment.

Ref: Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (April 22, 1994, Summit, Ottawa).

Challinger, (1987) offered some insightful views from seminars held by the Australian Institute of Criminology on 'Crime at School'. The seminars were prompted by a growing conflict between school administrators and Education Ministry personnel over *transfer arrangements and suspension policies* for disruptive students. Classroom disruption was viewed as a major impediment to learning, and disciplined education was imperative. However, to recognize the problems that arise when 'deviant' pupils are punished after the fact, discipline was defined differently than punishment.

The report succinctly stated:

If the suspension is being used as a punishment for the purpose of deterring extremely deviant behaviour, then it should be realized that it is likely to be relatively ineffective. The students most likely to incur the punishment are the students who dislike it least. For these students, suspension may even, inadvertently, become a reward. Gratification may come

from being singled out for the apparently ultimate form of punishment. The students' peer group may elevate him/her into a hero who easily manages to accommodate the worst that the school can do

It would appear, then, that where suspension is used as a punishment it is not fulfilling its carefully expressed function as per the Education Department Regulations nor is it an effective deterrent. The major advantage would seem to be in its effect of isolating the deviant student from the teaching body rather than the student body. Its greatest effect, therefore, is likely to be an increase in teacher, rather than student, morale. (p. 89)

The report suggested we consider the broader questions and design strategies to improve discipline, not just suspend students. These questions include:

- ◆ why do students become disruptive?
- ◆ why is suspension a more frequent occurrence in some schools than in others?
- ◆ why is the rate of suspension continuing to increase while enrolments are declining?
- ◆ why are students more prone to suspension at particular junctures in their school life?

Many agencies and departments across Canada prefer policies that deal with *violence prevention to promote safer environments* (e.g., Alberta Ministry of Education; Burnaby School District #41, British Columbia; Centrale des enseignants du Quebec (CEQ), Coquitlam School District #43, British Columbia; Greater Victoria School District #61, British Columbia; Guelph, Wellington County Board of Education; and Ottawa-Carleton Board of Education; Quebec Department of Education; and the Quebec Department of Health and Social Services, to name a few).

A background document prepared for the Alberta Ministry of Education, 'Invitational Forum on Student Conduct and Violence in School', November 1993 stated:

The school has a responsibility to keep weapons out of the school and to respond firmly and immediately to any violent incident ... educators, psychologists, ... and others who work with young people have learned from practical experience that most youth who behave in these ways are in need of help. Expelling those who commit violent actions maintains a certain level of safety in the school -- and this is extremely important. However, there should be some way of placing the offending student in another environment for a period of time, such as work experience, living skills, management behaviour programs, or in other alternative programs for troubled youth. (p.13).

Small group discussions at this forum focused on:

- ◆ school climate
- ◆ societal attitudes toward violence
- ◆ values and attitudes about violence
- ◆ community resources and support
- ◆ power of peer culture
- ◆ rights and responsibilities
- ◆ improved service delivery
- ◆ role of the media
- ◆ early intervention and prevention
- ◆ integration of immigrant families

The Québec Mouvement pour une école moderne et ouverte (MEMO) denounces repressive measures, including expulsion (Cadotte & Decourcy, 1994). In 1991, the Centrale des enseignants du Québec stated in its campaign against violence in school:

Everything must be done to avoid using repressive measures. Most of the time, prevention works. An action plan in which everyone is involved is essential. (p.74)

This campaign favoured prevention through:

- ◆ keeping the premises clean and well-maintained
- ◆ coordinating group movements
- ◆ establishing reasonable and acceptable rules of conduct
- ◆ initiating intelligent supervision
- ◆ promoting desirable values
- ◆ organizing sports activities
- ◆ consideration to concentrating all aggressive children in the same school

The B.C. Teachers' Federation Final Report (1994) revealed a preference for *violence prevention*.

While we recognize the importance of strong interventions for dealing with violent incidents, we believe that a focus on violence prevention, particularly with young children, through a variety of means, holds greater promise for addressing the problem. (p.4)

Schools are not isolated — solutions must involve the broader community. The necessity of collaborative strategies, in which teachers work with others in the education community and beyond, are necessary to respond to this issue.

The Burnaby School District #41 (1992) initiative called the 'Youth Violence Resource Information Project' was funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General of British Columbia. It collected effective youth violence prevention materials from Canada and the United States to inform administrators, counsellors, teachers and police officers about how to implement their own successful programs.

