

**SCHOOL VIOLENCE
AND THE
ZERO TOLERANCE ALTERNATIVE**

SOME PRINCIPLES AND POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS

**THOMAS GABOR, PH.D.
OTTAWA (ONTARIO)**

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research follows a 1994 report published by Solicitor General Canada, which focused on weapons use in Canadian schools. Although heavy weaponry such as guns was not a common finding in Canadian schools, increasing violence among youth was a recurring concern.

This investigation into school violence began with cross-Canada focus groups with police, teachers and youth. It was followed by surveys of police, school officials, the general public and the print media. It asked:

- What is the cause and incidence of school violence?
- How should we respond to school violence?
- What do Canadians understand zero tolerance to mean?
- Does zero tolerance decrease the incidence of school violence?

Participants in surveys and focus groups were convinced that school violence is more serious than it was 10 years ago. Violence is seen as more commonplace, more intense and more vicious than before. This is reflected by the emergence of group attacks or swarming, and increased discovery of weapons such as knives in schools.

Most school misconduct is verbal abuse, bullying and disorderly behaviour, but it also extends to vandalism, ethnic-based gang activity and stealing. Once seen as the domain of teenage boys, violence is now more generalized among children and teens of both sexes, especially in larger cities.

Research participants believed that a small core of students is violent and malicious, but that they attract a halo of followers. The majority of students are not members of either group, but they are affected by the minority's disruption of classes, hassling in the halls and bullying in the school yard.

Participants saw school violence as a societal problem that extends outside the bounds of the school yard. They agreed that family issues (breakdown, neglect, abuse, poor parenting, failure to set limits), peer pressure, media glorification of violence and community breakdown were at the root of school violence.

Despite this conviction, participants suggested firm treatment of violent youth, usually within the school setting. Thus, while society at large was to blame for the problem, schools were left to solve it with measures combining counselling, suspension and expulsion if necessary. This paradox may reflect the desire for tangible and immediate solutions, and a recognition of the uncertainty and difficulty of social change.

There was a good deal of support for zero tolerance policies, although the definition of such varied considerably. In most cases, participants defined zero tolerance as marking out clear lines for acceptable behaviour, along with repercussions for violating the limits. They favoured a swift, sure response to violence, tempered with discretion, especially for milder offences. They also suggested that school officials need greater support from families and higher authorities in confronting and resolving violent behaviour.

The most appropriate role for Solicitor General Canada in resolving school violence is that of facilitation and support for other levels of government. This involvement could include:

- policy leadership with respect to zero tolerance and other alternatives to school violence
- supporting national research projects
- evaluations of community-based demonstration projects involving the police
- monitoring regional trends and evaluating them in a national perspective

Based on this research, it is possible to suggest nine principles to guide police and schools:

1. School violence is a societal problem requiring partnerships between the police, schools, parents, students, and social agencies.
2. School violence must be openly confronted in the school in a process that includes school administration, teachers and students.
3. Formal policies at the district and even provincial levels are needed to support schools' response to and prevention of violence, but these policies should not inhibit reasonable discretion.
4. There must be clear and sure consequences (which may be corrective as well as punitive, or offering support and coping skills) for violence and other misconduct.
5. Punishments should be swift, compassionate, constructive, fair, protective and, where possible, flexible — not humiliating, degrading or violent.
6. The welfare of the majority of students should take precedence over that of any perpetrator, even though every effort should be taken to assist and salvage intransigent students.
7. Students must be held accountable for their actions and recognize that their misbehaviour is a result of conscious choices, not the result of disadvantage, discrimination and the like. Students also ought to be involved actively in the prevention and control of violence.
8. Parents must be held accountable for their children's misbehaviour, and must be cooperative partners in any disciplinary processes.
9. Programs should emphasize cost effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

"If you're a child who grows up in a family where there is domestic violence, in a neighbourhood where there is community violence, where you go home and watch on television five or six murders a night and then watch the news and see five or six more, is it any wonder we're seeing more violence in the schools?"

Former Ontario Education Minister David Cooke.

Canadian society, traditionally viewed inside the country and out as a nonviolent culture, is nevertheless submerged in a global community that values violence as a resolution for problems and makes extensive use of violence for entertainment. Now that this violent culture is permeating Canadian popular experience, the response is becoming defensive and negative.

Extensive media coverage of family violence, abuse of women and children, and a rising wave of seemingly random crime has forced Canadians to rethink the nature of their society. Solutions to its threat are wide-ranging.

One of the responses to school violence is zero tolerance — no violent behaviour is tolerated and a response to occurrences of violence is guaranteed. How violent behaviour is measured and what sort of response is justified varies greatly. Something as minor (but hurtful) as name calling or as major as violent assault could be included in the same definition. Responses range from reprimand to expulsion for the year.

The nature and effectiveness of zero tolerance policies, and the best role for police in their execution, are the focus of this study.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

In this study, youth violence is considered in its entirety, but with special attention to its effect on the school and the response to it by schools and the police. This study includes five parts:

1. focus groups with police, educators and students
2. a national survey of police services
3. a national survey of school boards
4. a survey of public opinion
5. a survey of the print media

This study is more than being a snapshot of Canadian attitudes. It seeks to compare some of the dynamics driving our social responses to school violence, with the hope that educators, police and policy makers can work together better to meet the challenge.

We were particularly interested in answering these questions:

- ◆ What is the cause and incidence of school violence?
- ◆ How should we respond to school violence?
- ◆ What do Canadians understand zero tolerance to mean?
- ◆ Does zero tolerance decrease the incidence of school violence?

STUDY LIMITATIONS

This study is not meant to be the last word on school violence. However it does provide insight into trends and attitudes. Anecdotal evidence presented must be accepted as just that. Even objective analysis such as the Angus Reid survey of public opinion must be considered within the broader context of all the other questions that could have been asked.

Given the sensitivity of safety issues such as violence in the school, some school boards may not have wished to reveal the extent of their problems. This may have resulted in an under-representation of incidents.

This study has not examined in detail collaborative programs between police, social agencies and schools to counter school violence. Nor has it examined the treatment of school violence in the electronic media, or the influence of these media on youth behaviour.

Police and school officials were consulted in detail; other than through the focus groups, teachers and youth were not. Nor did this study include the voices of parents or social agencies to any great degree. Because collaboration between groups is so essential to positive change, future research could further explore the beliefs and behaviours of all those involved: the youth, their parents, the teachers, social/health agencies and the police.

The incidence of youth violence has increased despite recent decreases in overall violent crime statistics. If this trend continues, Canadians' search for answers will grow. Suggestions for future research in this field include:

- ◆ hypotheses and research related to role models for violent youth or youth at risk
- ◆ identification of factors contributing to successful adjustment and nonviolent behaviour in youth not considered at risk
- ◆ examination of such social and economic factors as expectation of employment and integration in the community as factors in youth violence
- ◆ detailed analysis of the influence of the electronic media on youth, in relationship to learned behaviours and the willingness to learn/contribute at school

FOCUS GROUPS WITH POLICE, EDUCATORS AND YOUTH

Research began with a series of focus groups with police, educators and youth across the country. Discussions in these face-to-face meetings were often freewheeling and very informative.

Police focus groups

Participants included front-line community service and school liaison officers, as well as those working in gang units, investigations, drug units, and street crimes units. Locations: Vancouver, Surrey (BC), Winnipeg, London, Toronto, and Montreal

Educator focus groups

Participants included board officials, principals, vice-principals, teachers, and counsellors. Locations: Vancouver, Surrey (BC), Winnipeg, London, Toronto, and Montreal

Youth focus groups

Participants included students drawn from local high schools. Locations: London, Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver

Issues discussed at the focus groups

- ◆ how many students are involved in violence?
- ◆ what problems does school violence include?
- ◆ why is there school violence?
- ◆ what do you think about zero tolerance policies?
- ◆ what is the role of the police?
- ◆ what disciplinary measures prevent school violence?
- ◆ are there positive ways of dealing with violence?
- ◆ is there a place for security hardware in schools?
- ◆ how can school violence be prevented?
- ◆ are resources sufficient to implement violence management policies?

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE INVOLVED IN VIOLENCE?

Focus group participants agreed that between one and five per cent of students are responsible for many of the problems in schools. This estimate ranged as high as 10 per cent. In Vancouver, police suggested that up to 20% of the general population and as many as 50% of inner city students were involved in violent activities.

A distinction was usually drawn between hard-core instigators who were viewed by many as intractable and a larger number of youth involved in lower level misconduct such as bullying. This second group of students was seen as susceptible to influence by the instigators, but also to positive programs and disciplinary measures.

WHAT PROBLEMS DOES SCHOOL VIOLENCE INCLUDE?

