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A Study of School Disturbance in the United States: A Twentieth Century Perspective, Part Two

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1970 to 1995: Civil Rights to the Information Age

Areas of Transition

Social Transitions

During this period a growing number of cataclysmic societal changes impacted violence in American schools. Dysfunctional families, substance abuse, changing values of the adolescent subculture, and myriad personal and societal problems, negatively influenced development of young people.

In the early 1970's, 12% of all families were single-parent households. A 1989 survey found that 25% of children of divorce saw fathers at least once a week and 33% no more than once a year. The number of single parent homes and homes in which both parents work is continuing to increase. Working mothers of school-age children in 1982 comprised 82 percent, compared to 30 percent in 1960 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1992).

American culture continues to change in the 1990's. Approximately 85% of homes have television sets and VCRs. Nearly $10 billion in annual videotape rentals exists in a market that did not even exist twenty years ago. The impact of television and entertainment violence continues to generate debate while access and availability increase (Time, January 30, 1995).

By 1995, the United States had become the most diverse country in religious affiliation in the world. United States' citizens contribute more than $57 billion a year to "religion." Ninety-five percent of the American public report that they believe in God. There are approximately 1,600 different denominations; 44% of them are non-Christian. Most of these diverse religions have developed since 1960 (Time, January 30, 1995).

Crime Rate Trends

According to a Uniform Crime Report (UCR) published by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, there was an overall crime rate increase of 148 percent during the decade of the sixties, while the population increased only 13 percent.

The major trend in national crime has increasingly been toward youthful offenders. Figures from the FBI reveal that adult arrests for the violent crimes of murder, rape, robbery and assault doubled from 1960 to 1973. At the same time, the number of young people below the age of eighteen arrested for murder tripled; for rape, more than doubled; for robbery, quadrupled; and for assaults, more than tripled. The percentage increase in youth crime has outstripped the growth rate of the number of juveniles in the country (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973).

Violent crime grew from 161 reported crimes per 100,000 persons (in 1960) to 758 (in 1992) - a 371% increase. The annual homicide total topped 20,000 in the mid-1979's. Property crimes have risen from 1,726 reported crimes per 100,000 persons in 1960 to 4,903 in 1992--with the worst increases occurring before 1980 (U.S. News & World Report, January 17, 1994).

According to Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics, children under the age of 15 were responsible for 201 murders in 1988 as well as 1,372 rapes, 11,345 aggravated assaults, and 6,470 robberies (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1991).

School Disturbance Characteristics

McDermott (1980) stated that it has been only since the early 1970's, with the growing emphasis on problems for disorder and crime in schools, that researchers began to examine fear of crime in school settings. It was discovered that fear and apprehension were likely to affect the concentration and academic performance of students, as well as their participation in school activities, their attitudes toward school, and several other factors important to the learning environment. It also was discovered that disorder and uneasiness in schools were inseparable from wider social ills.

In the 1970's, new research contended that crime was not caused solely by harmful social conditions. Experts noted that most low-income youths were law-abiding and that even the wealthiest neighborhoods were not crime free. Juvenile justice experts began to focus less on social problems and more on individual motivations for crime (Drowns & Hess, 1990).

Prior to the 1970's, it had been a common practice for educators to skirt their responsibilities in dealing with "problem youth" by "pushing" them out of the educational system. However, by the decade of the 1970's, court decisions tended to stress that all youth had the right to an education and must be dealt with in the education setting. Therefore, youth who had been found delinquent, and/or status offenders, could no longer legally be dismissed from school on the recommendation of a teacher or an administrator. School counselors, who formerly concerned themselves with academic advising and sched-

uling, had to face the reality of coping with behavioral and/or emotional problems in their advisement of delinquent youth. It was determined that public schools, not reform schools, were the best places to meet the needs of delinquent youth (Cox & Conrad, 1978).

The apparent connection between education, occupational success, and life satisfaction began to lead educators to believe they must attempt to minimize the number of juveniles pushed out, or who choose to drop out of the educational system.

Data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other sources indicated that violence in schools throughout the United States increased at epidemic rates in the 1970's. Programs aimed at ameliorating the problem of violence and vadalism increased greatly in popularity. Many public schools implemented school programs which utilized uniformed police officers, sophisticated alarm systems, tightened security measures and other preventive activities.

Increases in school property damage and assaults on teachers by students occurred in the late 1970's. School crime remained essentially level, or declined for thefts from teachers and all offenses against students in the 1970's and 1980's. Junior high schools and schools in large cities were likely to have more crimes against persons than were senior high schools or schools in less urbanized locations (Moles, 1987).