Campbell (1993) suggested the following ways to create a *school culture of non-violence*:

- ◆ a recognition of the pro-social skills children need to learn
- ◆ the importance of school rules and regulations against violence, with clearly defined consequences that are enforced
- ◆ initiatives that provide playground support and activities for children
- ◆ a process for conflict resolution and mediation models
- ◆ promotion of sports and recreation that promotes being active and play, not just highly specialized competitive skills
- ◆ strategies that promote critical thinking about the media

Jaffe (1993) outlined several strategies and insights that schools can use as part of the *solution against violence*:

- ◆ violence is a learned behaviour that is condoned and even glorified through the media — teachers and students should discuss and examine violence in a variety of forums (e.g., assemblies, theatre, films, testimonies of survivors), as it is important to break the silence
- ◆ resolving violent behaviour requires collaboration between educators, police officers, justice officials, health providers and victims of violence

- ◆ school policies and protocols need to respond to violence in a way that doesn't blame the victims and holds perpetrators accountable for their behaviour
- ◆ violence is related to power and control
- ◆ ensure teachers are trained to deal with witnesses and victims of violence encountered at home or at school
- ◆ provide victim assistance programs
- ◆ involve parents as part of the solution

At the American National School Safety Center, superintendents from 15 large urban school districts identified *six key strategies to make schools safer*:

- ◆ get the public more involved in school activities
- ◆ improve school leadership skills
- ◆ keep guns and other weapons off campuses
- ◆ make schools and surrounding neighbourhoods drug-free
- ◆ halt negative gang activity
- ◆ improve discipline of youth in school and at home

(Department of Justice, School Safety, 1988)

In 1989, the American National School Safety Center task force report included extensive strategies and recommendations to help educators lessen crime's impact and reduce the number of victims in the school. These included developing guidelines for statistical tracking and prompt reporting of violent crimes, and developing clear school policies, training seminars, close partnerships with law enforcement and media contacts.

Bala et al. (1994) in the *Youth and Violence: A Police Reference Manual* establish that the *media* are often presented with information from schools, police agencies, and parents that either distorts

the specific circumstances, or presents a distorted picture of the overall nature and extent of violence

in schools As a result, media attention may create unnecessary anxiety and concern, and can lead to inappropriate responses. (p. 92)

They suggest the following actions for dealing with the media:

- ◆ develop a clear policy that clarifies who is responsible for collecting and disseminating information, and speaking to the press
- ◆ keep the media informed
- ◆ don't downplay the situation but present it in context

The Manitoba Summit on Youth Violence and Crime

The Manitoba Summit on Youth Violence and Crime (1993) concluded that the media (print, television and entertainment) were critical to the cause and prevention of youth violence. The media must be part of the solution to youth crime.

The Manitoba Summit identified strategies to address these issues:

- ◆ media should be partners in preventing youth crime
- ◆ encourage balanced reporting and less sensationalism
- ◆ report success stories
- ◆ media and justice should work together (e.g., publishing information on those in conflict with the law, and the consequences for their involvement)
- ◆ networks and parents should monitor violence in programming

The Manitoba Summit also identified *nine initiatives to suppress violence* including:

- ◆ a school anti-violence program in which youth service workers are trained to prevent school-based violence
- ◆ increased police surveillance of gang members
- ◆ institute a youth gang and violence call-in phone line
- ◆ pressure for significant improvements to the *Young Offenders Act*, including

making parents more responsible for their children's actions

- ◆ designate a school violence prevention coordinator to help school divisions and teachers find ways to prevent or deal with school violence
- ◆ provide opportunities for youth to participate in the solutions
- ◆ develop boot camps for convicted young offenders
- ◆ develop local anti-violence action plans and community-based prevention efforts
- ◆ develop a resource council on youth crime to assist neighbourhood-based and community groups or organizations

Finding weapons

Symons (1993) stressed the importance of developing an *early warning system* for schools to discover if students or intruders have brought weapons into a school building.

According to statistics (Harrington-Lueker, 1992) from the American National School Safety Center, one quarter of the U.S. big-city school systems currently use metal detectors to stem the flow of weapons into the schools. With a price tag of up to US\$10,000 each, *metal detectors* are among the costliest items a school system can purchase for its security arsenal. Are the devices an effective way to curb weapons use? The jury is still out! A few Canadian schools have already installed metal detectors — will others follow? (Donahue, 1989; Montgomery, 1993; Robinson, 1993)

Canadian schools address *student locker searches* in different ways (e.g., not at all, only with a police warrant, school principal checking specific lockers with 'reasonable cause'). According to Sussel (1992) when considering school 'search and seizure' policies and practices, Canadian courts follow the U.S. Supreme Court 'T.L.O. decision' and the leading Canadian case of 'R. v. J.M.G.'. These suggest that as long as school officials have 'reasonable' grounds and do not violate student privacy interests, the search is proper.