Many of the groups commented on the changing nature and intensity of school violence. Bullying and intimidation seem more commonplace than in the past. Swarmings and racial/ethnic conflicts are increasingly prevalent in some communities. Some thought that more young women are involved in violent activities than before.

Police:

"The intensity of the violence has really intensified. The crimes we're coming into contact with are really serious incidents."

"It's not your one on one assault; it's seven on one. They're fighting basically for no reason. That's what's scary. If you talk to any high school kid, they're freaked to go to school. They think they're okay if they don't make any eye contact, and so many kids say that."

"The kids enjoy the sensationalization of conflict and thrills; that's what has to be changed. The heroes that exist today are not the heroes that we grew up with. They live those television lives in their school lives."

"They think it is cool to watch cops go into houses with shotguns. In this culture, women are called bitches and they like it. They accept that. Those are the attitudes that need to be changed as well. That all comes together as a package that promotes a lifestyle that says guns, drugs, and thrills are what you want."

Educators:

"I've seen more weapons in the last couple of years than I've seen the rest of my career."

Youth:

"As soon as you hear the word 'fight', everybody is out the door."

"There was a fight in our cafeteria and people were standing on the tables to watch. This girl was just slugging another girl; you couldn't even walk because people were just crowding in, cheering them on."

"It doesn't matter who is fighting; everybody is egging everyone on."

"They [gangs in general] have a circle of silence."

"The Asian gangs are more highly organized than your average East end group of white, East Indian, and Spanish kids who just go around beating people up. The Asian gangs for some reason or another have developed a hierarchy and an organized structure."

"It comes back to the ethnic thing with the bonding rituals. They see each other as brothers and will enact revenge if one of their brothers gets hurt. They look out for each other."

WHY IS THERE SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

Schools may avoid rather than address the problem of youth violence. This can lead to escalation, as students get away with more and more serious infractions.

The consensus of educators and even some students is that principals and teachers need support and permission from higher authorities to confront violence and related problems in the school.

Educators:

"Some staff members will stay in their classrooms because they are afraid to confront [what] they see in the hallways or even in their classrooms. I've overlooked lots of things, when I should be confronting it and bringing it out. And I think if we were all doing that and we were all supporting each other, it would be a much better place. There is a lot of bullying, intimidation and racist stuff that goes on that we overlook."

"I think the wall of secrecy is gone. Now we're talking, we're phoning each other, asking questions, deciding that we have a responsibility to address these issues. It's the first step to addressing the issue."

"It's been my impression that [confronting violence] depends upon leadership from the board and permission. If the Minister of Education focuses on the issue, you have the principals feeling allowed to do these things."

Youth:

"[When there's a fight] even the teachers stand there and watch."

Youth violence was widely viewed as an extension of an increasingly violent society in which many people are isolated from the mainstream. The media was blamed for creating a climate of danger and violence that may be self-fulfilling. Many children and teens think their peers are carrying weapons, which is generally not true.

Many participants said that parents are to blame for their children's violent behaviour. It was pointed out that parents not infrequently neglected their children, served as poor role models, and needed to be taught parenting skills. There were anecdotes about parents who confessed that they were simply unable to control their children. In other cases, parents would deny that their child was troublesome. Parental abuse, too, was mentioned. There was also discussion of the many young people who sought instant gratification and respected no boundaries.

Parents may reinforce youth violence by undermining the school's attempts to deal with that behaviour. Some principals have experienced the wrath of parents (and occasionally accusations of racism) when attempting to deal with violent behaviour. Many parents have opposed the role of police in the schools, although this attitude is changing.

When the family's support and authority breaks down, youth rely on their peers for direction.

Educators:

"A vicious cycle starts because some kids form a gang. That attracts the opposition, which attracts more kids who want to be secure and feel like a part of something. It becomes a status thing for these kids."

"If kids feel that their needs are met through their family then they are more unlikely to gravitate towards peers who are waging war against their parents or the culture that they live in."

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE POLICE?

What is the optimal role of police officers in relation to the schools? How do police departments/services and schools achieve that role?

Problems:

- ◆ principals historically have not been receptive to police presence in the school
- ◆ students feel there is "something wrong" in the school when police increase their profile
- ◆ administrators think police did little other than charge and arrest people.
- ◆ police presence might alienate the 'good' students
- ◆ police see the job as babysitting and low status
- ◆ school liaison officers not always trusted with information by other officers
- ◆ excessive police involvement in the schools removes ownership of the issues from parents, teachers and students
- ◆ minor problems are best handled by the school or by peer mediators
- ◆ programs may reach only those kids who need them the least

Ideally, the police liaison is more than a security guard, and active involvement encompasses:

- ◆ lectures
- ◆ an office in or near the school
- ◆ participation in recreational activities
- ◆ enforcement
- ◆ bridging the gap between youth and the police
- ◆ solving problems, rather than merely arresting young people

Building an effective relationship with the administrators, students, and parents requires up to two years on the job for the liaison officer. However, the benefits are tangible. There were some anecdotes about reductions in violence and weapons infractions stemming from active liaison work. Participants made these suggestions for establishing a good working relationship between police and schools:

- ◆ a protocol setting the respective responsibilities of the police and schools
- ◆ active police presence increases the amount of information about illegal activities received from the students
- ◆ establish strong interpersonal ties between the officers and administrators
- ◆ training required is extensive because demands are various
- ◆ officer requires greater sophistication than for many other forms of police work
- ◆ officers have to be highly motivated and able to relate to young people in a non-authoritarian way

Police:

"Not every uniformed police officer out there can do the job. One day you might be arresting a kid, another day you might be taking a young offender's statement, and the next day you might be in the school fooling around. You wear a lot of hats and that's not so easy for every cop out there. "

When the relationship is working well, police are more likely to be called in before a major incident erupts. Ingredients for a fruitful working relationship include:

- ◆ officers should work with the youngest students, who are less likely to view police negatively
- ◆ informal and regular contact to develop a rapport with the students
- ◆ accessible office for police at or near the school
- ◆ formal training for officers in giving lectures, resolving conflicts, and handling the media

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT ZERO TOLERANCE POLICIES?

Most police and educators said that zero tolerance was not exclusively a punitive approach, nor were punitive consequences all equally severe. For example, serious assaults, weapons, and related infractions should be accompanied by consistent responses; less serious infractions should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. They also commented that it is easier for police to implement zero tolerance if it covers the whole area (not just one school)

They described zero tolerance as:

- ◆ swift and certain consequences
- ◆ severity of response proportional to the gravity of the infraction
- ◆ a clarification of school and social standards
- ◆ empowering school administrators and staff, as well as students

Educators:

"You need to have a bottom line, not only in the schools. If you make a bottom line then above that you can become open and understanding and all those things. What the provincial zero tolerance policy has done is given every school in the province that bottom line from which to work. If we believe that the kids involved in violence are high-risk kids, then we can say, 'I know you have a lot of problems, but this is as far as I can go and then it goes over to the police.' That is the policy of the board and the province. Around that it allows me to be more open about the issues."

WHAT DISCIPLINARY MEASURES PREVENT SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

Police, educators, and youth alike bemoaned the disruptive influence of the chronically troublesome, noting that much of the teacher's time was spent dealing with these students. The argument was made that the school's first responsibility was to provide a safe environment for the majority of students, who could then focus on learning. The welfare of the smaller number of troublesome students was a secondary priority.

Participants supported consequences for misconduct that were consistent, predictable and yet flexible at the same time. Youth participants said that students would not report violence if there were no consequences. In some cases, school boards have no clear policies on misconduct and teachers are unsure where to draw the line on unacceptable conduct. In other cases, policies were not enforced, leaving principals and teachers uncertain as to whether they would receive the backing of their bosses.

Several police and educators commented on the inadequacies of the *Young Offenders Act*, particularly its undue focus on the rights of young people and the lack of legal consequences for those under the age of 12.

Youth:

"Our high school last year was very unorganized. You could skip class all the time without any problem. This year they have this code of behaviour — attendance people sitting outside the door. If you are late, they call home every day. If you miss three classes, they will call you to the office. They got rid of a lot of people who were selling drugs, those that were influencing violence. It has really calmed down."

Suspensions, transfers, and expulsions

For some students, all forms of removal, especially suspensions, were viewed as a "holiday" or "joke". For others even a suspension could be devastating and, perhaps, "wake them up". Such drastic measures, including charges against the student, may be the necessary impetus to get indifferent parents or those in denial to take responsibility for their children.

Transfers may work in cases where:

- ◆ the student removed was the nucleus of a troublesome group and made other students afraid
- ◆ a student who must work to maintain a reputation for toughness is put in a larger school where he is "a small fish"
- ◆ the parents take the problem seriously

Failing to remove a particularly difficult student may lead to an escalation of violence due to fear, as well as the belief that misconduct can continue with impunity.