During the period between 1970 and 1973, there was a 77 percent increase in assaults on teachers, an 85 percent increase in assaults on students, a 37 percent increase in robberies of students and teachers, a 40 percent increase in rapes or attempted rapes, an 18 percent increase in homicides, and a 53 percent increase in weapons confiscated from students. Concomitantly, drug and alcohol use on school grounds increased by 37.5 percent and the incidence of dropouts by 11.7 percent (Gottfredson, 1975).

Caven and Ferdinand (1975), of Northern Illinois University, indicated that juvenile delinquency was demonstrated in three ways in the public schools in the 1970's. The three effects were serious misconduct in and around schools; truancy, both as delinquency itself and as the open door to other kinds of delinquency; and the day-long idleness of boys and girls who dropped out of school before graduation and found it difficult to become incorporated into conventional adult activities, such as steady employment.

The 1970's saw extreme concern about use of illicit drugs by juveniles. It was believed that the behavior patterns which were popularized and institutionalized in the 1960's would continue to pull more and more students into what appeared to be a relevent, youth-oriented "drug subculture." A recent high school survey (High School Senior Survey Trends in Lifetime Prevalence,

1992) offers information to the contrary. A random selection of high school seniors were surveyed and asked if they had ever used any type of illicit drug in their lifetime. The following data, classified by year, report the results of that survey:

Class of:	Illicit drugs	Alcohol
1975	55.2	90.4
1976	58.3	91.9
1977	61.6	92.5
1978	64.1	93.1
1979	65.1	93.0
1980	65.4	93.2
1981	65.6	92.6
1982	64.4	92.8
1983	62.9	92.6
1984	61.6	92.6
1985	60.6	92.2
1986	57.6	91.3
1987	56.6	92.2
1988	53.9	92.0
1989	50.9	90.7
1990	47.9	89.5
1991	44.1	88.0
1992	40.7	87.5

(NIDA Capsules, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, April 1993, p.3).

The above date suggest that in actuality, illicit drug use by students has dropped 14.5 percent between 1975-1992 with significant drops since the mid-1980's. During this period alcohol use remained relatively stable showing a decrease of 2.9 percent.

In December of 1977, the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare released statistics which indicated that in a given month, a typical secondary school student had approximately one chance in nine of having something stolen, one chance in eight of being attacked, and one chance in 200 of being robbed (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare,

1977).

The following is a chart of educator's perceptions of factors that contribute to the problems of school violence in the 1970's:

School Factors
building size
class size
dreariness of school building
educators unwilling to acknowledge problem
expectations of the schools
failure of schools to report crimes
compulsory attendance regulations
ignorance of due process
lack of alternatives to suspension
lack of parent/educator unity
lack of professional unity
lack of sufficient commitment to problem
lack of teacher/student relations
staff hostility, aggressiveness
staff inadequacy
whole curriculum

Nonschool Factors
bad student attitude
boy-girl triangles
community responses
family feuds
lack of community awareness
ineffective juvenile justice system
lack of multi-cultural understanding
lack of coordination of community services
lack of parental interest
news media cause problems
parents, community workers confront teachers
police handling of students
(Glasser, 1978: 331)

Beginning in the 1970's, schools gradually assumed more and more responsibility for the conduct and welfare of pupils within the schools. To the basic academic and instructional purposes of education, many schools added medical and dental examinations, nutrition concerns, vocational and psychiatric counseling, and vocational training. Schools also developed special curricula and classes for handicapped children, while assuming broad policing functions for disruptive children. Only when the disruptions reached an extremely serious level did the school feel compelled to call for police aid (Cernkovich & Denisoff, 1978).

School boards and principals did not like to admit that they could not maintain discipline and that occasional serious delinquencies or crimes occurred in and around schools. Frequently these offenses were of a type that would immediately command police attention if they occurred somewhere other than school. These problems were serious thefts, major vandalism, and physical attacks.

In the late 1970's, Miller (1975) conducted the first nationwide study of youth gangs. The study found youth gang problems in 50% of the nation's large metropolitan areas. The ten largest gang-problem cities contained about half the gangs. Miller estimated that 300 U.S. cities and towns contained about 3,400 youth gang related killings were reported for some 60 cities during a 13 year period ending in 1980.

There has been a continued movement of gangs from urban to suburban areas since this time. Gang members move to suburban and rural areas when police pressure and enforcement increase or to find more lucrative areas for their money-making activities. Also, in mid-size and small towns where factories close or businesses fail, unemployment, poverty, and unrest create conditions conducive to gangs (Tursman, 1989).

Many authorities on youth problems believe that the school is clearly neither the cause nor the cure for norm-violating behavior among young people. The influence of the school, whatever the direction or extent, is inseparably merged with those of other socializing agencies. Behavioral scientists generally agreed, however, that the school experience had the capacity to help initiate and nurture delinquent behavior or to help prevent and curb the development of such behavior (Cernkovich & Denisoff, 1978).