Anderson (1992) provided the following guidance for the B.C. School Trustees Association:

The police standard of 'probable cause' to ascertain the law has been violated does not apply in the school setting. (p.A109)

To assist in locker searches, Anderson discussed the following two areas:

1. *Schools may take the following steps to reduce student expectations of privacy:*

- ◆ The school could require students to enter into a locker rental agreement that includes i.e., "The student agrees that the principal or designate may search the locker at any time without notice to the student." (p. A112)
- ◆ School handbooks could outline the circumstances under which student lockers will be searched and any special restrictions on what students may store in their lockers.
- ◆ The lock for the locker could be rented to the student on the understanding that the locker itself remains in the possession of the school and the school administrator.
- ◆ The school could institute a uniform policy or consistent practice regarding random or periodic inspection or search of all lockers.

2. *Circumstances for searches:*

To justify a search there must be reasonable individual suspicion. Where there is no reasonable individual suspicion, the student's legitimate expectation of privacy will prevail. Therefore, blanket and random searches could pose legal difficulties.

Searches on individual suspicion are generally justified. To determine whether there is individual suspicion, the following guidelines were suggested:

- ◆ School officials have personally observed the student in incidents which raise suspicion of misconduct.
- ◆ A student has identified another student as involved in an illegal activity or breach of school rules.
- ◆ The suspicious conduct must suggest a specific breach of a particular rule. (pp. A109-A118)

Counselling and conflict

A steadily growing number of elementary and secondary schools across Canada are reaping the results of *conflict resolution* and *peer mediation* to suppress violence and possible weapons use. Some schools use peer mediators, others incorporate these concepts into the curriculum and many encompass both approaches. (Nyp, 1994)

Some school districts in Canada are involved in developing *response teams* to assist the victim and other witnesses in dealing with violent situations. These programs include: defusing, debriefing, ongoing counselling, and reducing exposure of the victim to further incidents. (Greater Victoria School District #61, 1993)

There are numerous *court-identified students*, and those responsible for educating them must try to provide help for their school-based problems.

Roth (1991) identified one method for conducting counselling groups with violent and pugnacious students who have school adjustment problems. Educators reasoned that acting arrogant, tough, or contemptuous at school is a necessary defence for many violent students against being overpowered. In this context, intimidators are often verbally or physically aggressive because they fear that any sign of weakness will mark them as inadequate.

Their immediate goal is not so much personal vindictiveness as it is protecting themselves against submission. This fear of submission is then camouflaged behind a flurry of hostile aggression. Intimidators routinely challenge their teachers' right to

tell them what to do. The program explores major patterns of student behaviours, and how they organize and give meaning to their school experiences.

The A.P.A. Commission on Violence (1993) reported that Americans' urgent need to *prevent violence* has led to a proliferation of *anti-violence interventions*. Their conclusions were that many of these interventions were created primarily for service delivery, concentrating on assessing the program's effects on risk factors or mediators of violence. For example, those interventions targeted at:

- ◆ the perpetrators of violence, others at the victims, and others the bystanders who may play a pivotal role in condoning or preventing violence
- ◆ prevention, and others seek to ameliorate the damage already done
- ◆ changing individuals, and others seek to change the systems and settings that influence, such as the family, peers, schools, and the community

Few programs, however, were designed with plans for outcome evaluation, or evaluated the direct short-term and long-term effects of intervention on rates of violence.

The following *key criteria described the most promising intervention approaches*:

- ◆ Begin as early as possible to interrupt the trajectory toward violence'.
- ◆ Address aggression as part of a constellation of antisocial behaviours in the youth. For example, the cluster of behaviour often includes academic difficulties, poor interpersonal relations and cognitive deficits.
- ◆ Include multiple components that reinforce each other across the everyday social contexts, as aggressive behaviour tends to be consistent across social domains such as family, school, peers, media and community.
- ◆ Take advantage of developmental 'windows of opportunity', points at which interventions are especially

needed or especially likely to make a difference.

- ◆ Introduce primary prevention programs of the type that promote social and cognitive skills, such as those that aid in learning alternatives to violence, self-esteem enhancement, peer negotiation skills, problem-solving training and anger management.
- ◆ Programs that attempt to work with and help the families of high-risk children showed the greatest potential for preventing aggression and violent behaviour.
- ◆ Include 'diversion programs' to keep high-risk or predelinquent youth out of the juvenile justice system. Interventions may include behavioural contracting, child advocacy and involvement in the community.
- ◆ Partnerships between police and the community play a pivotal role in reducing youth violence.

In conclusion, violence involving youth is generally not random, uncontrollable, or inevitable. Many factors, both individual and social, contribute to an individual's propensity to use violence. Many of these factors are within our power, collectively and collaboratively, to change.

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