Police:

"With transfers you're helping out the victim and in many cases waking up the parents. ... There are times when I will lay a charge simply to bring home to the parents that the kid is getting out of control. I know that just calling the parents isn't going to do it. Laying the charge and the inconvenience of having to go to court is going to instigate more involvement and action by the parents for whatever reasons."

"There are some negative aspects to every expulsion, but you have to look at the whole student body. You can't have these kids not being expelled or the message gets out to everyone else that nothing is happening with this person, so others might as well engage in whatever they are doing."

Disadvantages of transfers and expulsions include:

- ◆ the behaviour of the troubled youth may be shifted to the next school or the community
- ◆ the underlying causes of the misconduct are not addressed

Youth:

"If you throw the problematic kids from school to school, they will eventually get fed up and quit. If you don't let them back into the educational program, you're putting them out into society to become criminals. That's not dealing with the problem; that's just putting it off until later. What you have to do is get the principals to deal with the individuals instead of just throwing them out. I think you can make the vast majority of them conform but they need a bit more than the regular students. They need a bit of pride."

Corporal punishment and boot camps

Most participants (but not some police) opposed the reintroduction of the strap or other forms of corporal punishment. It was felt that using violence to quell violence set a poor example. Opponents of corporal punishment were unconvinced about their deterrent effects and saw physical punishments as ignoring the underlying reasons for student misbehaviour.

Participants also rejected military-style, boot camps for young offenders, especially if their only purpose was punishment. Such camps would increase hostility and serve as schools for crime, they suggested. The participants were more receptive to community service or "wilderness camps" designed to teach skills and improve self-esteem.

Youth:

"[wilderness camps aren't] prison; they give them structure. If these kids keep making the wrong choices, I would like to make some choices for them. We don't want to put them in the military but we want to give them discipline, skills, and teach them what they need to be taught, whether they like it or not."

ARE THERE POSITIVE WAYS OF DEALING WITH VIOLENCE?

Some participants said that every attempt ought to be made to salvage troublesome students and that expulsions should be a last resort.

Suggestions for positive action included:

- ◆ solutions that could reconcile the need to be firm and, at the same time, avoid casting the student away
- ◆ involving the parents
- ◆ charging students, if necessary, but seeking alternatives to incarceration or expulsion
- ◆ attaching conditions to suspensions so that they have some credibility and can be constructive for the student
- ◆ suspensions involving unpleasant consequence that are not strictly punitive (such as isolation from peers)

Educators:

"We know the kids and we know their home situation. A couple of kids who have abused marijuana abuse this year are still in our school. They know that we know. They know that the police know. But they are safer in our school, because if they weren't in our school they wouldn't go to any other school. They would be on the street and they are done. So zero tolerance just doesn't work. We want to try to salvage these kids and I still have hope for them."

"There are good kids out there and things go wrong from time to time because they are kids. In some cases they're happy just to be in school because they are safe, they're dry, and they're warm. Their friends are there. It's very positive and they're not having to deal with the sorts of things that happen outside the school. For a lot of these kids the school is the safest place they have."

"We had one kid who was on a five-day suspension and he camped out across the school for the five days because the school was really the only safe place for him and we knew he wasn't going home at night. He was sleeping in a park."

"For some kids home suspension is effective, but for others I'd like to have a little office that was glassed in and I could put a student in and he will have an in-school suspension, meaning that the work is there and I can see it. I don't want staff to oversee it. I don't want it to be in the library. I want it to be a glassed in little place where the kid is going to work for three days."

IS THERE A PLACE FOR SECURITY HARDWARE IN SCHOOLS?

Educators from Toronto were perhaps the most enthusiastic about such hardware, although they stressed that there were differences between communications and surveillance equipment. The former could be used not only to curb violence but in any emergency. These educators felt that cameras helped students feel more secure and they could be useful for evidence. They stressed that such equipment ought not replace human security. A Montreal police officer added that if students felt more secure, they would bring fewer weapons into the school.

West coast participants suggested that installing these devices was an admission of the school's failure to prevent violence, and would make students feel less secure, knowing that there is a serious problem. It was also felt that their presence demoralized staff and turned schools into "penal colonies".

Support for wearing of ID badges, uniforms and other dress codes was lukewarm, especially on the part of students.

HOW CAN SCHOOL VIOLENCE BE PREVENTED?

The focus group participants discussed a number of issues relating to the prevention of school violence, aside from the role of the liaison officer and disciplinary measures. Suggestions included:

- ◆ student involvement in school programs, especially as peer counsellors, because they can relate to students in conflict more easily than adults
- ◆ proactive initiatives by students to foster a more harmonious school environment
- ◆ teachers taking a genuine interest in and showing respect for students
- ◆ teachers playing a visible supervisory role as well as a nurturing one
- ◆ creating a sense of community with visibly involved teachers
- ◆ orientation programs for new students including buddy systems linking younger and older students
- ◆ encouragement of students' involvement in sports and clubs, both during and after school
- ◆ working with students from highly dysfunctional families
- ◆ creating alternative programs for those involved in violence and misconduct on a regular basis

"Kids are incarcerated in Youth Detention Centres anywhere from two months to a year and a half, and all of a sudden they're out and back in school. We need a halfway point — an interim program that gives kids the social skills for school. The other program we have is Step-Up, but it is a school where they stay there and graduate from there."

"[kids who have been in violent situations] have a whole baggage that schools have no control over. The beauty of special programs is that small staffing and small populations creates stability. When a kid has an altercation with her mother and comes to school surly, the teacher can handle it. That's better than having her unload it on a kid who looked at her the wrong way in a classroom of 30 kids, where she hasn't the opportunity there to talk it out."

ARE RESOURCES SUFFICIENT TO IMPLEMENT VIOLENCE MANAGEMENT POLICIES?

Existing resources were considered sufficient to support and advise schools, but insufficient to place full-time officers in schools. Resources are rarely available for active liaison work with elementary and junior high schools — a service many police officers regarded as critical. Training in giving presentations, handling conflicts, and in dealing with the media was also insufficient.

Cost-sharing arrangements were described as problematic because the police, schools, school boards and districts all have to cooperate. Where cost-sharing does exist, it must not interfere with the accountability of police to their superiors.

One key issue in resource allocation is defining the respective roles of the police and school. Police participants said that zero tolerance policies and school liaison programs initially increase demands for services. As their preventive effects kick in, the role of the police increasingly becomes proactive.

It was widely felt that the school should be the first line of defence against misconduct, with the police getting involved only when charges were warranted or where the school felt it was incapable of handling a problem.

Police and school resources were judged inadequate to get liaison programs off the ground and to maintain the demands for information and support.

Resources requested include:

- ◆ better information storage and access for police
- ◆ more teaching space to reduce overcrowded schools and classes, which reduce a sense of community and provide anonymity to disruptive students
- ◆ funding to deal with high-risk students and their families
- ◆ social workers to assist overworked school counsellors
- ◆ training in safety issues and mediation for school staff and police

HOW THE POLICE SEE THE PROBLEM

Along with teachers and school administrators, police officers are on the front lines of the zero tolerance debate. On one side, they are being asked by parents and children to enforce the law and make school safe. On the other side, they are being encouraged to spend more effort on community policing, solving problems in the community context. Discretion is at the core of community policing principles, but it comes squarely into conflict with zero tolerance, which advocates swift, sure and consistent responses to violence.

The study surveyed 250 police services and received responses from 149.¹

WHAT IS THE CAUSE AND INCIDENCE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

About 80% of respondents nationwide felt that there was more violence in the schools now than 10 years ago. Almost a third felt it was much worse. None thought things were getting better.

Much worse	30%
Somewhat worse	49
About the same	20
Less of a problem	0
Not sure	1
No response	0

How serious is the problem in the under- and over-12 age groups?

Not surprisingly, the police viewed violence in under-12s as less problematic, in part because these children are below the age of criminal responsibility and hence not within the jurisdiction of the police. Respondents from larger cities were most likely to regard violence as a major problem.

Ages 12 and over

Major problem	11%
Moderate problem	56
Minor problem	28
No problem	5
No response	0

Under 12 years

Major problem	2%
Moderate problems	32
Minor problem	43
No problem	20
No response	4

¹ See Appendix A for more information on methodology.

What are the most critical factors contributing to school violence?

Almost all responses to this open-ended question concentrated on social factors rather than shortcomings of schools. Police from larger cities mentioned peer pressure and racial/ethnic conflicts more frequently.