Between 1985 and 1988, adolescents aged 12 to 15 were about twice as likely as older teens to experience crimes in a school building or on school property. About 37% of violent crimes and 81% of crimes of theft against younger teenagers occurred at school, compared with 17% of the violent crimes and 39% of the crimes of theft against older teens. Younger teens were more

likely than older ones to be robbed or assaulted at school, but the two age groups had a similar proportion of robberies and assaults that occured on the street. Violent crimes against teenagers that took place in school or on school property were much less likely than street crimes to have been committed by an armed offender. Violent street crimes against teens were three times as likely as crimes in school buildings to have been committed by an offender with a weapon (37% versus 12%) (Teenage Victims, National Criminal Victimization Survey, May 1991).

In a nationally representative sample of public school teachers, 44 percent reported there was more disruptive classroom behavior in their schools in 1986-87 than five years before. Almost one third indicated that they had seriously considered leaving teaching because of student misbehavior. Teachers estimated that about seven percent of the students they taught were habitual behavior problems and interfered with their teaching. Almost 20 percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they had been threatened by a student at some time (National Institute of Justice, 1987).

Data from the 1987-88 school year revealed more than 2,500 incidents against staff members in New York City. Teachers found that the treatment they received after the crime often constituted additional injury and lengthened their recovery period. Teachers who had been victimized reported very casual treatment and response to their attacker citing that they were ignored, left in offices by themselves, asked to fill out confusing forms without help, unaccompanied to emergency rooms, and generally treated as though they were the criminals rather than the victims (Feder, 1989).

In 1988, some experts estimated the yearly cost of school vandalism at $5 million. Targets of vandalism included buildings, equipment, and furnishings. Other types reported included painting on walls and property, theft, lavatory damage, driving cars across lawns, and defacing school furniture. Most acts of vandalism were committed by the school's students, and they were as prevalent in affluent suburban schools as they were in inner-city schools. It was determined that the typical vandal was a white male, aged about 15 years (Sadler, 1988).

A University of Michigan study (U.S. News & World Report, November 8, 1993) reported that 9 percent of eighth graders carry a gun, knife or club to school at least once a month. In all, an estimated 270,000 guns are brought to school every day. Inner-city schools have started adding "drive-by-shooting drills" to traditional fire drills. Schools have fenced in their campuses, installed metal detectors and started locker searches and student shakedowns. The Los Angeles School Board decided in October of 1993 to put its armed, plainclothes security officers in uniforms and to add nightsticks to their weaponry.

The actual number of teachers who are victims of violence nationwide is not known but is probably under-reported. Many teachers are injured attempting to break up student fights or halt robberies; however, not all teacher injuries are caused by students. The "psychic violence" against teachers—the intimidation and verbal abuse—is unmeasured, but nevertheless present in the classroom. This causes many teachers who are new to the system and who do not have much invested to give up and quit (Teacher Magazine, 1990).

Nearly 20 percent of the student respondents to a survey in 1991 reported that they had carried a weapon during the previous school year. Boys were more likely to have weapons than girls, and Hispanic and black males more likely than white males. An estimated 71 weapon-carrying incidents occurred per 100 students per month. Knives and razors were carried more often than clubs or firearms (Morbidity and Morality Weekly Report, 1991)

Possible Solutions to School Disturbances in the U.S.

There is increased awareness of the central role that schools can play in preventing delinquency. Every youngster spends a considerable amount of time in school, and many delinquent acts are committed within the school setting. Time and time again, researchers have noted that weak commitments to educational achievement and attachments to the school culture, combined with the association with delinquent peers, appear more closely related to delinquency than do family, community, or social structural variables. Educators have proposed, therefore, that the most effective school-based prevention efforts would be to increase students' experiences of academic success, stimulate student to student and student to teacher relationships, encourage commitments to school culture, and stimulate attachments between students and non-delinquent peers (Hawkins & Wall, 1980).

Theorists have developed six general building blocks for preventing student-to-student violence. These six elements are a shared system of beliefs and values, a vision of respect, explicit policies, a holistic plan of staff development, district statements of policy, and the use of learned strategies.

Policies and legislation that protect school employees, that provide teacher training in conflict resolution, that help in the creation of a school culture and sense of community, that foster the development of an emergency school plan, and that establish reasonable precautions to protect school staff are ways to reach the goal of reducing school violence. Educators, when assaulted, should pursue every legal means possible against the assailant, so as to cause the attacker to face the consequences of violent behavior while providing the victim full support (Curcio & First, 1993).

One of the greatest problems contributing to school violence is the lack of parental involvment. There are many strategies for increasing parental nvolvement in school efforts to reduce violence. Parent representatives can be added to school safety committees and school improvement teams. Meetings scheduled at breakfast, lunch time, or during the evening make attendance more feasible. A copy of the school's discipline code can be sent home to all parents. A communication system utilizing strategies such as a parent telephone network, calling parents at work, and/or sending a brief note home could be effective.