Six most frequent responses

1. Laws applying to young offenders
2. Family breakdown/lack of discipline in home
3. Erosion of the school's legal authority
4. Peer pressure
5. Violence in the media
6. Poor rule enforcement in schools

Six least frequent responses

1. Inadequate security measures in schools
2. Racial/ethnic conflict among students
3. Insufficient recreational programs after school
4. Curricula in schools
5. Economic pressures
6. Lack of awareness of students' previous misconduct

Other suggestions

- Selfishness and lack of empathy of youth
- Police response to school violence
- Lack of coordination among schools, police, and other agencies
- Violence in students' country of origin
- Youth alienation and boredom

What are the most serious infractions in schools?

Cities over 500,000 were especially likely to experience problems with gangs, robbery/extortion, violence by intruders, and violence surrounding the schools. Police in larger cities mentioned these problems more frequently than police in smaller cities.

Ontario respondents mentioned weapons in the school most frequently. Ontario and the Atlantic provinces were most likely to mention assaults on staff as a problem.

Overall responses across the country reveal that there is a lot of threatening behaviour, but it does not always result in physical violence. Bullying should not be minimized, however. Children and youth subject to threats and intimidation are not in an ideal learning environment.

Six most frequent responses

1. Verbal abuse/threats
2. Bullying/intimidation
3. Disorderly behaviour
4. Property damage/vandalism
5. Assaults on students
6. Stealing or other illegal acts

Six least frequent responses

1. Robbery/extortion
2. Racially-motivated/hate crimes
3. Assaults on staff
4. Gang activity
5. Violence by intruders
6. Weapons in school

Other suggestions

Violence surrounding the school

What proportion of the student body is guilty of these behaviours in the school?

If the respondents believe that misbehaviour is widespread, then community-based solutions are the only answer. Although most blamed the problem on a small fraction of students, quite a few saw misconduct as more widespread.

Less than 5%	47%
5 - 10%	37
10 - 25%	11
25 - 50%	3
Over 50%	1
No response	2

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

When should police and parents be notified and become involved? When should lockers be searched? When should students be suspended, transferred, or expelled? Virtually all of the police officials felt that the police should be notified after any serious infraction. Police were virtually unanimous regarding the need to involve parents following any serious infraction.

How soon should police be notified?

After any serious infraction	96%
After repeated serious infractions	1
Only if other students' safety is at risk	3
Never	0

How soon should parents get involved?

After any serious infraction	97%
After repeated serious infractions	1
Only if other students' safety is at risk	1
Never	0

How soon should students be suspended from school?

After any serious infraction	84%
After repeated serious infractions	9
Only if other students' safety is at risk	5
Never	1

How soon should students be transferred to another school?

Although police felt strongly that response should be quick and sure, they were not as quick to suggest transferring students.

After any serious infraction	25%
After repeated serious infractions	28
Only if other students' safety is at risk	22
Never	23

How soon should students be expelled from school?

After any serious infraction	46%
After repeated serious infractions	34
Only if other students' safety is at risk	18
Never	0

In the matter of locker searches, it is clear that police are more comfortable working as a team with school officials. They may also feel that maintaining school regulations remains firmly in the school official's court until law breaking is suspected.

Who should be authorized to search students' lockers?

Only police officer with search warrant	5%
Police officer & principal without a warrant	56
Principal or designate without a warrant	38
Never	1

When should schools call the police?

Serious assaults on staff or students, and firearms possession topped the list of incidents justifying police notification. As one might expect, police support for getting involved in minor misbehaviour was weaker than for major events such as robbery/extortion or gang assaults.

These percentages of police respondents said police should **always** be called for:

Serious assaults on staff	100%
Serious assaults on students	100
Possession of firearms	99
Robbery/extortion	98
Gang or group assaults	98
Possession of knives	81
Stealing	69
Property damage	51
Racial/hate harassment	48
Verbal abuse/threats	30
Bullying/intimidation	24
Disorderly behaviour	10

Police were **least likely** to support coming to the school for cases of:

- Racial/hate harassment
- Bullying/intimidation
- Disorderly behaviour

What infractions warrant expulsion from school?

More than 75 per cent of police respondents favoured expulsion for serious assaults on staff and students, firearms possession, robbery/extortion, and gang or group assaults. Disorderly behaviour was ranked lowest in importance.

These percentages of police respondents said students should **always** be expelled for:

Serious assaults on staff	94%
Possession of firearms	90
Robbery/extortion	88
Serious assaults on students	87
Gang or group assaults	75
Possession of knives	52
Stealing	24
Racial/hate harassment	21
Property damage	17
Verbal abuse/threats	11
Bullying/intimidation	8
Disorderly behaviour	7

Police were **least likely** to support expulsion for:

- Disorderly behaviour
- Property damage
- Stealing
- Verbal abuse/threats
- Racial/hate harassment

Should schools institute Crimestoppers programs?

The Crimestoppers program encourages students to call in tips anonymously to the police after they have observed criminal activities in school.

Police favouring Crimestoppers	87%
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Should violent youth be sent to military-style boot camps?

Physical re-education was an appealing idea for police. Such programs range from remote wilderness settings where youth learn survival and self respect to punitive marine-style camps that favour discipline and loss of individuality.

Police favouring military-style boot camps	68%
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Should violent youth be sent to the Scared Straight program?

Scared Straight attempts to shock young people by exposing them to life in prison for a few hours. Few police were convinced of its effectiveness.

Police in favour of Scared Straight 39%

Should violent youth receive corporal punishment in the school?

Giving errant youth the strap had surprising appeal for police, considering that corporal punishment has been absent from schools for some time. However, for some youth, enduring such temporary discomfort is probably more a badge of honour than a deterrent.

Police in favour of corporal punishment 41%

What criteria should be considered in deciding our responses to youth violence?

Police were prepared to use discretion in their dealings with youth offenders, however they did not think an offender’s age should be a deciding criterion for response. This may reflect their frustration with youthful offenders who escape criminal liability because they have not reached the age of 12.

These percentages of police respondents said these criteria should **always** be taken into consideration:

Seriousness of act	100%
Safety of other students	98
Type of infraction	97
Circumstances of the act	86
Student's prior misconduct	73
Age of the student	56

Twenty-one per cent of police thought that age should **never** be taken into consideration in responding to student misbehaviour.

What are the factors that best ensure a safe school environment?

At least four out of every five police respondents viewed certain and swift punishment, the involvement of parents, and consistency across cases as critical factors. The involvement of the police and of students in setting penalties were less favourably considered. It is interesting that most criminologists also believe that certainty and swiftness of punishment have more effect than the severity of punishment.

Police ranked these factors as **most** critical:

Certainty of punishment	91%
Swiftness of punishment	91
Involvement of parents	91
Consistency across cases	83
Severity of punishment	69
Visibility of punishment	64

Police rated these factors as **least critical** to the outcome:

- Involvement of the police
- Administrative discretion
- Involvement of students in setting penalties

What should be the role of police in the schools?

Should the police play a more proactive/preventive role or should they just react to incidents as they occur? This survey revealed that police prefer a low profile in the school. Police in cities over 500,000 population and those from the West Coast were more likely to favour a full-time police presence in the schools. Respondents from Quebec were least in favour of such a presence.

Respondents **agreed** that police should:

Act in an advisory capacity/respond to incidents	54%
Assign officers full-time to schools	30
Respond after notification of a criminal act	11
Supervise some school events	5

The resources available to police departments may explain why police are more supportive of a reactive role. Three-quarters of police felt that resources were adequate to respond to incidents. Respondents from the largest cities and West Coast were most likely to consider their resources adequate to support a full-time police presence, perhaps explaining why they were the most likely to favour such a presence.

Respondents agreed that resources were **least adequate** for:

Assigning officers full-time to schools	76%
Supervising some school events	30

Respondents agreed that resources were **adequate to**:

Only respond to incidents	76%
Advise schools/respond to incidents	58

What is the police presence in your schools?

The larger city police departments and school boards, as well as those located in the Pacific region, were most likely to have school liaison officers. In-school officers were less common in Quebec and the Atlantic region.

School liaison officer in the department or school board (nationally)	76%
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How is this police presence financed?

A majority of the police were in favour of sharing the salary of these officers with school boards.

Favour cost-sharing between police and schools	61%
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What should the police be doing to prevent youth violence?

Police feel it is critical to be involved in a limited number of activities. The farther away the activities strayed from traditional policing, the lower their priority. For example, mediating disputes between students was rated a critical need by only 23 per cent of the police. This reflects the problems of resources, the perception of police that this is not their turf, and the relative status of school and youth violence issues relative to other demands from the community.

Four activities rated as most critical:

1. Encouraging students to notify police of incidents
2. Informing schools about potential problems
3. Speaking to students about non-violence
4. Communicating with parents

Four activities rated as less critical:

1. Warning perpetrators
2. Training teachers in handling problems
3. Protecting and counselling victims of violence
4. Assigning officers to schools

Activities rated as least critical:

- Advising schools on security measures
- Working with social agencies
- Mediating disputes between students

How adequate are resources to perform critical activities?

Only one in every five police officials felt their resources were adequate to perform critical preventive activities. Respondents from Ontario and Quebec were most likely to state that their resources were seriously inadequate.

Adequate	21%
Somewhat adequate	52
Seriously inadequate	24
Not stated	3

WHAT DOES ZERO TOLERANCE MEAN?

The surveys contained an open-ended question asking respondents to define zero tolerance.

Zero tolerance was most frequently a reference to punishment or the suppression of the misconduct. Most definitions referred to notification of the police or expulsion of the troublesome student. Zero tolerance meant intolerance of violence and included some consequences for action.

Most frequent definitions of zero tolerance:

Punitive response (expulsion, police notified)

Some consequences, response, action/consistent rule enforcement

Violence not tolerated, accepted or ignored

Least frequent definitions of zero tolerance:

Safe schools, free of violence and fear

Combination of punishment and prevention

Proportional, graduated response

DOES ZERO TOLERANCE DECREASE THE INCIDENCE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

When asked about the effect of zero tolerance policies, the police believed that zero tolerance approaches would reduce violence and enhance safety in the schools.

Most agreed that zero tolerance:

Reduces student violence 87%

Makes students feel safer in schools 87

Protects victims of violence better 78

Is in conflict with Y.O.A.² and courts 64

Fewest agreed that zero tolerance:

Will merely shift violence elsewhere 46%

Will further marginalize troubled students, producing more violence 55

Will not be implemented by school staff/administrators 53

² Young Offenders Act

HOW SCHOOL BOARDS SEE THE PROBLEM

Nominally, school boards are responsible for all activities on school property. Actually, what goes on in the school is both a reflection of and a response to what goes on in the rest of the community. Despite the fact that teachers and other school officials feel a great deal of pressure from the increase in youth violence, their authority to deal with problems in the school has, if anything, been weakened.

Working with other social agencies and the police is a partial solution to this dilemma. However clarification of the relative roles of school authorities and other authorities is probably a first step to tackling increasing violence among youth.

Of 260 school boards surveyed, responses were received from 151.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE AND INCIDENCE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

Eighty per cent of the school officials felt that the problem was worse, not the same or better. Respondents from the larger cities were more likely to say that the problem had got much worse.

Much worse	18%
Somewhat worse	62
About the same	15
Less of a problem	2
Not sure	2
No response	1

How serious is the problem in the under- and over-12 age groups?

More school officials than police considered children under 12 a major problem; youth over 12 were most likely rated a moderate problem.

Ages 12 and over

Major problem	12%
Moderate problem	57
Minor problem	28
No problem	2
No response	1

Under 12 years

Major problem	6%
Moderate problems	42
Minor problem	43
No problem	7
No response	3

What are the most critical factors contributing to school violence?

There was a high degree of agreement between police and educators on the causes of youth violence. Many school-related factors were downplayed in both surveys. Respondents from larger cities were more likely to emphasize the important role of peer pressure and racial/ethnic conflicts.

Six most frequent responses

1. Family breakdown/lack of discipline in home
2. Violence in the media
3. Laws applying to young offenders
4. Peer pressure
5. Erosion of the school's legal authority
6. Lack of coordination among schools, police, and other agencies

Five least frequent responses

- 1. Inadequate security measures in schools
- 2. Lack of awareness of students' previous misconduct
- 3. Police response to school violence
- 4. Curricula in schools
- 5. Racial/ethnic conflict among students

Other suggestions

- Insufficient recreational programs after school
- Selfishness and lack of empathy of youth
- Poor rule enforcement in schools
- Youth alienation and boredom
- Violence in students' country of origin
- Economic pressures

What are the most serious infractions in schools?

There was a high degree of consensus between police and school boards on the problems being encountered. Cities over 500,000 were especially likely to experience problems with gangs, robbery/extortion, violence by intruders, and violence surrounding the schools. Police in larger cities mentioned these problems more frequently than police in smaller cities:

Six most frequent responses

- 1. Bullying/intimidation
- 2. Verbal abuse/threats
- 3. Disorderly behaviour
- 4. Assaults on students
- 5. Property damage/vandalism
- 6. Stealing or other illegal acts

Six least frequent responses

- 1. Assaults on staff
- 2. Violence by intruders
- 3. Robbery/extortion
- 4. Racially-motivated/hate crimes
- 5. Gang activity
- 6. Weapons in school

Other suggestions

Violence surrounding the school

What proportion of the student body is guilty of these behaviours in the school?

Once again, police and schools boards concurred. Although most viewed the problem as confined to a small fraction of students, a fairly significant number saw misconduct as more widespread.

Less than 5%	56%
5 - 10%	35
10 - 25%	7
25 - 50%	1
Over 50%	0
No response	1

How much time is dedicated to dealing with violence-related issues and cases?

About 60 per cent of school board officials spend under 10 per cent of their time dealing with violence. The rest spend as much as a quarter or half of their time on violence. Although these numbers do not seem high, they represent a significant drain on time that could be dedicated to educational issues.

Less than 5%	37%
5 - 10%	24
10 - 25%	24
25 - 50%	8
Over 50%	4
No response	3

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

Many school board officials felt police should be notified after any serious infraction. The rest felt that repeated serious infractions or threats to the safety of other students should be the trigger. School officials were not as quick to suggest expulsion, and a minority would only transfer a student if other students were at risk.

How soon should police be notified?

After any serious infraction	78%
After repeated serious infractions	9
Only if other students' safety is at risk	13
Never	0

How soon should parents get involved?

After any serious infraction	99%
After repeated serious infractions	1
Only if other students' safety is at risk	0
Never	0

How soon should students be suspended from school?

After any serious infraction	80%
After repeated serious infractions	13
Only if other students' safety is at risk	3
Never	0

How soon should students be transferred to another school?

After any serious infraction	16%
After repeated serious infractions	24
Only if other students' safety is at risk	33
Never	21

How soon should students be expelled?

After any serious infraction	17%
After repeated serious infractions	44
Only if other students' safety is at risk	34
Never	1

Who should be authorized to search students' lockers?

School board officials were more comfortable than police to give principals or their designates freedom to search lockers.

Only police officer with search warrant	8%
Police officer & principal without a warrant	28
Principal or designate without a warrant	63
Never	0

When should schools call the police?

School board officials were less eager to call police to schools than police would like them to be. The most pronounced differences were found in relation to verbal abuse/threats, bullying/intimidation, and racial or hate-related harassment. Police felt they should be notified but board officials often said no.

These percentages of school board respondents said police should **always** be called for:

Possession of firearms	98%
Serious assaults on staff	96
Serious assaults on students	96
Gang or group assaults	91
Robbery/extortion	82
Possession of knives	65
Stealing	44
Property damage	33
Racial/hate harassment	22
Verbal abuse/threats	9
Bullying/intimidation	8
Disorderly behaviour	5

Police were **least likely** to be called for:

Disorderly behaviour
Bullying/intimidation
Racial/hate harassment

What infractions warrant expulsion from school?

Serious assault on a staff member was the only infraction that prompted more than 75 per cent support for expulsion from school board officials. Weapons possession, serious assaults on students, gang or group assaults, and robbery/extortion also prompted censure by school officials, though not as strongly as for police. Disorderly behaviour was viewed as less serious.

These percentages of school board officials said students should **always** be expelled for:

Serious assaults on staff	77
Possession of firearms	72
Serious assaults on students	66
Gang or group assaults	50
Possession of knives	36
Robbery/extortion	33
Racial/hate harassment	7
Stealing	7
Verbal abuse/threats	6
Bullying/intimidation	5
Property damage	4
Disorderly behaviour	2

These percentages said students should **never** be expelled for:

Disorderly behaviour	32
Stealing	29
Verbal abuse/threats	27
Property damage	25
Bullying/intimidation	22
Racial/hate harassment	13

What should the terms of expulsion be?

There is considerable ambiguity surrounding the definition of expulsion. Here is how school board officials interpreted the term:

Could be reinstated before the end of that school year	19%
Could apply for reinstatement only in the following year	62%
Permanently excluded from that school board	13%

Educators in the Atlantic region were most likely to select the first option. Those in Ontario were most likely to view expulsion as permanent.

Should schools institute Crimestoppers programs?

The Crimestoppers program encourages students to call in tips anonymously to the police after they have observed criminal activities in school.

School officials in favour of Crimestoppers 83%

Solutions such as boot camps and Scared Straight, which operate outside the school environment, held little attraction for school board officials.

Should violent youth be sent to military-style boot camps?

Such programs range from remote wilderness settings where youth learn survival and self respect to punitive marine-style camps that favour discipline and loss of individuality.

School officials in favour of military-style boot camps 36%

Should violent youth be sent to the Scared Straight program?