Administrators can get parents and students to help paint and clean up during summer months and use parent volunteers to patrol schools during the school year. School districts can provide transportation for parents to attend meetings. Teachers can develop parent-student homework assignments. Law enforcement agencies can invite parents to be part of a School Crime Watch Program for the child's school (Greenbaum, Gonzales, & Eackley, 1989).

A relatively new idea in handling student disputes and arguments is "Teen Court." This is a dispositional alternative which represents a potentially vital and effective approach in which first-time juvenile offenders are tried by a jury of their peers. Since the first Teen Court opened at Odessa, Texas, in 1983, Teen Courts have appeared in Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, California, Michigan, New York, Georgia, Indiana, and Florida. Teen courts have had encouraging results. In Odessa, 15 percent of juvenile traffic offenders and 1 percent of other offenders recidivate. The failure rate for Montgomery County, Indiana's Teen Court is between 10 and 15 percent, while Gila County, Arizona's is less than 12 percent (Collins, 1992).

Teen Courts receive referrals from juvenile courts. Teen Courts are not designed to determine guilt or innocence. They function as a dipositional alternative. Adjudications are handled by a district court. Teen jurors hear the details of the case and recommend a constructive sentence. Every participant in teen court is between the ages of 14 and 17, except for the judge, who is usually a retiree from the district court. The jurors listen to a case then adjourn to the deliberation room to discuss the case. A foreperson is elected and the case is discussed until a unanimous decision has been reached. Upon returning to court, the bailiff provides and instructs the defendant to face the jury. The forperson reads the constructive sentence to the defendant who is then issued the completed jury form and told to meet with the Teen Court coordinator to finalize sentencing arrangements. If the jury sentence is unacceptable to the judge, jury deliberations must begin again (Collins, 1992).

There are at least three components to a school's effective control or

suppression strategy. The first provides for the development of a school gang code, with guidelines specifying an appropriate response by teachers and staff to different kinds of gang behavior, including a mechanism for dealing with serious gang delinquency.

A second element calls for the application of these rules and regulations within a context of positive relationships and open communication by school personel with parents, community agencies, and students. Third, a clear distinction between gang and non-gang related activity must be delineated so as not to exaggerate the scope of the problem (Schmitze, 1993).

Community, home, and school must have a strong presence in a child's life. If any of these key components are weak, the remaining components have to "pick up the slack." There must be approaches such as school safety plans, conflict resolution instruction, peer counseling and peer mediation that can help strengthen each of these components (B. Nielsen, personal communication, March 12, 1994).

All efforts must have community support in whatever is done. Schools must have everyone's support for any effort to have a chance at succeeding (Splittgerber-Wise, personal communication, March 12, 1994).

A relatively new strategy for fighting school violence is the development of a School Safety Plan. The basic components of these plans are as follows:

1. Determine what is the problem (Identify the problem)

2. How each school is going to prevent this problem

3. What will happen if a problem does occur

4. How the school is going to handle the media

5. What the school is going to do after the problem is over

There are numerous suggestions for other activities that schools can do. Some possible activities are listed as follows:

provide student supervision (all hours)

call parents often

develop strong discipline policies

involve police when needed

communicate with everyone

develop emergency response teams

teach law related education courses to students

program where students can skip grades & catch up

practice emergency skills

make counseling available after an incident

use block scheduling

lower the number of students in hall at any given time

limit changes between rooms

determine problem areas in school

develop student leadership

establish parent-student swap programs

make parents pick up report cards

survey as many people as possible

provide a crime line - students can call in anonymously and report crime

target troublesome grades — 6, 7, 8 and 9th grades
(B. Nesbit, personal communication, March 12, 1994).

Efforts such as these must be combined with positive after-school, weekend, and holiday activities, positive adult role models, school-based community services and activities, and police-driven efforts to reach out to children prior to the emergence of problem (Majority Staff of The Senate Judiciary Commitee, April 1994).

Significant school problem areas that require space-management design consideration are school grounds, parking lots, locker rooms, corridors, rest rooms, and classrooms. Problems on school grounds often stem from poorly defined campus borders, undifferentiated campus areas, isolated areas, and poorly located bus loading areas. Parking lot problems typically include poor planning, i.e.: conflict with the neighborhood, poor placement, and landscaping. Problems associated with lockers and locker rooms include the assignment of more than one student to a locker, locker design and color, and isolation. Corridor problems include blind spots due to poor planning and class scheduling that promotes congestion. Rest room security problems typically stem from location. Other problems are multipurpose classroom use and isolation (Crowe, 1991).

The solutions presented above are representative of strategies utilized by local districts, states and the federal government to establish programs to prevent school violence. They are certainly not meant to be inclusive of all of the possible solutions to school disturbance.