Scared Straight attempts to shock young people by exposing them to life in prison for a few hours.

School officials in favour of Scared Straight 28%

Should violent youth receive corporal punishment in the school?

However, virtually all school officials (especially those in Quebec) were set against corporal punishment, possibly given the potential for legal liability.

School officials in favour of corporal punishment 7%

What criteria should be considered in deciding our responses to youth violence?

School board officials overall were willing to take more circumstances into account when judging the response required. However, virtually all police and school officials thought that the type of infraction, its seriousness, and the safety of other students were critical deciding factors. More school officials than police felt that the student's prior misconduct and age ought to be taken into account.

These percentages of school officials said these criteria should **always** be taken into consideration:

Seriousness of act	97%
Safety of other students	97
Type of infraction	97
Circumstances of the act	87
Student's prior misconduct	87
Age of the student	77

What are the factors that best ensure a safe school environment?

School officials were considerably more likely to favour administrative discretion, rather than iron-clad principles, in responding to misconduct. They also viewed the involvement of parents and the certainty of punishment as critical factors. The paradox in their response lies in their insistence that responses to violence be both consistent and flexible. If discretion leads to individualized responses, then consistency may be difficult.

School officials ranked these factors as **most** critical:

Involvement of parents	90%
Certainty of punishment	81%
Consistency across cases	73
Swiftness of punishment	66
Administrative discretion	58

School officials rated these factors as **least critical** to the outcome:

Involvement of the police
Involvement of students in setting penalties
Consistency across cases

What should be the role of police in the schools?

Both police and school officials favoured a low-profile role in which the police advised schools and responded to incidents. Fewer school officials than police respondents favoured having officers in the schools full time. School officials in cities over 500,000 population and those from the West Coast were more likely to favour a full-time police presence in the schools. All respondents from Quebec were least in favour of a police presence.

Respondents agreed that police should:

Act only in advisory capacity and respond to incidents	53%
Assign officers full-time to schools	21
Respond only after being notified of a criminal act	15
Supervise some school events	7

What is the police presence in your schools?

The larger city police departments and school boards, as well as those located in the Pacific region, were most likely to have school liaison officers. These officers were least likely to be found in Quebec and the Atlantic region.

School liaison officer in the department or school board	73%
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How is this police presence financed?

Safety is not considered a valid educational expense by school officials. Few school board officials favoured sharing the cost of their liaison officers.

Favour cost-sharing between police and schools	19%
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What should the schools be doing to prevent youth violence?

School board officials favoured proactive measures over reactive, disciplinary measures. They considered most of the activities listed as critical. An overwhelming majority felt that helping high-risk students, communicating and meeting with parents regularly, and training staff in dealing with violence and disruptions were especially important.

Fewer than a fifth of school officials rated improving security measures high on their list of critical activities.

Activities rated as most critical:

- Helping high-risk students
- Communicating/meeting with parents regularly
- Training staff in handling problems
- Working with social agencies

Activities rated as less critical:

- Encouraging active student involvement
- Enforcing rules strictly
- Preventing/mediating racial/cultural conflicts
- Promoting police liaison programs
- Including non-violent conflict resolution in curricula

Activities rated as least critical:

- Creating response teams to handle problems
- Establishing peer mediation projects
- Lobbying the media

How adequate are resources to perform critical activities?

School officials felt even less confident than police about resources available to prevent violence. Only one in seven felt their resources were adequate. Respondents from Ontario and Quebec felt least equipped to deal with youth violence.

Adequate	15%
Somewhat adequate	56
Seriously inadequate	29
Not stated	1

WHAT DOES ZERO TOLERANCE MEAN?

The surveys contained an open-ended question asking respondents to define zero tolerance. School officials included references to punishment and the need for consequences. They were more likely to suggest making the response proportional to the gravity of the act, and were somewhat more likely than police to include both concepts of punishment and prevention in their definitions.

Most frequent definitions:

- Not tolerated, accepted, ignored
- Some consequences, response, action/consistent rule enforcement
- Punitive response (expulsion, police notified)

Least frequent definitions:

- Combination of punishment and prevention
- Proportional, graduated response
- Safe schools, free of violence and fear

DOES ZERO TOLERANCE DECREASE THE INCIDENCE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

When asked about the effect of zero tolerance policies, school officials were just as optimistic as police. They believed that zero tolerance approaches would reduce violence and enhance safety in the schools. Almost half thought parents might undermine disciplinary measures and 40 per cent expressed concern about the cost of implementing zero tolerance policies.

Most agreed that zero tolerance:

- Makes students feel safer in schools 87%
- Reduces student violence 79
- Protects victims of violence better 72
- Is in conflict with Y.O.A. and justice system⁶¹

Fewest agreed that zero tolerance:

- Creates an overly repressive school environment 79%
- Will not be supported by school board and administrators 77
- Decreases likelihood of teachers reporting incidents if penalties too strict 68
- Will overload justice system, hampering ability to respond 66
- Lacks flexibility, fails to take mitigating circumstances into account 60
- Will result in too many expulsions 60

GENERAL COMMENTS FROM POLICE AND SCHOOL OFFICIALS

At the conclusion of the survey of police and school board officials, the respondents were asked whether they had any final comments. Overall, cooperation and partnerships among stakeholders including parents, teachers, school officials, youth, police and social/health agencies were stressed.

“School officials should exercise their authority without fear of civil or criminal action.”

“Expectations need to be clearly outlined and enforced appropriately.”

“Long-term control of violence requires changes in beliefs, attitudes, and values.”

Other comments and anecdotes revolved around these themes:

What is the cause and incidence of school violence?

- ◆ School violence reflects what is happening in the family and in the community. These problems must be solved at the same time.
- ◆ Weakening the authority of teachers, principals and school boards has eroded respect and discipline.
- ◆ The mass media has desensitized our young people and has glamorized violence.
- ◆ Children are wise to the system and are using it to avoid retribution.

How should we respond to school violence?

- ◆ Identify children at risk early — as early as primary school.
- ◆ Disruptive children should not be allowed to interfere with the education of other children.
- ◆ All students who break rules should be disciplined; there should be clear consequences for all misconduct.
- ◆ Every incident should be dealt with promptly and consistently.
- ◆ Parents must take responsibility for their children.

WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS ABOUT YOUTH VIOLENCE

The concern of Canadians about youth violence in general, and school violence in particular, is well known. In 1994, 93 per cent of those surveyed by Environics expressed concern about youth violence.³ In 1991, the majority of those surveyed by Decima said they wanted security guards in schools.⁴

This study conducted its own survey of the Canadian public to ask about the causes of youth violence and the measures required to combat the problem, using an omnibus survey of 1500 Canadians across the country.

1. When a student assaults another student or staff member, a number of measures can be taken. Which one of the following measures do you think is most appropriate?

The student is given counselling and other support	56%
The student is automatically suspended and possibly expelled	36
The student is transferred to another school or program	5

There was no province in which a majority of respondents chose automatic suspension or expulsion. However, the *Counselling and other support* option was particularly strong in Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Though never higher than 45 per cent of the total, support for expulsion was highest in Alberta, Ontario and Nova Scotia (40% or more in each) and slightly less strong in British Columbia, and Manitoba.

Slightly more women than men favoured the counselling option, as did middle income earners over the wealthy and least wealthy respondents.

2. When do you think of the term "zero tolerance" as it relates to school violence, which one of the following approaches is closest to your understanding of the term?

Zero tolerance means:

A combination of responses to violence including: punishments, counselling, preventative measures and educating students about non-violence	44%
The automatic suspension or expulsion of students displaying violent behaviour	36
Students face some consequences for violent behaviour	17

The responses to the first and second questions are quite reminiscent of opinions expressed by focus groups and the police/school board surveys. Canadians seem to feel strongly about safety in the schools, but they see violence as a symptom of a greater problem, with broad solutions as the most favoured choice.

Provincial breakdown of the responses held some surprises. Prince Edward Islanders, strong supporters (71%) of a balanced response to youth violence in *Question 1*, were now 43% in favour of expulsion. Nova Scotia and Ontario were equally in support of expulsion. As before, Ontario was almost equally divided between the balanced and expulsion options. Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick residents were strongest in favour of the combined approach.

³ Cited on the CTV nightly news on October 12, 1994.

⁴ Cited in Robert R. Robinson, "Schools Are Being Made Safer." *Canadian Security*, June/July 1991, pp.16-17.

3. Would you say that you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose zero tolerance approaches to school violence?

Strongly favour	48%
Somewhat favour	24
Somewhat oppose	11
Strongly oppose	13

Support for zero tolerance approaches was weakest in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, where the combined percentage for those favouring it was 60% or less. Combined percentages in the other provinces ranged between 70% (Alberta) and 81% (Manitoba).

Women were more likely than men to be strongly opposed to zero tolerance.

Respondents between 35 and 64 years, those with more education and those wealthier were more likely to favour zero tolerance, as were those with children in high school.

4. There are a number of possible reasons why school violence occurs. From the following list, please tell me which one reason you think is the most likely reason that school violence occurs?

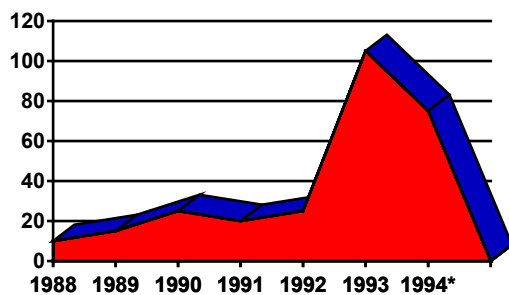
Family breakdown	41/29% ⁵
Lack of discipline of young people	31
The influence of mass media like television, newspapers, and radio	20/15
Peer pressure	18
Laws for dealing with young people are not tough enough	16
Economic pressures in society	11
Problems with immigrants or minorities	7
Inadequate rule enforcement in schools	6

⁵ The questions were split into two surveys, with each group getting both family breakdown and media influence, plus four other suggestions. Therefore, there are two scores for family breakdown and media influence.

YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE PRINT MEDIA

How are youth violence and zero tolerance policies portrayed in the print media? Analysis can provide clues to the origins of public opinions about these issues. It can also show whether the print media distorts the issues or reports in a balanced manner.

Most articles analysed appeared in the Toronto Star; Calgary Herald; Winnipeg Free Press; Globe and Mail; Montreal Gazette; Vancouver Sun; and Western Report. However, the Halifax Chronicle Herald, Macleans and Financial Post were also analysed. Coverage of school violence issues has increased dramatically in the last two years, as shown in the chart.



* This represents the projected number by the end of 1994.

Topics

Most articles dealt with assaults on students or teachers, disorderly conduct, or weapons in schools. A smaller number dealt with bullying, vandalism, robbery/extortion or other illegal activities. One-seventh of the articles dealt with racial or ethnic conflicts, a factor given minimum importance by those surveyed for this research.

Factual or analytical

Though previous research showed that crime coverage was generally factual, two-thirds of these articles on youth violence included a commentary. Perhaps when young people are involved, there is a greater attempt to understand the underpinnings of behaviour.

Commentary	67%
Factual	11
Statistical/Research	8
Mixed	8
Policy	6

Information sources

While school officials and staff were the most common sources for reporters, police officers, research reports, students, and parents were also frequently cited in articles.

School staff	58
School board officials	44
Police – front line	25
Research/documents	24
Students	21
Parents	21
Academics	14
Other politicians	14
Youth workers	13
Ministers of Education	13
Citizens	12
Police administrators	12

Seriousness

Fewer than half the articles discussed the seriousness of the problem, but many of these considered youth violence extremely or moderately serious.

Not mentioned	51
Extremely serious	28
Moderately serious	12
Ambivalent	6
Not serious	3

When articles compared the problem with previous years, many considered violence to be worsening.

Not mentioned	46
Considerably worse	43
Ambivalent	8
About the same as before	2
Less problematic of late	1

Reasons for youth violence

Family breakdown/dysfunction and media legitimization of violence were the most common reasons suggested. These sources of violent behaviour were also mentioned frequently by those surveyed for this paper. Only two of the fourteen reasons blamed the school or the police. The emphasis on socio-economic, cultural, familial, and community-related factors echoed the results of the public survey, suggesting that the print media does influence the public's views on this issue.

Family breakdown, violence, poor supervision	20% ⁶
Media legitimization of violence	18
Student fear and self-protection	16
Racial/ethnic conflict	14
Urban life and community breakdown	14
Denial of the problem by school officials	12
Situational factors (parties, sporting events, etc.)	12
Cultural values promoting violence	12
Neighbourhood gangs	12
Economic stresses or inequality	10
Psychological problems/low self-esteem	9
Poor cooperation between schools and police	9
Excessive emphasis on the rights of young persons	8
Lack of respect for authority	8

⁶ More than one issue could be included in an article; therefore totals do not add up to 100%.

Solutions to youth violence

Although the media often suggested that youth violence is due to social, economic, and cultural roots, these factors were mostly absent from their remedies for the problem. Most articles placed the onus for resolution on schools, with some help from the police. Preventive responses focusing on familial interventions, community issues and on the cultural legitimization of violence were conspicuously absent.

Collaboration of concerned parties	24
Police presence in schools	17
Automatic suspension or expulsion	15
Establishment of a code of behaviour	14
Good record-keeping and information-sharing about incidents	12
Keep schools physically secure	11
Teaching conflict resolution/anger management	10
Notification of police about incidents	10
Tougher laws with more parental accountability	9
Peer mediation programs	9
Schools should study problem	9
Home schooling and special programs for offenders	9
Acknowledgement of a problem by schools ⁸	
Counselling for perpetrators	8
Provide teachers with skills to handle problems	8

Zero tolerance in the print media

In this survey, "zero tolerance" is first mentioned in 1988 in the context of school violence⁷ but seldom used until 1993. The term received greater mention in Central Canada and on the West Coast than in the Prairies or in Atlantic Canada. Only 17 per cent of the articles used the term; when they did it was usually defined as involving the suspension or expulsion of offending students and/or the notification of police. Very few articles judged the rightness or wrongness of the policy. Those that did criticize zero tolerance said that the policy just shifted problems from a school to the community or another school.

No evaluation	83
Balanced position	9
Favourable	4
Critical	4

⁷ This assertion is made with the recognition that the term may have been used before the 1988 starting date of our media search. The term may have also been used by publications not covered by the Canadian Business and Current Affairs Index, and by the Canadian Periodical Index.

CONCLUSIONS

A ROLE FOR SOLICITOR GENERAL CANADA

Throughout this project, participants emphasized the importance of forging partnerships at all levels of government. While policing and education matters fall primarily under the responsibility of the provinces, the Solicitor General of Canada should have a role to play in developing partnerships with other governments, school boards and police services to support local decision makers in meeting the challenges of school violence. This involvement could take the form of:

- ◆ policy leadership with respect to zero tolerance and other alternatives to school violence
- ◆ supporting national research projects
- ◆ evaluations of community-based demonstration projects involving the police
- ◆ monitoring regional trends and evaluating them in a national perspective

When administrators, school staff and students have the backing of provincial, federal and territorial ministries, they can respond to school violence with confidence.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACTION: POLICE

Backed by community policing approaches, more and more police are recognizing that problems are better solved where they are found. Successfully confronting and resolving violent behaviour in the school is ideal. Suspending or expelling students for inappropriate behaviour is not likely to benefit society in the long run if they simply get to stay out of school and hang around the mall.

The involvement of the police in school violence issues can range from the purely reactive one of responding to calls for service, to a full-time assignment in a school. Most police departments surveyed had some form of liaison program and favoured a role somewhere between these extremes.

There were major differences of opinion about how deeply involved the police should be in school-based preventive programs. Many surveyed preferred a reactive role, with the police also providing advice to the schools, speaking to students about non-violence and communicating with parents.

Others felt strongly that involvement must run much deeper if police are to play their enforcement role effectively and influence the attitudes of students constructively. They recommended officers go through extensive on-the-job training, maintain regular contact with staff and students, actively patrol the school and even participate in school activities (e.g., coaching a school team).

Three or four formal presentations a year were deemed insufficient to develop the rapport necessary to change student attitudes, or to compel staff and students to notify police more consistently about existing or looming problems. Token "public relations" efforts are unlikely to yield such benefits. At the same time, excessively high police profile in the schools can undermine the school's authority and ownership of problems, alienate students and strain police budgets.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **The benefits of adopting an active liaison program must be weighed against availability of resources, level of commitment and need.**
- ◆ **Police departments need to strike a balance between a purely reactive role (which is at odds with the community policing philosophy) or one that is so proactive that it undercuts the school's initiatives in dealing with violence.**
- ◆ **Police departments that choose an active role in the schools need both preparatory and on-the-job training, including presentation skills, conflict mediation and media relations, lasting up to two years.**
- ◆ **Formal agreements should be established between the police and schools, defining roles and the conditions under which the police are to be notified.**
- ◆ **Cost-sharing arrangements should be pursued, although it should be made clear that liaison officers report to their superiors only.**

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACTION: SCHOOLS

Policy versus discretion

An apparent contradiction revealed by this study was the tendency for educators to call for predictable and consistent consequences for violent behaviour on one hand, and for administrative discretion, on the other. Automatic sanctions for all infractions would be excessively rigid, failing to take the circumstances of the misconduct into account. Fixed penalties would also leave school administrators with little authority. Undercutting their authority is not only problematic, but removes compassion from the process and opens the door to the sabotage of policies by administrators.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **Schools should seek a balance between the extremes of excessive automatic sanctions and unfettered administrative discretion.**
- ◆ **Infractions that are eligible for automatic penalties and automatic notification of the police should be identified in advance. Unless such infractions are so grave that they warrant immediate police notification, the school should investigate the circumstances first. If the sanction is not applied, the school must justify why.**
- ◆ **Less serious infractions should be responded to by the school, taking into consideration mitigating factors.**

Suspension, transfer, and expulsion

Although the police collectively supported expulsion more than schools, most educators recognized that expulsion may be necessary as a last resort, usually for the rest of that school year.

Suspensions were viewed as having little credibility in the eyes of students. Transfers and expulsions were justified by the need to protect other students as well as to maintain their opportunity to learn. There was evidence that a hard-line approach did improve the climate in conflict-ridden schools. Anecdotes both supported and refuted the notion that transferring students would merely shift the problem elsewhere.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **Suspensions, transfers, and expulsions should be maintained but used only in relation to specified serious infractions or after less severe measures have been exhausted.**
- ◆ **Suspensions should carry credibility by requiring that students meet certain conditions and by involving parents where possible. In-school suspensions may be the best way of ensuring that students meet these conditions.**
- ◆ **Transfers to more distant schools may remove the student from adverse peer pressure. Information regarding the student's misconduct in the former school(s) should be shared with the new school.**
- ◆ **Expulsion (removal for the duration of the school year) should be used as an absolute last resort or following an infraction that placed the safety of other students in jeopardy. Where possible, alternative schooling arrangements should be made for these students.**

Other punishments and enforcement measures

In the surveys and focus groups, participants were asked to provide their views on measures such as Crimestoppers, encounters with jail conditions, military-style boot camps and corporal punishment. Crimestoppers was the most favoured of these measures, probably because it was the most benign and only encouraged students to do what liaison programs aimed to do — provide information to the police about lawbreaking in and around schools.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **Those setting school policies should not use violence (including corporal punishment and banishment to boot camp) to combat violence.**

Security systems in schools

Security hardware includes radio communications equipment, surveillance cameras and metal detectors. Intrusive systems were not favoured by all, but some jurisdictions considered cameras essential in deterring misconduct, empowering students and convicting those committing criminal offences.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **Intrusive physical security measures, such as cameras installed in school corridors, should be used only when violence and fear are at unacceptably high levels. Their use is no substitute for preventive programs and human security measures — such as school patrols conducted by police officers, staff and students, and crisis management teams.**

Preventing violence in the schools

A proactive approach to minimizing the negative effects of violence includes not just special measures and programs but also fostering a positive sense of school community. Strong bonds between teachers and students are essential to this environment. A positive school environment encourages student involvement in preventing and solving violent behaviour, as well as encouraging participation in school clubs and sports — activities that insulate them from antisocial pursuits.

Active police liaison programs, where possible, are desirable because they can cultivate more positive attitudes to the law and authority figures in general. They also assist the police in performing their enforcement functions.

Early intervention with high-risk students and their families was probably the most frequently recommended preventive initiative. Other preventive initiatives mentioned frequently included the teaching of non-violent conflict resolution and training school staff to mediate conflicts.

Considerations for action include:

- ◆ **The prevention of violence should be a priority in allocation of resources.**
- ◆ **Schools should create positive, non-authoritarian learning environments in which a genuine interest in, and respect for, students is shown and in which students are actively involved in school affairs.**
- ◆ **Active police liaison efforts should be encouraged to cultivate positive attitudes towards the law.**
- ◆ **Early intervention with high-risk students and their families is a high priority.**
- ◆ **Non-violent conflict resolution and training of school staff in conflict mediation should be encouraged.**

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

SURVEY OF POLICE

We spoke with front line officers and their superiors through a survey of 250 police services, including all the largest departments/detachments, and a one in three sampling of departments in communities with less than 25,000 people. The composition of the final sample was as follows:

Municipal police services	57%
RCMP detachments	38%
Quebec/Ontario provincial police	< 5%

Total response: 149 out of 250 surveyed

Most police respondents lived in communities with populations between 5,000 and 50,000. Only four per cent of the responding departments were from cities of over one-half million people, a situation due to the smaller number of large urban centres.

Community size	Respondents
500,000+	4.0
250,000 - 499,999	6.0
100,000 - 249,999	7.4
50,000 - 99,999	11.4
25,000 - 49,999	18.1
10,000 - 24,999	18.1
5,000 - 9,999	17.4
2,500 - 4,999	12.8
100 - 2,499	4.7

Geographic distribution roughly approximated Canada's population, with under representation from Quebec and over representation of the Prairie provinces.

Province or territory	Respondents
Ontario	34
Québec	9
British Columbia	15
Alberta	15
Saskatchewan	9
Manitoba	6
New Brunswick	4
Nova Scotia	5
Newfoundland	1
Northwest Territories	1
Yukon Territory	1
Prince Edward Island	0

SURVEY OF SCHOOL BOARDS

A total of 260 school board officials were contacted throughout the country. All the largest boards were contacted, and a random selection of smaller boards in each province and territory were also included. A total of 151 boards responded for a response rate of just under 60%.

Over 90% of the boards completing the questionnaire were responsible for schools at more than one level (i.e., high school and elementary school or both senior and junior high school). Seven per cent of the boards contained high schools only and just a few of the responding boards subsumed elementary or junior high schools only. Thus, the responses of the school officials tended to relate to both elementary and high school students.

Community size	Respondents
500,000+	13%
250,000 - 499,999	6
100,000 - 249,999	13
50,000 - 99,999	13
25,000 - 49,999	16
10,000 - 24,999	19
5,000 - 9,999	11
2,500 - 4,999	5
100 - 2,499	4

Larger communities were also over-represented in the educator sample, relative to their numbers in the country as a whole. About an eighth of the school boards surveyed were located in cities of over half a million people.

Geographic distribution reflected Canada's population, although Quebec is somewhat under-represented and the Prairie provinces are over-represented.

Province or territory	Respondents
Ontario	24
Québec	11
British Columbia	16
Alberta	15
Saskatchewan	11
Manitoba	11
New Brunswick	3
Nova Scotia	4
Newfoundland	2
Northwest Territories	1
Yukon Territory	1
Prince Edward Island	1

SURVEY OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Canadians 18 years of age and over were surveyed through the national Angus Reid Omnibus Survey during the third week of October 1994. Four questions were asked of all 1500 respondents, who were drawn from all 10 provinces.

Basic demographic information, including whether there were elementary or secondary school-age children living with in the household, was gathered with the survey.

1. When a student assaults another student or staff member, there are a number of measures which can be taken. Which one of the following measures do you think is the most appropriate?

- * The student is automatically suspended and possibly expelled
- * The student is transferred to another school or program
- * The student is given counselling and other support

2. When you think of the term "zero tolerance" as it relates to school violence, which one of the three following approaches do you think is the closest to your understanding of the term? Zero tolerance means:

- * The automatic suspension or expulsion of students displaying violent behaviour
- * Students face some consequences for violent behaviour
- * A combination of responses to violence including: punishments, counselling, preventative measures and educating students about non-violence
- * Other

3. Would you say that you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose zero tolerance approaches to school violence?

4. There are a number of possible reasons why school violence occurs. From the following, please tell me which one reason you think is the most likely reason that school violence occurs.

- * Family breakdown
- * The influence of mass media like television, newspapers, and radio
- * Peer pressure
- * Economic pressures in society
- * Problems with immigrants or minorities
- * Inadequate rule enforcement in schools
- * Lack of discipline of young people
- * Laws for dealing with young people are not tough enough

The sample was split in half for question four, with both halves being given the choice of family breakdown, media influence and three other options.

SURVEY OF PRINT MEDIA

Articles on school violence were identified by searching major Canadian newspapers and magazines through the Canadian Business and Current Affairs Index and the Canadian Periodical Index. The words used in the search included "school violence", "youth violence", "zero tolerance", "safe schools", "weapons", and "gangs". The search covered January 1988 to early September 1994. A total of 317 articles were identified and 277 of these were located. A final sample of 266 articles was judged relevant and used as the basis of the content analysis.

A detailed form designed to minimize subjectivity guided the coding process. It was pretested and revised to leave as little room for discretion as possible.

The coding form noted:

- ◆ name of the publication
- ◆ date of publication
- ◆ regional/geographic origin
- ◆ nature of the article (factual report, commentary, research/statistical, or policy-related)
- ◆ sources of information cited or quoted
- ◆ characterizations of the gravity of school violence
- ◆ explanations offered for school violence
- ◆ remedies discussed
- ◆ other issues pertaining specifically to zero tolerance policies.